A Jewish Repair for a Free Church Vision:
Reforming Restitutionist Hermeneutics *With* Peter Ochs

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Over the course of his research on the New Testament and early Christianity, the late Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder developed a provocative thesis that the historic Jewish-Christian schism was not historically inevitable. Yoder argued that it might have been possible for Jews and Christians to remain together as one people despite a difference of faith regarding the significance of Jesus Christ. While many found Yoder's thesis refreshing, not all were convinced that it was without its significant theological problems. Peter Ochs, a Jewish pragmatic philosopher, was invited to respond to Yoder's claims through commentary included in a posthumous publication of essays which contained Yoder's provocative claims. Ochs argued that Yoder's thesis perpetuated a form of Christian supersessionism, a Christian teaching that states that the Church has replaced Israel as the people of God.

This thesis seeks to expose the roots of Yoder's supersessionism for the purposes of repairing/reforming Yoder's vision for the Church and the Church's relation to the Jews. The argument of the thesis is that Yoder's particular appropriation of a restitutionist perspective on Christian history, as a fundamental hermeneutic, is the root of his supersessionism. I demonstrate this to be the case through engaging two key essays in which Yoder treats the significance of the restitutionist perspective for his theology. After demonstrating this, I critically re-evaluate Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic with the help of Ochs among several other supporting authors in order to suggest specific ways that inheritors of Yoder might carry forward key elements to his thought without repeating his supersessionist mistake.

Acknowledgments

For My Grandparents,

Frank and Ruth

and

Jake and Helen

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Introduction

Over the course of his research on the New Testament and early Christianity, as well as through numerous exchanges with his Jewish friend Steven Schwartzschild, the late Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder developed a provocative thesis that the historic Jewish-Christian schism "did not have to be."[1] Yoder was convinced that the schism did not have to do with the scandal of Christological confessions professed by the original disciples of Jesus. Rather, Yoder argued, the schism had more to do with the fourth century subversion and co-option of the original and radical vision of the Jewish Jesus of Nazareth by the Roman Empire and by Gentile converts with philosophical agendas alien to Jewish belief.[2]

According to Yoder, Jesus was nothing less than a Jewish Rabbi debating with his fellow Jews about the right meaning of Jewish tradition by appealing to "the 'original' or the 'radical' meaning of teachings on the sovereignty of God and the imperative of obedience" for the people of God.[3] Yoder argued that the Jewish teachings that Jesus proclaimed had distinct resonances with the teachings of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah and his vision for Israelite life in exile in Babylon.[4] Although Jesus and his disciples were "not in charge," they were to trust that by "seeking the welfare of the city" (Jeremiah 29:7) where God had sent them, they would fulfil their divine calling as heralds of the New Age.[5] Thus, according to Yoder, Jesus did not reject Jewish teaching, but argued for its proper or normative interpretation.[6] Despite the fact that some

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[1] John Howard Yoder, "It Did Not Have To Be," in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 43-66. (Hereafter, references will be to *JCSR*.)
[2] Yoder, *JCSR,* 57, 72-75.
[3] Yoder, *JCSR*, 49.
[4] Yoder, *JCSR*, 191-192.
[5] Yoder, *JCSR*, 49, 183-202.
[6] Yoder, *JCSR*, 77.

Jews began to declare that in Jesus' resurrection the Messianic age had indeed begun while others rejected that notion, both were Jewish responses to a Jewish claim; both represented "tense but tolerable, overlapping…Jewish and Christian identities."[7]

Perhaps surprisingly, Yoder found that this vision of the original teachings of the Jewish Jesus, severely neglected as he believed them to be in much of Christian history, had been uniquely attested to in his own Free Church tradition.[8] In the context of the Radical Reformation period of history, Yoder argued that the Anabaptists of the Free Church tradition articulated a vision of the radical renewal of the church that took up the same emphasis on "the sovereignty of God and the imperative of obedience" that Jesus had highlighted in his teachings. By doing so, the Free Churches had recovered a Jewish vision without recognizing it. This vision was expounded by Yoder in a number of places throughout his writings and is identified by him under the label of a *restitutionist* perspective on Christian history. [9]

For Yoder, using the restitutionist perspective on Christian history to recover a vision of the Jewish Jesus held the potential for new forms of Christian faithfulness in the present, including a new relationship between Jews and Christians that was no longer haunted by the long history of Christian supersessionism and its use as a justification for a variety of forms of anti-Semitism.[10] If Jesus did not reject Judaism, then no longer could Christian traditions rightly hold to supersessionist doctrines that claimed that the Jews had been rejected by God and replaced or

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[7] Yoder, *JCSR*, 48-49, 54.
[8] See Yoder, *JCSR*, 105-119.
[9] While space does not permit at this juncture a full definition of what makes for a "restitutionist perspective on Christian history" or what Yoder's particular appropriation of that perspective looks like, the "Terminology" section below helps address this as does the content of chapter 2.
[10] Supersessionism is the belief, articulated dogmatically throughout the Christian tradition in various ways, that the church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people. For pertinent examinations of the origins and implications of supersessionism, see Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999). Soulen's tri-partite account of supersessionism will be referenced throughout. Also, addressing the racial aspects to supersessionism which J. Kameron Carter claims are "[g]laringly absent" in Soulen's work, see J. Kameron Carter's *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford, 2008), 383.

superseded by the Church as God's new people. Yoder developed this thesis, among many other related ones, over the course of twenty years and several essays which were eventually collected, first into a desktop packet which was shared among Yoder's colleagues prior to his death, and then into a posthumous collection published as *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited.*

Not all were convinced, however, that what Yoder had achieved in the performance of his novel thesis was without its significant theological "burdens." Peter Ochs, a Jewish pragmatic philosopher, was invited to respond to Yoder's claims through commentary included in the posthumous work. Among the many "wonders" that he observed in Yoder's thesis, Ochs nonetheless registered concerns that Yoder's particular recovery of the Jewish Jesus still contained forms of supersessionism.[11] According to Ochs, Yoder's account of the Jewish Jesus led him to make four different types of claims that were supersessionist in form.[12]

First, by virtue of his vision of Jesus' claims regarding normative Judaism, Yoder claimed that, as a Christian, he knew what normative Judaism was properly to be and so also what would count as deviant Judaism.[13] Ochs sees such a move as holding the potential to co-opt and singularize Jewish identity in a way that replays supersessionist strategies, which post-liberal

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[11] Peter Ochs, "Commentary," in *JCSR*, 40. Ochs' critical engagement with the theology of John Howard Yoder began in the 2003 posthumous publication of *JCSR*. More recently, Ochs has continued his evaluation of Yoder's theology in the publication *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011). Ochs has also directly engaged with Mennonites through conferences at Eastern Mennonite University in 2007 and Canadian Mennonite University in 2009. The latter conference resulted in the publication of *The Free Church and Israel's Covenant* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010). While Ochs will be the principal interlocutor that will be engaged in this thesis, it should also be noted that the Jewish scholar Daniel Boyarin also issued his own criticisms of Yoder's thesis (along with his strong affirmation of the thesis). See Daniel Boyarin, "Judaism as a Free Church: Footnotes to John Howard Yoder's The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited," *CrossCurrents* 56, no.4 (2007): 41-51.

[12] Ochs' statements regarding the four types of supersessionist claims that Yoder makes which I provide here are summarized from Ochs' more recent work *Another Reformation*. They are, however, all present in *JCSR*.

[13] Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 160.

Jews such as Ochs reject on numerous grounds.[14] Second, and building on the first claim, by locating the Old Testament precedent for Jesus' particular political style in the prophet Jeremiah and Jeremiah's vision for Israelite life in exile, Yoder claimed that exile is the normal state of Jewish existence.[15] By doing so Yoder effectively made inconsequential those aspects of Jeremiah's vision that also call for a return to the land. Third, Yoder's appeal to pacifistic elements present in the Jewish tradition, such as in the Jeremiah tradition mentioned above, led him to suggest that Judaism is properly pacifist and advocates a total avoidance of the powers of statehood.[16] Fourth, and finally, while Yoder presented his novel thesis as though it had potential for encouraging a new relationship of dialogue between Judaism and Christianity, he ended up setting up the terms for such a dialogue in advance through his Christian vision of "messianic Judaism" and not through a more basic proposal for scriptural common ground upon which to engage in mutual dialogue.[17]

Since the publication of *JCSR*, there have been a few attempts, many if not most of them by non-Mennonites, to critically engage Yoder's thesis in *JCSR* and reform key elements of it in ways that sought to avoid the pitfalls that Ochs identified therein.[18] Few of them to my

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[14] It is important to situate Ochs' commentaries on Yoder's work within the community of Jewish scholars variously known by the labels of "Textual Reasoner," "post-liberal," "post-Shoah," and "post-critical." Some of these labels will be attended to more in detail in chapter three. For now, it is enough to register the fact that during his commentaries, Ochs is explicit about the community that he speaks on behalf of, stating that he will "always respond from out of the movement of the post-liberal Jews who share in or support the approach of the Society for Textual Reasoning." Ochs, "Commentary," in *JCSR*, 38.

[15] Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 160.

[16] Ochs, *Another Reformation,* 161-162.

[17] Ochs, *Another Reformation,* 162.

[18] As indicated in footnote 11 above, Ochs himself has offered further reflections on Yoder since the initial publication of *JCSR*. See his *The Free Church And Israel's Covenant* and *Another Reformation*. A number of Christian theologians have offered critical and constructive proposals which take up Yoder's writings in *JCSR* in some way or another. See Alain Epp Weaver, *States of Exile* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2008) and *Mapping Exile and Return* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014); C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell, "The Politics of Scripture: Exile and Identity In Jewish And Christian Readings Of Jeremiah," (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 2003); Paul Martens, *The Heterodox Yoder* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012); Tommy Givens, *We The People: Israel And The Catholicity Of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

knowledge, however, have made the attempt to do so by testing and expanding Ochs' claims regarding Yoder's supersessionism with reference to Yoder's use of the restitutionist perspective on Christian history.[19] As already hinted at above, Yoder is explicit about the importance of this perspective for his thesis in *JCSR* and yet these two elements to Yoder's theology are rarely discussed together. The present inquiry aims to draw them together in order to argue that Yoder's particular appropriation of the restitutionist perspective on Christian history, as a fundamental hermeneutic which he identifies as a Free Church vision, results in his supersessionist tendencies. I then argue that by critically re-evaluating Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic and subjecting it to the judgement of Ochs and several others, Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic can be reformed so as to leave behind the negative forms of supersessionism therein. These arguments will be achieved in four chapters.

In the first chapter, I provide a brief but detailed account of supersessionism as a problem for Christian theology. If, as I will later argue, Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic does produce supersessionist tendencies, it will be necessary to establish a more complex understanding of what supersessionism is and how it functions in a Christian theological context. Through a summary of Kendall Soulen's account of supersessionism as it has been operative in traditional and modern forms of Christian theology and his own constructive proposals for doing Christian theology without supersessionism, I set the stage for a critical reading of Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic.

In the second chapter I turn to a critical evaluation of Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic,

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[19] Exceptions here would be Michael G. Cartwright, "Editors' Introduction," in *JCSR*, 6-29 and Tommy Givens, *Israel And The Catholicity Of Jesus*. While Givens does not engage in Ochs' work directly, he does note that Ochs' influence on his book "is subtle but ubiquitous." (xii) Also, the most recent publication of the latest *The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 13, no.2 (2014), which treats *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* specifically, has begun to fill in this gap with several insightful articles putting Yoder and Ochs' thought into dialogue.

asking to what extent it replays or overcomes the kinds of supersessionism that were identified with Soulen's help in chapter one. With reference to two of Yoder's texts which explicitly treat his appropriation of the restitutionist perspective on Christian history, along with supporting texts found throughout his writings, I argue that Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic succumbs to a form of what Soulen identifies as "economic supersessionism."

Disclosing the roots of Yoder's supersessionism through attention to his restitutionist hermeneutic, while a necessary first step, is on its own not enough to reveal recommendations for how Yoder's theology might be reformed so as to avoid supersessionism. In the third chapter, I seek such recommendations through a treatment of Ochs' own hermeneutical convictions as a pragmatic philosopher who is pursuing his own understanding of Jewish faithfulness after modernity. I make Ochs' hermeneutical convictions evident through a broad reading of his scholarly corpus, including his critiques of Yoder. Before Ochs can helpfully provide recommendations for reforming Yoder's hermeneutic, the deeper reasons why Ochs thinks Yoder is a supersessionist, and why he thinks Yoder's supersessionism represents a problem for present day Jews like himself, need to be exposed. While it may seem obvious why Ochs would have a problem with Yoder's supersessionism given that the general definition of supersessionism is that the Jews are to be considered rejected by God, it is nonetheless important to know why, in Ochs' particular context, Yoder's supersessionism is problematic.

This type of contextualization has resulted in the third chapter having a distinctly biographical flavor to it. This is necessary as Ochs' own distinct hermeneutical convictions require him to be discursively explicit about the communal basis for his own thinking. Throughout this chapter, I periodically draw Ochs' critiques of Yoder in *JCSR* back into focus in order to show the foundation of Ochs' criticisms. I end by arguing that Ochs' criticisms of

Yoder, founded as they are on his hermeneutical convictions as a pragmatic philosopher, also suggest paths for repairing (Ochs' term) or reforming Yoder's theology in such a way as to make Yoderian theology without economic supersessionism possible. As an interpreter of Yoder and as a member of the Mennonite tradition of which Yoder was also a part, I see such a task as important. Thus, in the fourth and final chapter, I take up two critical components of Ochs' pragmatic method and apply them to a final critical reading of Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic with the help of two authors with roots in the Mennonite tradition. I then end with an alternate account of Yoder's central thesis in *JCSR*, "it did not have to be," which seeks to build on the positive dimensions of Yoder's thesis while also incorporating some of the more suggestive trajectories in recent Christian theologies of Judaism and some of Ochs' key methodological convictions. Through this alternate account, I suggest that Mennonite communities today might carry forward Yoder's insights in a way that avoids his supersessionist tendencies through practices of scripture reading that are not pre-determined by ethical commitments such as pacifism.

Terminology

As will already have been noticed, I appeal variously throughout this thesis to restitutionist hermeneutics or to a restitutionist perspective on Christian history. To some, this perspective may be unfamiliar and so a brief description is warranted even if the later engagement with Yoder's particular adaptation of this perspective will provide a broad definition of this perspective while also taking its own unique direction. In several of his studies on Anabaptism, the American Protestant scholar Franklin Littell consistently identified the theme of

die rechte Kirche, the true church, as a central defining principle to the theology and ecclesiology of the Anabaptists, a diverse group sometimes identified corporately as the "left wing of the reformation."[20] Littell notes how the theme of the true church arising among or coming out from a "fallen" or apostate church is by no means exclusive to Anabaptist thought but indeed runs throughout the Christian tradition as a whole, including the more explicit accounts of the nature of the fall and its cure during the Magisterial and Radical Reformations.[21]

In the context of the Magisterial Reformation, however, Littell states that the notion of the true church was appealed to uniquely by Anabaptists in order to identify what they saw as the *thoroughgoing* apostasy of Christendom, not only as it was manifest in their own time but as they believed it to have been manifest ever since the fourth century when the fusion of church and state occurred in Constantine. For the Anabaptists, the apostasy of Christendom was characterized by how the church had diverged significantly, and in some accounts even completely fallen away, from the identity and calling that defined the church from its inception. This resulted in proposals for the restitution or recovery of a primitive foundation of the church, a heroic age, which had been abandoned or lost in a fall within historic Christian practice. These proposals were often quite diverse. Despite the diversity of the above uses of the concept of restitution, a central element that unites them all is the conviction that a primitive core of ecclesial faithfulness had at some point or points in time been lost and that that same core could be recovered only in the common life of committed believers who take the scriptures seriously as the sole authority of the Christian community.

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[20] Franklin Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church* (Boston: Star King Press, 1958), 79ff. The phrase "left wing of the Reformation" is often credited to Roland H. Bainton. See "The Left Wing of the Reformation," *The Journal of Religion* 21, no.2 (1941):124-134.

[21] Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church,* 48-55.

CHAPTER 1

Christian Theology After Supersessionism

Introduction

On October 28th, 1965 Pope Paul VI proclaimed what was to become a historic declaration of the Catholic Church. The "Declaration On The Relation Of The Church To Non-Christian Religions," known more commonly by the Latin phrase which began the declaration, *Nostra Aetate* ("In our time…"), included a declaration on the Jewish people in its fourth section, stating that

> [a]lthough the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures…God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues-such is the witness of the Apostle [Paul].[1]

Taken within the context of Vatican II, the twenty-first ecumenical council of the Catholic Church, these statements were to be understood as part of the Church's efforts to reform its teachings regarding and relationships toward the Jews in its own time. Previous teachings regarding the Jews had, for most of Christian history, maintained that the Jewish rejection of Jesus resulted in God's rejection of the Jewish people as such, replacing them with the Church, the "new" people of God. In modern times, this doctrine has come to be known by many labels, the most common among them being "replacement theology" or "supersessionism."

The events of the *Shoah* (or Holocaust) led many in the worldwide Christian community

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[1] "Declaration On The Relation Of The Church To Non-Christian Religions," (1965), accessed May 19, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

to acknowledge the distinct connection between supersessionism and the anti-Semitism that fueled the persecution of the Jews throughout history. In charting new paths of faithfulness after the Holocaust, Christian communities have rightly moved to repudiate supersessionist teachings as they have persisted uniquely within the context of their own confessional communities. This has led to the widespread development of similar statements as those found in *Nostra Aetate* within a broad spectrum of Christian traditions.[2] What is clear from statements like these is that the Christian church broadly understands its own efforts at reforming the church in the post-Holocaust era to necessarily involve a reformation of the church's attitude towards the Jews and Judaism.

What is not immediately clear, however, in statements such as those found in *Nostra Aetate* is how Christians should interpret these new developments in Christian-Jewish relations theologically. What theological consequences follow from a rejection of supersessionism? What elements of traditional and modern theology result in supersessionism? How might such elements be reformed? These questions largely remain open ones today. As a result, some Christians, such as the German Roman Catholic theologian Hans Hermann Henrix, have acknowledged that "theology has not caught up with aspects of doctrinal statements and ecclesial documents on the relationship of the church with Jews and Judaism."[3] While Henrix is right to point out a general lack in the area of Christian theological reflection that seeks to reject supersessionism, there have nonetheless been noted attempts at such reflection that deserve

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[2] For a comprehensive account of the various statements made by different Christian groups, see *Bridges: Documents Of The Christian-Jewish Dialogue*: *The Road To Reconciliation*, ed. Franklin Sherman, vol. 1, *1945-1985* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2011) and *Bridges: Documents Of The Christian-Jewish Dialogue*: *Building A New Relationship*, ed. Franklin Sherman, vol. 2, *1986-2013* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014).

[3] Hans Hermann Henrix, "The Son Of God Became Human As A Jew: Implications Of The Jewishness Of Jesus For Christology," in *Christ Jesus And The Jewish People Today: New Explorations Of Theological Interrelationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 115.

attention. While many examples in this regard could be chosen, for the purposes of this thesis I examine one attempt as it appears in a groundbreaking work of theology by Kendall Soulen called *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*.[4] Soulen's work is helpful for the way it diagnoses three principle forms of supersessionism and their presence in traditional and modern forms of Christian theology.

Supersessionism and the Christian Tradition: An Exposition of Three Forms

In the introduction to his book, Kendall Soulen notes that he will address two important questions: "how deeply is supersessionism implicated in the traditional fabric of Christian theology? And how can Christians read the Bible and articulate their most basic convictions in ways that are not supersessionist? In short, how can Christians be really Christian without being triumphalist toward Jews?"[5] While Soulen's answers to the latter question are important and will be briefly attended to throughout, for the purposes of the present chapter, I focus mainly on his answers to the first question. Soulen suggests that supersessionism is indeed implicated deeply in the traditional fabric of Christian theology and that it can be identified in three different forms. Those three forms go by the labels "economic," "punitive," and "structural," and will now be defined in sequence as they appear in Soulen's work.

First, Soulen defines "economic" supersessionism as the teaching that "the ultimate obsolescence of carnal Israel is an essential feature of God's one overarching economy of

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[4] Kendall Soulen, *The God Of Israel And Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 1999). One other notable author to mention here is Paul M. Van Buren whose trilogy, *A Theology of the Jewish Christian Reality,* 3 vols. (New York: Seabury, 1980-83; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), set new standards for thinking about a Christian theology of Judaism.

[5] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, x.

redemption for the world."[6] In this vein, Soulen demonstrates how theologians of modernity such as Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher argued that Christianity's split from Judaism was necessary so as to emancipate itself from the limits and particularities of a fleshly people. For Kant, Soulen argues, "Christian doctrine simply *is* the story of the triumph of creaturely-universal spirit over historical-particular flesh."[7] Similarly, for Schleiermacher, Jesus represented a wholly new "religious consciousness" that contained no continuity with Judaism.[8] In other words, for both Kant and Schleiermacher, carnal (fleshly) Israel was at best a means to an end or an unfortunate layover on the way to the true destination which was Christ. After Christ, however, carnal Israel no longer served a purpose, as all that mattered now was the spiritual transformation that Christ brought to the whole world.

Soulen goes on to note how, although great strides have been made in more recent Christian theology to move beyond forms of economic supersessionism such as are evident in Kant and Schleiermacher, it is still latent therein. To demonstrate this, Soulen turns to the work of the Reformed theologian Karl Barth and the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner. For the sake of space, I will only briefly account for Soulen's treatment of Barth. Soulen argues that Barth helpfully moves beyond some of the operations internal to the supersessionism evident in Kant and Schleiermacher by drawing out the importance of the theme of covenant throughout the scriptures.[9] God's covenant with the fleshly people of Israel is precisely, for Barth, the way by which God aims to achieve his work of "consummation" in the created order and that covenant is "eternal."[10] God does not covenant with Israel as a temporary means to address the problem of

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[6] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 29.
[7] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 68.
[8] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 71.
[9] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 83.
[10] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 87.

sin in the world. Rather, God originally covenants with Israel as a means to achieve God's

gracious intent for creation as a whole and does so before any particular account of sin even

enters the picture.

According to Soulen, however, due to his decisive Christological starting point, Barth

still upholds a form of economic supersessionism by locating God's covenant with Israel in a

prior covenant with Himself in the election of Jesus Christ. Once Jesus appears in human history

as the fulfillment of God's redemptive and consummative plan for history, "Israel's distinctive

role comes to an end in principle, and it is taken place by the church."[11] Thus, while God's

covenant with Israel is not seen in negative terms, it still ultimately ends up being superseded by

the Church as "…*[Israel's] mission as a natural community has now run its course*."[12] Soulen

wonders whether or not Barth (and Rahner) might have avoided economic supersessionism by

"exploring the possibility that God's work as Consummator engages creation in the total, open-

ended, and still ongoing history that unfolds between the Lord, Israel, and the nations."[13] In other

words, rather than draw Israel's history to a close in Christ, might that history have carried

forward in its own way? Soulen himself makes a helpful proposal in this regard. Jesus enters

time not as the fulfillment and so end of Israel's history but rather as

> the carnal embodiment of God's end-time fidelity toward Israel and toward Israel's future
> as the place of unsurpassable blessing for Israel, for the nations, and for all creation. By
> its nature…Jesus' resurrection from the dead anticipates a future event whose character
> as victorious fidelity can no longer be in doubt.[14]

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[11] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 90.

[12] Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics*, III/2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 584, quoted in Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 91. The emphasis is Soulen's.

[13] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 106.

[14] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 166.

In other words, Jesus' resurrection carries history forward in the light of a new act of God that confirms that God will fulfill his original gracious and consummative intent in covenanting with Israel and through Israel, the nations. From this perspective, the church becomes not the new people of God in the sense that they replace an old people, but in the sense that they represent a new act of God to create a community of "table fellowship" between Jews and Gentiles, a definitive sign that God's blessing will overcome the curse in the course of a history ravaged by violence and division.[15] Israel of the flesh is thus, for Soulen, never abandoned or superseded by the Lord. While more could be said regarding the helpful dimensions to Soulen's proposal, his treatment of other forms of supersessionism must also be attended to.

The second form of supersessionism that Soulen identifies is "punitive" supersessionism, which is the teaching that "…[b]ecause the Jews obstinately reject God's action in Christ, God in turn angrily rejects and punishes the Jews."[16] Soulen notes that because punitive supersessionism is less difficult to identify it is in some ways less problematic when compared with the sometimes insidious nature of economic supersessionism. Soulen identifies the early Christian apologete Justin Martyr as exemplifying punitive supersessionism in his *Dialogue With Trypho*. There, in an outrageous interpretive move, Justin claims that God gave Israel the Mosaic Law, with its ordination of circumcision, as a form of punishment, singling out as it does in a visible way the Jews as the people "who crucified Christ."[17] Soulen finds no particular need to provide a proposal for moving beyond punitive supersessionism as, of all the three forms he treats it is the most crude. As a result, Soulen believes it can be dispensed with in crude fashion. Soulen's

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[15] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 171.
[16] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 30.
[17] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 39. Soulen's reference to Justin's *Dialogue With Trypho* in this context come from the English translation by T.B. Falls, *Saint Justin Martyr* (New York: Christian Heritage Press, 1948), 19, 92.

primary concerns are with economic and structural forms of supersessionism. This latter form must now also be summarized.

For Soulen, economic and punitive supersessionism are only possible on the basis of a more foundational form of supersessionism that serves as their inner logic. Structural supersessionism, for Soulen, is a particular way of conceiving of the unity of the biblical canon, what he calls "the "standard canonical narrative," as a four part story of creation, fall, redemption, and final consummation.[18] In structural supersessionism, God's intent in creating humanity for the purposes of consummating the created order is construed in terms of a universal human call, such that the vocation of humanity is understandable apart from a particular calling of the people of Israel.

Furthermore, the creation of humanity for this calling is quickly overshadowed by the problematic of the first parents' fall.[19] At this point, all that comes to dominate the rest of the Old Testament is the dialectic between the fall and a hoped for redemption that has not yet come. In this dialectic, Israel functions to foreshadow the redemption that Christ will bring rather than as ongoing partners in a covenant between God and Israel characterized by God's calling Israel to continually participate in the divine work of consummation in the created order. By virtue of the

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[18] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 25.

[19] As will become clear below, Yoder's appropriation of a restitutionist hermeneutic employs the language of a "fall" as well. In the context of restitutionist hermeneutics, however, Yoder appeals to the "fall of the church" as a particular instance or instances of apostasy rather than within a more general ontological statement regarding fallen humanity as Soulen is here addressing it. In this latter regard, however, Yoder does have his own understanding of the fallen state of the "creature and the world." See his chapter "Christ and Power," in *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 134-161. To be sure, in "Christ and Power," one can find a link between what Yoder understands as the fallen state of the world and what he elsewhere refers to as the fall of the church. In a sense, the fall of the church is precisely its failure to demonstrate to the world, through faithful obedience to Christ, that the fallen state of the powers, their claim to "sovereignty," has been "broken" in Christ's death and resurrection. (144) Quite simply, when this failure occurs, the particular community in question ceases to "be" the church as the church just "is in itself a proclamation of the lordship of Christ to the powers from whose dominion the church has begun to be liberated." (150) As will be argued below, this construal of the fall is problematic inasmuch as it engenders a form of supersessionism by replacing a "fallen" church with a "restored" church rather than recognizing the ongoing dimension of fallen humanity *within* the restored community that is the church.

dominance of the fall on this telling of the narrative, Genesis 1-3 become functionally the only significant Hebrew Scriptures needed to tell the story and the rest of Israel's history becomes inconsequential.[20] Once Christ comes by the time of the New Testament, the resolution of the fall is achieved and Israel, as a people, is no longer needed. The resolution of the story is achieved and will be brought to a final close at the return of Christ. For Soulen, then, the principle problem with structural supersessionism is how it "*unifies the Christian canon in a manner that renders the Hebrew Scriptures largely indecisive for shaping conclusions about how God's purposes engage creation in universal and enduring ways.*"[21]

What structural supersessionism relies upon at its core is an assumption that the scriptures should be read from the beginning to the end as a story arced toward the event of the incarnation. The incarnation, in structural supersessionism, is the key to the whole of the scriptural witness' meaning. Soulen's own proposal is to advocate for a different key. Rather than make the incarnation the key, Soulen advocates that "the reign of God" be understood as the central interpretive and hermeneutical key to unify the scriptures.[22] The reign of God is helpful, for Soulen, because it allows for the decisiveness of Christ's death and resurrection as a definitive act in history whereby God demonstrates fidelity to Israel and the nations as Lord, but does so without making that act the meaning of the whole of the scriptures themselves. Thus, Soulen states with regards to the unity of the biblical canon that, "…[w]ithout doubt evertything turns on Christ, but not everything concerns Christ."[23]

Conclusion

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[20] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 31.
[21] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 31. Emphasis in original.
[22] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 138.
[23] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 175.

Soulen's analysis of the three forms of supersessionism at work in traditional and modern forms of theology is helpful for providing a basic grid by which to evaluate many forms of Christian theology as replaying or avoiding supersessionist tendencies. In engaging any particular author of Christian theology, the question can be put to them whether or not any particular aspect to their theology encourages an ongoing and open-ended role for Israel within the plan of God or whether such a role is shown to be, either formally or functionally, obsolete. This question will now be put to Yoder through an analysis of his restitutionist hermeneutic.

CHAPTER 2

Restitutionist Hermeneutics: A Supersessionist Vision?

Introduction

The primary claim of this chapter is that John Howard Yoder's use of the restitutionist perspective on Christian history, which I argue functions as a fundamental hermeneutic operative in his writings, ends up producing a form of what Kendall Soulen identified as economic supersessionism. To make this claim on the basis of Yoder's hermeneutic in particular may appear to some interpreters of Yoder as misguided from the beginning. It is common when treating Yoder's broad and diverse writings to make some kind of clarifying comments about how Yoder should not be pigeonholed into one methodology or hermeneutic framework. Thus, to claim that Yoder has consistently utilized the restitutionist perspective as a theologically relevant hermeneutic (and perhaps even method) might sound, to some interpreters of Yoder, too much like pigeonholing him.

Interpreters of Yoder such as Mark Thiessen Nation laud Yoder for refusing to write systematically, and yet what is curious is Nation's equal desire to laud Yoder's "relentless" consistency.[1] If Yoder was an occasional theologian who rejected "methodologism" in favor of working without an overarching theological system and yet was "relentlessly consistent," on what basis or center can he be judged consistent?[2] There are others such as Paul Martens who are

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[1] Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 196-197.

[2] Nation, *John Howard Yoder*, 197. For Yoder, "methodologism" was a negative term meant to communicate his rejection of the modern obsession with focusing on questions of method as the proper starting point for any legitimate inquiry. See his essay "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism," in *A Pacifist Way of Knowing*, ed. Christian E. Early and Ted G. Grimsrud (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010).

not convinced that Yoder's work displays such consistency but rather that Yoder develops his

thought in problematic ways that could be understood as "heterodox."[3]

Stanley Hauerwas has provided a more nuanced perspective, noting that, for Yoder,

"Jesus is central…but since Jesus is the Son of God, that means he is the center that cannot be

summarized, because Jesus makes a difference for how everything is understood." [4] Yet this

statement, as was shown above with Soulen's analysis of supersessionism, only begs larger

questions about what is all wrapped up in the phrase "makes a difference for how everything is

understood." While Hauerwas' comment gets closer to the truth than those who wish to write off

any definitive framework or system to Yoder's work, how to communicate Jesus' meaning

correctly and consistently on the basis of the scriptures is indeed Yoder's goal.

As will be shown below, a correct vision of Jesus, for Yoder, is made possible through a

restitutionist hermeneutic. If this hermeneutic is not to be called a system, then at the very least,

as Yoder himself contends, it should be viewed as a consistent pattern of thought he utilizes for

describing his vision of the significance of Jesus such that it could be useful for testing in

"ordinary language."[5] Some may still object arguing, as Craig Carter does, that Yoder's vision of

Jesus springs from his reforming efforts and that he is therefore "not a restitutionist."[6] While

Carter is right to call Yoder a reformer, he is wrong to suggest that, for Yoder, being a reformer

precludes being a restitutionist. This is so because for Yoder, the restitutionists that he took his

cue from, the "ecclesial Anabaptists," were true reformers.[7] By taking up the restitutionist

perspective of the ecclesial Anabaptists, Yoder thus presents his role as a reformer as founded

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[3] See Martens, *The Heterodox Yoder*.
[4] Hauerwas, "Foreward," in *John Howard Yoder*, xi.
[5] Yoder, *PK*, 124; idem, "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism," 91.
[6] Craig A. Carter, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2001), 120.
[7] Yoder, *PK*, 125.

upon a particular performance of the restitutionist hermeneutic as hermeneutics of reform. Carter is thus right if the "restitutionist" he imagines is a rampant sectarian who claims to be recreating Eden, but then he would have done better to clarify the sense in which he appeals to the term. The distinction, in other words, need not be made in the way Carter makes it. Thus, while there is no doubt that Yoder himself would have been suspicious of any aspect of his theology becoming "a law unto itself," he no doubt wanted his vision of Jesus to be received as a skilled attempt at providing resources for the church to defend against what he saw were incorrect visions of Jesus.[8] It should thus be no scandal to claim that the restitutionist perspective, which Yoder elsewhere calls a "mental structure," was a considerable feature of his own theology.[9]

The first part of this chapter begins by briefly locating the restitutionist perspective on Christian history within the context of the Reformation and Radical Reformation since this is the foundational context that informs Yoder's particular engagement with and adaptation of the restitutionist hermeneutic. I then turn directly to an analysis of Yoder's appropriation and use of restitutionist hermeneutics in one key essay, "Anabaptism and History," from his book *The Priestly Kingdom*. The key question asked throughout that analysis is what the principle elements are to Yoder's adaptation of the restitutionist hermeneutic, and to what extent they replay any of the three forms of supersessionism Soulen identified.

However, since in "Anabaptism and History" Yoder is not treating the question of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity at all but rather the question of the church's authoritative criterion for reform, the linkage between his adaptation of restitutionist

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[8] Yoder, "Walk and Word," 91. The fact that Yoder hoped for his work to be received in such a way is evident in the preface to the second edition of *The Politics of Jesus* where he notes that rather than preface his work therein with "theoretical prolegomena," he is content rather to let "the text play its role as the documentary spine of the church's identity." (ix)

[9] Yoder, *PK*, 130.

hermeneutics and supersessionism will not be initially obvious. However, as will become clear throughout the chapter, for Yoder the restitutionist hermeneutic is just as much a hermeneutic for evaluating the history attested to throughout the scriptures (such as Israel's history) as it is a hermeneutic for evaluating history outside of the scriptures (Church history). This latter point will become particularly clear in the second part of the chapter, when I turn to the text "The Restitution of the Church," in *JCSR*, in order to test Yoder's claim that restitutionist hermeneutics can represent a Jewish vision of (or hermeneutic for evaluating) history. I end by arguing that two dimensions to the restitutionist hermeneutic, the appeal to the 'fall' of the church and the 'radical renewal' of the church produce supersessionist tendencies in Yoder's theology.

Reformation and Radical Reformation: Restitution of the 'True' Body

Ave Verum Corpus! This Latin phrase, which begins the Eucharistic prayer attributed to Pope Innocent VI (1352-62) and which would come to be beautifully composed by Mozart centuries later, in many ways encapsulates the controversy that was at the heart of the Reformation.[10] Where is the "true body" of the faithful? For the Anabaptists of the Radical Reformation, the true body was not to be found in the established churches of the day, especially not in their Eucharistic celebrations.[11] For this reason, it had to be sought elsewhere. The prominent use of the biblical metaphor of "the whore of Babylon" in Anabaptist writings

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[10] Miri Ruben, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist In Late Medieval Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 156.

[11] For a detailed account of Anabaptist theological reflection on the Lord's Supper, see John Rempel, *The Lord's Supper In Anabaptism: A Study In The Christology Of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History 33 (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993).

illustrates this with provocative clarity.[12] Pertinent here especially is Pilgram Marpeck's tract

The Uncovering of the Babylonian Whore.[13] In this tract, Marpeck uses the image from

Revelation to refer to the Roman Catholic Church stating, "We speak, as can be seen, of the *old*,

red, Roman whore (who passed herself off for so long as the bride of Christ, deceiving herself

and many with her). This whore [*sic*] the real bride of Christ--the bride consisting of a *new*

people, married to Christ through his blood and suffering--has *thrown out* and rejected with all

her tricks."[14] For Marpeck, the old body, uncovered and exposed as false, must go and the new,

true body must be put in her place. Serving the true body meant throwing out a body that had, for

so long, been the supposedly false bearer of Christ's body.

A lot has changed since the tumultuous times in which Marpeck and other Anabaptist

leaders declared their faith in opposition to what they saw so clearly as a false church. For some

time now Mennonites, and particularly Mennonite historians, have noted that appeals to stark

distinctions between *the* true church and *the* false churches as were common in the Reformation

era are, while perhaps understandable then given the circumstances, finally unhelpful for any

long term use today. Furthermore, the historical records show how Free Church traditions such

as the Mennonites have, from their earliest beginnings, maintained significant lines of continuity

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[12] The use of the 'whore of Babylon' metaphor to refer to the *Catholic* Church was by no means original to the Anabaptists but had been used before them by Luther and Calvin among others. What was perhaps significant among some of the Anabaptists was that they assumed that the metaphor implicated the Magisterial Reformers as well. Texts from the period have demonstrated the widespread use of this metaphor and for diverse purposes. In some cases the metaphor was used as a call to arms as with some of the Melochorites. See James Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002)*,* 285. In other instances, such as was the case with Dirk Philips, the metaphor was used to describe the fate of false teachers "drunk with the wine of harlotry." See *The Writings of Dirk Philips: 1504-1568*, trans. Cornelius J. Dyck, William E. Keeney, Alvin J. Beachy, (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 215.) With Menno Simons, the metaphor was used as a call to rebirth and separation from the world. See Earl Zimmerman, "Fleeing Babylon: Menno's True Church," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 18, no.1 (Winter 2000):60-79.

[13] Pilgram Marpeck, *The Triumph of Peace, and Power of True Christianity: An Early Anabaptist Tract on Defenselessness and Fidelity to Christ originally published as Aufdeckung der Babylonishen hürn*, trans. Peter Hoover; ed. Edsel Burdge, Jr. (Shippensburg, PA: Benchmark Press, 2001).

[14] Marpeck, *The Triumph of Peace, and Power of True Christianity,* 2. Emphasis mine.

with the greater church traditions that some of the earliest Radicals readily identified as false.[15] Opposing idealistic depictions of Free Church traditions such as the Anabaptists, Mennonite historians have also demonstrated the fallibility of Anabaptist communities, both in their genesis and in their growth and development into numerous tradition-forms.

This has led many to acknowledge the basic point that Christian faithfulness, regardless of the tradition in question, can never be achieved apart from the complexity, diversity, and indeed the "spots" and "wrinkles" of flesh and blood Christian communities such as are evident in all the traditions of the church.[16] This more realistic and humble self-awareness on the part of many Mennonites has in turn contributed to a growing desire to re-establish connections between Free Churches and the great traditions of the church catholic. Almost five hundred years have passed since the Reformation began and many within the Mennonite community have begun to question the ongoing relevance of the ecclesial divisions which were a result of that tumultuous time.[17]

Yet, among these more moderate Mennonite voices, John Howard Yoder continued to argue that in spite of the clear evidence of fallibility in Mennonite history, there was something to the basic logic that Marpeck expressed so long ago that was still needed by the church in order to keep her from assuming a false body. In fact, Yoder argued, the only way to be serious about

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[15] See Arnold Snyder, *The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler,* Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History 26 (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984) and idem., *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004).

[16] This perspective became much more credible with the publication of the densely researched article, James M. Stayer; Werner O. Packull; Klaus Deppermann, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49, no.2 (1975): 83-121. Theological accounts of the 'pluralistic' realities of Anabaptist-Mennonite communities have also strengthened this perspective. In this regard, see Rodney J. Sawatsky, "The One and the Many: The Recovery of Mennonite Pluralism" in *Anabaptism Revisited*, ed. Walter Klassen, 141-154 (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992). Spirited counter-arguments have also been offered. See J. Denny Weaver, "Anabaptist Vision: A Historical or Theological Future?" *The Conrad Grebel Review* 13, no.1 (1995): 69-86.

[17] This is to say, there was no doubt a real relevance to the divisions in the time of the reformation. That being said, such relevance is not necessarily self-evident or real today.

history as a contingent sphere of human action and decision was to be willing to be *radically* critical of the various church forms that had been operative throughout history right up until his own time. Yoder identified this perspective as "restitutionist," differentiated it from the closely related term "reform" and described it as a useful "though pattern" for churches that are seeking renewal in any given age.[18] Yoder's use of the restitutionist perspective has been met both with praise as well as continual criticisms by many historians and theologians.[19] In his own time, Yoder did not shy away from debate over the usefulness of the restitutionist perspective either. This is particularly clear in one text of Yoder's which will now be examined.

Restitutionist Hermeneutics in Three Movements

In his essay "Anabaptism and History," Yoder describes what he says are the three "movements" to the restitutionist thought pattern or view of history. These three movements will be immediately recognizable as having formal similarities with what Soulen identified as the standard canonical narrative: "There was once a normative state of the church. There was a 'Fall,' leaving a degenerate state, so intrinsically deteriorated as not to be reparable without discontinuity. Then there is the radical renewal."[20] Yoder claimed that this pattern is essentially "catholic," having been appealed to commonly, not only by (some) Catholics and Protestants, but also by "most historically oriented religions."[21]

In other words, for Yoder, most Christian traditions give an account of the church's normative beginnings that set the standard for evaluating future development. As a result, most

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[18] Yoder, *PK*, 124.
[19] J. Denny Weaver positively commends Yoder's restitutionist vision in his *Becoming Anabaptist: The Origin and Significance of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1987), 124.
[20] Yoder, *PK*, 124.
[21] Yoder, *PK*, 124.

traditions also have a sense of what abandoning that normative beginning might look like and the effect(s) that such an act might have. Finally, most traditions have a sense of what it might take to get back on the right track. The pattern is thus not peculiar to any given tradition, only specific uses and adaptations of the pattern are. This gets again at Yoder's earlier point, namely, that the term restitution does not refer to a concept peculiar to Anabaptists or the Free Churches, rather is it a pattern of thinking internal to Christian discourse. The question to be explored below, however, is whether this pattern of thinking is itself productive of supersessionist tendencies or inimical to them.

The First Movement: The Normative State

Yoder begins his account of the first movement of the restitutionist thought pattern, the "normative state" of the Church, by distinguishing it from what he sees as "fringe" versions that express a longing for an ideal church.[22] For Yoder, articulating a vision of the normative state of the church in any time is risky because such an articulation is itself an act of ascribing or establishing authority, either in an idealized past or in an "unaccountable Spirit or kingdom."[23] Since Yoder wishes to avoid these latter options, he locates the church's normative state not in terms of ideal human structures and practices that can be defined in general terms, but rather in terms set by particular acts of divine rule in history. For Yoder, the church's normative state

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[22] Yoder, *PK*, 206.
[23] Yoder, *PK*, 125. Yoder distinguishes his use of the first movement of the restitutionist thought pattern from radical reformation figures such as Melchior Hofmann, Hans Hut, and Thomas Müntzer whom he feels demonstrate an unhelpful use of the restitutionist perspective. According to Yoder, these figures defined normativity in a way that abandoned incarnation as the normative authority and replaced it with some account of a pure or heroic humanity represented by Adam or David or who appealed to a work of the Spirit that was unaccountable to any norm outside of the particular interpretation of that Spirit by the community. On the other hand, Yoder singles out the Swiss Brethren, the Hutterites, and the Dutch Mennonites, whom he calls the "ecclesial Anabaptists," as those who demonstrate an historical instance of a community that abides by this "incarnational" criterion of normativity.

consists in its submission to the rule of God, as it was definitively made manifest in the event of the incarnation and since then as it is continually made manifest through the power of the Holy Spirit.

For Yoder, defining normativity finally in terms of anything but the incarnation is problematic because of how such definitions limit the church's accountability to within the bounds set by a particular church tradition's structures or language. Yoder is aware, however, that his appeal to the incarnation, on its own, only evades the more difficult but always necessary task of defining *how* the incarnation should be normative for the church in a given age.[24] In turn, Yoder offers his answer to this question by unpacking what he feels is "the meaning of Incarnation."[25]

For Yoder, the meaning of incarnation is, simply put, defined by the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whose particular obedience attested to in the New Testament demonstrates the way God wants his people to live in the midst of "pluralistic and relativistic" reality.[26] Jesus' incarnation, witnessed to in the scriptures, is the act of "God's reaching into human reality to say what we must do and what we must leave behind."[27] More than that though, by virtue of Christ's resurrection and ascension, Jesus' incarnation is also definitively "the Rule of God."[28] In this way, the incarnation is normative in a way that no other reference point can be.

Yet the striking dimension to this norm of the church is that it is nonetheless found at "a point within history."[29] Precisely in Jesus' particularity as a *human* being -- his openness to being encountered as a singular and unique historical agent whose meaning nonetheless extends,

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[24] Yoder, *PK*, 125.
[25] Yoder, *PK*, 128.
[26] Yoder, "But We Do See Jesus: The Particularity Of Incarnation And The Universality Of Truth," in *PK*, 59.
[27] Yoder, *JCSR*, 141.
[28] Yoder, *PK*, 54.
[29] Yoder, *PK*, 127.

through the power of the Holy Spirit, before and beyond his own context --is his life normative

for the church. What Jesus, as incarnate Lord, means therefore, can only be decided in particular

times and places as that meaning itself is established or incarnated anew in people who have

learned to "do" what Jesus did.[30]

The logical question following upon these affirmations, however, is if people are to learn

how to do what Jesus did but are not to rely on the authority of a particular tradition in order to

achieve such learning, how is it that the normative message of Jesus' incarnation is

communicated across time and space so as to be accepted (or rejected) as the church's norm? If

the bounds set by a particular church tradition's structures or language are not to be finally

trusted as reliable vehicles of transmission for that message, how is the Spirit is at work

'translating' Jesus' meaning into new contexts? These questions are crucial because it is

precisely at this point that Yoder needs to show how his position does not require that the

'meaning' of the incarnation be co-equal with or dependent upon the particular 'path' taken by

the church in history. For if the meaning of the incarnation is somehow possessed by the church

then the church, according to Yoder, is no longer accountable to an authority beyond the bounds

of tradition.

For Yoder, the translation of Jesus' meaning is achieved through the canon, which must

be understood as having two senses. First, canon is "testimony" (scripture) to the "saving events

of human history" that have direct relevance for all history.[31] This first sense of canon, as

testimony, is never to be understood as a source of authoritative propositions regarding Jesus'

meaning. For Yoder, the translation of Jesus' normative humanity into new times and places is

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[30] Yoder, "Turn, Turn," in *He Came Preaching Peace* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2004), 140.
[31] Yoder, "The Message of the Bible On It's Own Terms," in *To Hear the Word* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 141.

possible because the early followers of Jesus took steps to ensure that the founding memories of the church were passed down in the form or rule of scripture as a canon of authoritative writings, or what Yoder elsewhere calls "the collective scribal memory, the store *par excellence* of treasures old and new."[32]

Here Yoder seems to recognize the real mediating function of "agents of memory" in the community of faith without which the Gospel would not be transmitted.[33] An agent of memory "remembers expertly, charismatically the store of memorable, identity-confirming acts of faithfulness praised and of failure repented."[34] Even in this case, though, the agents of memory and the community in which these agents serve, are never judging or deciding the meaning of Jesus and the calling of the church (the saving events) themselves. That is a perpetual task for each community in each age. Thus, while canon in this first sense is linked to the body of people who over time continue to transmit these memories, the memories and particularly the definition of the memories are themselves always independent of the body that transmits them; the meaning of Jesus remains independent of any particular tradition.

Beyond canon just being authoritative writings, then, there is a sense in which canon more formally represents the "norming authority" of the church.[35] This sense of canon refers to the deferral of a community's authority to an "objective history" that stands in judgment of any particular appropriation of that history. This leads Yoder to elsewhere make the particularly provocative claim that the canon, rather than giving the church a "handle on history," leaves the church squarely within

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[32] Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood," in *PK,* 31.
[33] For this reason, Chris Huebner argues that, for Yoder, the Scriptures themselves are not independent of the community. See his *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006), 61.
[34] Yoder, *PK*, 30.
[35] Yoder, *To Hear The Word*, 100.

the continuing uncertainty of life within history, the arbitrariness and the particularity of all historical existence, and the arbitrariness and particularity of hermeneutics within history, which is precisely where we ought to be, since that is where God chose to be revealed in all the arbitrariness and particularity of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Jeremiah, Jesus and Pentecost, Luke and Paul, Peter and John.[36]

Provocatively, Yoder thus asserts that the normative state of the church is a state of contingent existence in which there is no specific "rhyme or reason" to why particular people are chosen as participants and witnesses to the reign of God in history. Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Jeremiah, Jesus and Pentecost, Luke and Paul, Peter and John are all particular historical agents whom by themselves carry no natural qualities or capacities that would make them capable of participating in or witnessing to the reign of God. The fact that they can is only a result of God's choice. This is, in a sense then, what the meaning of the incarnation is. Incarnation means that God chooses particular people, but does so in a contingent sphere of human activity in which those same people do not, by virtue of God's choice, come to then be authoritative agents of God's reign. Instead of becoming agents of God's reign, they are to remain obedient subjects.

Yoder's emphasis on God's choice here is one of the few times that Yoder comes close to discussing the topic of divine election. God's choice is supremely here an act of the rule or reign of God; no choice of any of the aforementioned figures determined or elected God. Rather, God elected these individuals to participate in and witness to the reign of God. The key question to attend to here in light of the statements of *Nostra Aetate* and Soulen's analysis of supersessionism is to what extent God's choice, once made, is revocable.

On the basis of Yoder's worries about ascribing normativity to any particular church tradition's institutional structures or language, one might surmise that Yoder would, in a sense,

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[36] Yoder, *To Hear The Word*, 100.

remain agnostic on this question. It is conceivable that God might irrevocably choose to be represented by one particular people in time and in history but it is also conceivable that God might choose to be so represented only for a time. To make a judgment one way or another is, in a sense, saying too much. Thus, Yoder notes in one other rare instance in which he treats this question, that "[b]oth views [irrevocable/revocable] are true, dialectically."[37] In relation to the church, then, no particular tradition is ever in a place in which they can assume that God has put the divine stamp of approval on the particularities of their existence. A particular church tradition may be witnessing to the reign of God, but they may also be the enemies of that reign. The first movement of the restitutionist hermeneutic thus acts to relativize all church traditions' claims to authority by ascribing ultimate authority to the reign of God as attested to definitively in the incarnation.

Having briefly treated Yoder's particular appropriation of the first movement of a restitutionist perspective on Christian history, how might it be evaluated in light of Soulen's analysis of supersessionism? Particularly, how might Yoder's particular understanding of the incarnation as the hermeneutical key of the scriptures be evaluated? Yoder is explicit that one of the key features of the restitutionist perspective is its move to "identify *within* Scripture its baseline, especially with regard to the relationship of the Testaments."[38] On the one hand, Yoder's identification of the incarnation as the restitutionist "baseline" evades the problematic of economic and structural supersessionism by joining Soulen in naming the reign of God as the hermeneutic key of the scriptures. Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Jeremiah, Jesus and Pentecost, Luke and Paul, Peter and John are all particular figures and events within Israel and

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[37] Yoder, "Jesus the Jewish Pacifist," in *JCSR*, 84.
[38] Yoder, *PK,* 126.

the Church's history that represent the church's hermeneutic baseline as they all say something definitive about the reign of God as it takes on flesh in particular people and places. Specifically, they attest to the supremacy of the divine election.

Thus, the proper scriptural hermeneutic of the church is not achieved through reading the Old Testament from the perspective of the New in order to highlight their difference. Rather, the right hermeneutical approach to the unity of the Old and New Testament is to see them under the one reign of God. So far this perspective would seem to be in accord with Soulen's own constructive proposal for moving beyond supersessionist accounts of the unity of the scriptures. The scriptures, for Yoder, do not find their hermeneutical key in Christ as the figure who provides closure and resolution to an otherwise open-ended story. Rather, the incarnation heightens and intensifies history's contingent character as a sphere in which the reign of God is visibly active as an ongoing dynamic in history. With Yoder, however, the pivotal caveat in this account is that Jesus Christ, while simultaneously continuous with all those other figures, is also *the reign of God* in the flesh. None of the other figures can be ascribed this status. Does this move effectively undermine what is otherwise a non-supersessionist approach to unifying the scriptures under the norm of the reign of God?

Not necessarily, as what is still left uncertain is what particular impact Jesus' incarnation, as the reign of God, has on the nature or vocation of the people of God. If Christ appears as the reign of God in history but does not in some way resolve history, then it is conceivable that Israel and her scriptures, as a testimony to the events in history which display the reign of God, would continue to have a significant role in revealing how the reign of God is operative in history in ongoing ways. That being said, the fact that Yoder equates the reign of God with the particular person of Jesus Christ does open up a door through which a structurally supersessionist

hermeneutic could enter. For, if the definition of the nature of peoplehood achieves its apex in Christ, then what came before will always be a subordinate example of earlier and less precise, yet nonetheless real, definitions of peoplehood under the reign of God.[39]

However, must holding to a high view of Christ's significance for interpreting the scriptures and for defining the nature of peoplehood imply a crude supersessionism of any of the three varieties that Soulen mentioned? Soulen himself has recently said otherwise. Since the publication of *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, he has gone on to develop and change his thoughts regarding the usefulness of his own proposal. In a recent essay, Soulen notes, "I am no longer satisfied with some of the things I wrote...Basically, I failed to give Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity a central and constitutive place in my canonical narrative."[40] Furthermore, Soulen notes, "I no longer think that supersessionism is an essential or necessary feature of the standard canonical narrative."[41] Instead, Soulen proposes that the narrative is still helpful and that what needs to be addressed instead is the "deformation of that narrative."[42] Soulen's more recent proposals for what that deformation consists of and how it can be addressed have led him to focus on the continuity of "the canon's cumulative witness to the Tetragrammaton, the sacred and unspoken name of God."[43]

While space does not permit a full analysis of Soulen on this score, what is important to highlight in this shift in Soulen's thinking is his realization that, within the standard narrative, one can find resources for achieving the ongoing significance of Israel and her scriptures along

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[39] John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays On Christian Pacifism*, (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003).
[40] Kendall Soulen, "The Standard Canonical Narrative and the Problem of Supersessionism," in *Messianic Judiasm: Its Ecclesial Context And Biblical Foundations*, ed. David Rudolph and Joel Willitts (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 285.
[41] Soulen, "The Standard Canonical Narrative and the Problem of Supersessionism," 285.
[42] Soulen, "The Standard Canonical Narrative and the Problem of Supersessionism," 285.
[43] Soulen, "The Standard Canonical Narrative and the Problem of Supersessionism," 285.

with traditional Christian claims regarding Christ. The Tetragrammaton is helpful here because the sacred and unspoken name of God remains sacred and unspoken in the New Testament, even after Christ's resurrection and ascension.[44] Thus, whatever it means to speak the name of Jesus as a testimony to the reign of God, God's identity as professed by Israel in the Tetragrammaton remains *along with* or as *constitutive of* that testimony. Furthermore, even if Christians confess that Jesus is Lord and that it is in him that we truly see the reign of God, no one Christian can have immediate access to the meaning of the incarnation in any final sense and for this reason Christians have no recourse to claiming that Jesus' Lordship somehow usurps the endurance of God's promises to Israel.

Thus, while the Christian confession may imply at least some form of supersessionism in a minimal sense, this need not imply that Israel's unique covenant with God at Sinai has been superseded. Christians really must confess that Jesus has brought something superior to all that had come before or would come after. In response, however, Christians have a choice between two kinds of supersessionism. Here a different account of the forms of Christian supersessionism is helpful to introduce.

The Jewish philosopher David Novak has made the claim that there are two kinds of supersessionism, a "hard" supersessionism and a "soft" supersessionism.[45] "Hard" supersessionism claims that Christians are the inheritors of Jesus' new covenant and that Israel's covenant has been abrogated. In hard supersessionism, it would be difficult to see how any feature of Israel's life could have enduring significance (including the sacred name of God).

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[44] Soulen has made this argument in his more recent *The Divine Names and the Holy Trinity: Distinguishing the Voices* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).

[45] David Novak, "The Covenant In Rabbinic Thought," in *Two Faiths, One Covenant?: Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other*, ed. Eugene B. Korn, and John T. Pawlikowski, 65-80 (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 66. Also, see his *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Novak's account of hard supersessionism would thus accord with Soulen's account of economic and punitive supersessionism. There is, however, also a "soft" supersessionism. Soft supersessionism claims that although Jesus did fulfill Israel's promises, there is an enduring (and mysterious) way in which Israel and the Church remain together as distinct covenant partners with the one God of Israel. Novak's own convictions regarding what makes for legitimate Jewish-Christian dialogue leads him to claim that "Christianity must be generically supersessionist. In fact, I question the Christian orthodoxy of any Christian who claims he or she is not a supersessionist at all."[46] Here is where one might say that Novak's statements and Soulen's original proposal regarding "structural" supersessionism part ways. Novak believes that Christians should uphold some form of supersessionism in order to be true to their faith commitments.

In light of the above analysis of the first movement of Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic, it can be stated that Yoder's desire to seek the normative definition of peoplehood in the incarnation of Christ does not necessitate a "hard" supersessionism per se. Israel and Israel's scriptures, for Yoder, can still testify to the reign of God in enduring ways after Christ as Jesus' reign is continuous with the reign of God as it had already been present in the old covenant. If the first movement of Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic does not necessarily result in a hard supersessionism, can the same be said of the other two movements?

The Second Movement: The Fall

For Yoder, the fall of the church occurs when the church chooses to establish its own reign or kingdom as a self-legitimating authority. By virtue of doing this, it essentially abandons

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[46] David Novak, "The Covenant In Rabbinic Thought," 67.

accountability to the norm of the incarnation. Once this has happened, the church, is left in "a degenerate state, so intrinsically deteriorated as not to be reparable without discontinuity."[47] Here Yoder introduces significant terms such as "degenerate," "deteriorated," and "discontinuity." Each of these terms carries a potential range which will once again be necessary for Yoder to specify.

In Yoder's own appropriation of this second movement, he will want to distinguish himself from those Radical Reformation figures that took this movement to the extreme by abandoning the mainstream churches for a church of their own ideological making. For example, his problem with the radicals at Münster was that they replaced a "mainstream church" that was accountable only to itself with a "clandestine" church that was only accountable to itself.[48] For this reason, Yoder claims that the call for "discontinuity" with a fallen church is not necessarily a recommendation of discontinuity with all previous traditions of the church (i.e. the church's proclamation expressed diversely throughout history). Indeed, in his dissertation, Yoder made what might be a surprising claim to some readers that "Anabaptism did not wish to have a centre that it held 'for itself.'"[49] Having begun to understand the importance of Yoder's account of normativity, however, one can see why Yoder would want this to be the case. If Anabaptism had a center for itself, it would no longer be accountable to Christ as Lord.

Nonetheless, for Yoder, Anabaptism did end up becoming its own unique tradition separate from the mainstream churches due to the "failure of the official Reformation churches"

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[47] Yoder, *PK*, 124.
[48] Yoder, *PK*, 133.
[49] John Howard Yoder, *Anabaptism And Reformation In Switzerland: An Historical And Theological Analysis Of The Dialogues Between Anabaptists And Reformers*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History 4, ed. C. Arnold Snyder, (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004), 142.

to engage in "a truly fraternal polemic."[50] Here one sees Yoder arguing that amidst the diverse

ways restitution could function as a thought pattern, it need not be seen as an inherently purist or

sectarian way of evaluating history or performing obedient discipleship. In the context of the

Radical Reformation, "the Anabaptists," claimed Yoder, "did not reject the present for its failure

to be Eden…"[51] The problem, according to Yoder, that the Anabaptists addressed, was not the

lack of a total perfection within the church and not even necessarily false teachings per se but

instead "one particular set of decisions, accepted by the churches at large in the fourth century,

symbolized by Constantine…" that would for a great period of time change the social shape of

the church.[52]

Yoder describes this "set of decisions" in various ways throughout his writings. Almost

all of them, however, can be captured by what Yoder calls the decision to assume the

indefectibility of the church. Indefectibility, for Yoder, can be summarized as the church's claim

to secure its own success in the world through the powers and structures of human institutions.

Constantine is the primary symbol that Yoder appeals to when discussing indefectibility as, with

Constantine, trust in the invisible Lordship of Christ (the reign of God) was replaced or else

subsumed under the banner of a visible empire as the guarantor of God's governance of history.[53]

While Constantine is no doubt the symbol of the church's decision to assume

indefectibility, for Yoder, it is indefectibility as itself a false thought pattern (which Yoder labels

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[50] Yoder, *Anabaptism And Reformation In Switzerland*, 142.
[51] Yoder, *PK,* 129.
[52] Yoder, *PK,* 129. For Yoder, the Anabaptist judgment on the Catholic period of history implies the necessity of "historiography" for theology. Yoder, *PK*, 127. Yoder's claim that the ecclesial Anabaptists worked with a significant historiography has been challenged more recently by Geoffrey Dipple. Dipple claims that, while the evangelical Anabaptists no doubt appealed to the apostolic church as their model, they did not, apart from noted exceptions, need "an elaborate historical vision" to justify their restitutionism. See Geoffrey Dipple, *'Just As In The Time Of The Apostles': Uses Of History In The Radical Reformation* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005), 168.
[53] Yoder, *PK,* 136.

"Constantinianism")[54] that defines the fall of the church in any given time. Where restitution recognizes the reign of God in the incarnation as the authority which is independent of and external from the church (or any power), indefectibility establishes authority within the church as an institution, which in the context of the Catholic church occurred via apostolic succession.[55]

But what if indefectibility is challenged from within a church that assumes indefectibility? Would that not imply that, although the church had potentially erred in assuming indefectibility, it was in spite of itself still capable of reform from within? In other words, is fall too severe a word to use in making this judgment? For Yoder, the implication of the fall, and indeed of the very logic of indefectibility, means that the church cannot truly hear that challenge. Thus, while the radical reformers challenged the Catholic Church's claim to indefectibility, the Catholic Church would consistently refuse to hear it. For this reason Yoder argues that "the criterion of unfaithfulness is not the doctrinal or moral standard which other churches uphold, but rather this congregation's failure or refusal to receive fraternal admonition and council from sister churches."[56]

Appealing again to the "ecclesial Anabaptists," Yoder argues that they were not inherently schismatic or seeking to erect a new church edifice, but were simply concerned with taking "their own time seriously as one more *kairos* of choice between fall and renewal."[57] The restitutionist perspective on history is shown here to make reform or renewal truly possible because what is being renewed is not only the particular content of the church's witness, but also

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[54] Below, when I treat some critics of Yoder's use of the restitutionist thought pattern, I will further define what Yoder means when he refers to Constantinianism.

[55] Yoder, *PK,* 125.

[56] Yoder, "Is there Historical Development of Theological Thought," in *Radical Ecumenicity: Pursuing Unity and Continuity After John Howard Yoder*, ed. John C. Nugent (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2010), 235.

[57] Yoder, *PK*, 128.

the form of the church's witness, her "social shape."[58] The only way that a faithful form of the

church could presumably have been embodied in light of the persecution faced by the

Anabaptists, says Yoder, was through a new beginning apart.

This might seem schismatic on the part of the radicals. According to Yoder, however,

quite the opposite is the case. The schism did not occur when the radicals decided to worship

apart from the Catholic and Magisterial churches. Rather, the schism occurred when

conversation and debate amidst diversity was no longer possible because the radicals were

"driven into isolation."[59] Here it is important to highlight a key feature of Yoder's understanding

of the church's task in the world. For Yoder, the church's task is principally that of mission; of

being sent into the world with the gospel. Since the church's task is an outward focused mission

and not an inward focused "provincialism," pluralistic accounts of Christ's meaning should be

expected; and so disagreement should be expected. The normative state of the church, then, is a

state of a plurality of perspectives and practices that seek to nonetheless demonstrate the one

affirmation that "Jesus is Lord."

The fall of the church, as a consequence, occurs when that plurality is effaced and

subsumed into one human language which determines the meaning of Jesus is Lord as the

affirmation of one tradition alone as legitimate or authoritative. A church that performs this

effacement has ceased to be church inasmuch as it no longer witnesses to the Gospel as a

message of Jesus' Lordship "for the nations," and instead becomes a witness to a particular

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[58] Yoder, *PK*, 126.
[59] Yoder, *PK*, 28.

people's efforts at establishing and securing its own identity boundaries under the banner of Christ.[60] For Yoder, the fall of the church really does happen at this point.

In the fall, the church becomes so degenerate in her social form as to make Christian faithfulness unattainable apart from discontinuity with that form. This is where Yoder draws in the much stronger term "apostasy" to describe the fall. Since the church really is located in the contingency of history, and so must always face the decision of embracing God's reign in Christ or rejecting it, the church can at any given time really choose paths that are completely opposed to the nature of her calling.[61] "Although the biblical worldview," notes Yoder, "sees history as meaningful movement, at every point there are two possible ways to move, and at every point some people make the wrong decision."[62] This is not to say that apostasy is total; "Faithfulness must also be possible."[63] Apostasy, however, is equally possible and possible to such an extent that wide ranging critiques of history must be performed in order to discern the root cause of unfaithfulness in the task of reform.

Restitutionist hermeneutics, in this second movement, is at base then simply an affirmation that the church really can be unfaithful to her calling; that she can cease to authentically be the church, and to a degree of such magnitude that at a given time in history a radical separation from the old form of the church must be performed and a radical renewal to correct an unfaithful set of decisions made in the past would need to be embraced. In order to "renew," however, there has to be a foundation to rebuild on; there has to be, in other words, an objective norm in history that determines why renewal is necessary and how it might be pursued

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[60] The phrase, "for the nations," comes from the title of Yoder's final published work before his death. See *For The Nations: Essays Evangelical And Public* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

[61] John Howard Yoder, *Theology of Mission: A Believers Church Perspective*, ed. Gayle Gerber Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 279.

[62] Yoder, *Theology of Mission,* 279.

[63] Yoder, *PK*, 129.

in any given time. This is what the first movement in the restitutionist thought pattern establishes.

Since the incarnation, as definitive testimony to the reign of God, represents the church's true and faithful constant -- its baseline or "objective" criterion -- for Yoder, one must always bring that criterion to bear upon the form of the church in a given time in order to judge whether or not there is conformity between the two. When in a given context proper conformity to the objective form is absent, then churches must become discontinuous with that particular form of the (false) church. Those that must be rejected by the restitutionists, according to Yoder, are thus not the Catholics or the Protestants as such, but rather particular Protestants and particular Catholics who refuse, through various means, to check their own expression of the Gospel with the objective form of Christ and scripture. Said differently, it is not fifteen hundred years of history that needs to be rejected, but particular and perhaps persistent failures within those fifteen hundred years that must be rejected. Indefectibility is problematic, for Yoder, because it claims to have assumed the Lordship of Christ revealed in the New Testament *into* the church. The "historical objectivity and distance" of the claims of Christ become subjectively possessed and the promise becomes a possession.[64]

How might this understanding of *fallenness* be understood in relation to Soulen and Novak's accounts of supersessionism? At this point it is helpful to be reminded again that in the context of the essay being treated here, Yoder treats restitutionist perspective in relation to Christian history and not, as in Soulen's case, Israel's history as construed by Christian theology. Nonetheless, as we will see below, the restitutionist hermeneutic is, for Yoder, just as much a hermeneutic for evaluating the history attested to throughout the scriptures as it is a hermeneutic

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[64] Yoder, *Theology of Mission,* 283.

for evaluating history outside of the scriptures. For this reason Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic can be evaluated on the basis of Soulen's (and Novak's) account of supersessionsm all the same.

In treating the fall as an operative dynamic in Christian history, Yoder clearly intends to avoid making the church's sin or the fall the dominant theme of Christian history. He claims, rather, that obedience is possible. On first impression then, he seems to avoid one dimension to what Soulen finds problematic in the standard canonical narrative, namely, the hermeneutic that makes the story of the Hebrew Scriptures fundamentally about "the catastrophe of sin and whose goal is therefore deliverance from the negative conditions of existence."[65] That being said, Yoder's concern in treating the restitutionist perspective to begin with is, in a sense, to show that the church has tended to make too little of its capacity for apostasy. For this reason, Yoder goes on to make statements that, on Soulen's account, might be judged as supersessionist in character. For example, with reference to the church that is "*defined by succession,*" Yoder notes that "[t]here can be no cure in continuity" with that church.[66] Here the fall really can appear in history as a catastrophe, and not only in a singular event in an epic past, but in an ever recurring form.

In this way, interestingly, rather than repeating a strict punitive or economic supersessionism whereby a disobedient Israel is replaced by a new, obedient church, Yoder in effect makes supersessionism an ever present dialectic throughout all of history. There is faithfulness and there is apostasy, and this is how it always is. There will always be the faithful who must, in certain circumstances, supersede the unfaithful. However, Yoder does not simply stop at the dialectic. The fall is not just a testament to the tragic in human history; it is also the context of the call to faithfulness of which the incarnation attests. Thus, for Yoder, while history

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[65] Soulen, *The God Of Israel And Christian Theology*, 53.
[66] Yoder, *PK,* 125. Emphasis in original.

testifies to the dialectic of faithfulness and apostasy, to divine election and divine rejection, one can really make an effort to be on the right side of this dialectic. How? Through obedience to the norm of the church which is the reign of God in Christ. What does obedience to Christ look like, for Yoder? Put simply, it is living as Christ lived. But how did Christ live?

Yoder's answer is famously provided in his *Politics of Jesus* but he provides this answer throughout his writings. In another key essay already quoted above, Yoder identifies the life of Christ as an act of self-emptying (*kenosis*).[67] For Yoder, this self-emptying has particular content in Jesus' history in terms of Jesus' refusal to control history, even in the face of death on a cross. This self-emptying, for Yoder, continues to have particular content in the lives of those who live out a similarly self-emptying style of politics. Yoder's favorite examples in "Anabaptism and History" are the Anabaptists who were 'forced' to break with the mainstream churches because they mixed church and state together and so, by Yoder's estimation, failed to live *kenotically*.

Here, in his account of the fall of the church, Yoder seems to move into the territory of a variety of hard (economic) supersessionism. I say "variety" of hard supersessionism because clearly Yoder's concern is not, strictly speaking, the replacement of Israel per se. Rather, for Yoder, the people that are replaced are the people of God in any age who become apostate by taking their survival into their own hands. These people are not identified and then superseded on the basis of their corporate identity, be it national, ethnic, or otherwise, but by the degree to which they are disobedient to the call of God.

This second movement of the restitutionist perspective thus seems to represent a critical adjustment in the restitutionist hermeneutic. Where before Yoder appealed to the incarnation as that act of God's reign that definitively relativizes all attempts to establish the reign of God

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[67] Yoder, *PK*, 145.

through a particular tradition or people, Yoder turns in his account of the fall against his own insight, suggesting that the dialectic of faithfulness and apostasy can be overcome, if not in reality then at least in principle, in the community of people that reject church-state linkages, refusing to take survival into their own hands.[68] This people, says Yoder, represent the radical renewal that God brings in history. In order to adequately judge whether or not this is a fair judgment of Yoder's restitutionist perspective, the third and final movement he describes must now be treated.

The Third Movement: Radical Renewal

For Yoder, just as the church's normativity hinges on the particularity of Jesus' claim to Lordship, and just as the fall hinges on a particular form of rejection of that Lordship with detrimental effects on the social shape of the church in history, so too will it be the case that "a particular restitution" of the church will be needed in history.[69] Radical renewal occurs, for Yoder, quite simply through events in time when Jesus and the New Testament, as the norm of the church, are taken with full seriousness by the community gathered in the Spirit. But since, in the contingency of history, this "taking Jesus seriously" will almost certainly happen in the face of previous decisions to not take Jesus seriously, radical renewal will also require a judgment on the preceding history; an evaluation of how and why things went wrong. How did this look for the Anabaptists? Did their judgment on previous history, including specific judgments related to the ascendency of Emperor Constantine, amount to a rejection of the thirteen or so hundred years of history in which God was presumably at work? Yoder would have his readers say no.

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[68] Yoder, "Jesus The Jewish Pacifist," in *JCSR*, 84.
[69] Yoder, *PK*, 129.

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For Yoder, the Anabaptists did not reject history but took it with such seriousness that they had to reject specific *decisions* made in the past which led to the church's radical unfaithfulness. Since, for Yoder, tradition or continuity in history is not what defines the church but rather mission under "the continuing Sovereignty of the Word Incarnate," there is a sense in which history need not be rejected at all but rather accepted for what it is, the place where the God of Jesus Christ has staked his claim and where he will continue to stake his claim, in spite of opposition from the church or the world.[70]

In the movement of radical renewal, the fallen church is thus not so much replaced by a true church as, in a sense it was never "established" at all. The church was never established, for Yoder, in the sense of made continuous in a particular organizational structure that persists over time. Rather, it was only ever present through the Spirit's making it so in the lives of particular people in particular times and places. For Yoder, then, the restitution of the church is quite literally nothing less than the "event" of faithfulness which is, finally, a "continuing series of new beginnings, similar in shape and spirit, as the objective historicity of Jesus and the apostles, mediated through the objectivity of Scripture."[71]

How might this understanding of *radical renewal* be understood in relation to Soulen's account of supersessionism? Clearly Yoder avoids a strict logic of economic supersessionism by virtue of the fact that he does not wish to advocate a definitive replacement of one church form with another that will endure as the one "true" church. Since radical renewal is a perpetually necessary operation within history as a sphere in which "falls" continue to occur, there can be no single definitive replacement of an "Israel" by the "Church" or of Catholics by the Protestants or

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[70] Yoder, "Biblicism and the Church," in *The Roots of Concern: Writings on Anabaptist Renewal 1952-1957*, ed. Virgil Vogt (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 92.
[71] Yoder, *PK*, 133.

the Protestants by the Anabaptists. Furthermore, since the church's identity is not sustained through any singular tradition-form, defined by the continuity of flesh, blood, and institutions over time, there is no one church or people to replace. But does this really resolve the problematics that are central to economic and punitive supersessionism as identified by Soulen or does it simply replay them in a different key? It would appear to do the latter.

Through appeal to the second and third movements of his restitutionist hermeneutic, Yoder finally replays a form of economic supersessionism by requiring, on the basis of the norm of the church, that the church (or the people of God) not be defined in any way by continuity of flesh, blood, or institution over time. To put it in Soulen's terms, evading continuity in these forms effectively promotes the obsolescence of specific traditions of the church or periods of church history as an essential feature of God's one overarching economy of renewal for his people. Perhaps strikingly, one could say then that, for Yoder, what finally made particular Jews the people of God was not their chosenness as Jews but their obedience as particular Jews. Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, and Jeremiah were not people of God because they belonged to a chosen people but because they *acted* as chosen people. Similarly, Catholics, Protestants, and Anabaptists are not the people of God because they are constituted by God's irrevocable decision to inaugurate the Church in Christ, but because they *act* like Christ.

Yoder's exposition of the three movements of the restitutionist thought pattern has now been critically engaged. Further, each movement has been examined in light of Soulen's account of supersessionism so as to make the argument stated at the outset of this thesis, namely, that Yoder's restitutionst hermeneutics results in his supersessionist tendencies. Yoder's supersessionist tendencies, it was claimed, come to the fore in his treatment of the "fall" and the "radical renewal" of the church. To fill out the above claim, I now turn to treat Yoder's argument

in *JCSR* that the restitutionist hermeneutic is a Jewish way of viewing history.

'The Jewish Jesus and Radical Protestantism:'
Restitutionist Hermeneutics as a Jewish View of History?

Yoder's essay "The Restitution of the Church," was initially presented as a lecture in 1976 at the Ecumenical Institute for Advanced Theological Studies (Tantur) in Jerusalem where, Yoder notes, he delivered "three presentations on 'The Jewish Jesus and Radical Protestantism.'"[72] Yoder begins by providing what he calls a "sketchy historical account" of the radical reformers, the "other stream of reformations" that are less well known by the mainstream traditions.[73] He lists four "common features" among these radicals, namely congregationalism, voluntary membership, religious liberty, and non-violence.[74] Each of these features, argues Yoder, set these reformers apart from the official Protestant Reformation.

Thus the first part of the essay is essentially a summary of the key themes of "Anabaptism and History," with some modifications and additions to meet the needs of the particular setting of the presentation. Yoder begins by setting up the predictable antinomies. Where the official reformers were concerned about conformity to right doctrine and organizational hierarchy, the radicals held diverse and at times conflicting doctrinal positions but were unified congregationally in spite of diversity and were "opposed to hierarchy as a definition of the unity of the Church."[75] Where the official reformers still practiced involuntary membership through infant baptism, the radicals practiced voluntary membership by adult baptism. Where the official reformers made "religion and politics...inseparable," the radicals

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[72] Yoder, *JCSR,* 142.
[73] Yoder, *JCSR,* 131.
[74] Yoder, *JCSR,* 136-137.
[75] Yoder, *JCSR,* 136.

gave up "control over its members."[76] And finally, where the official reformers still wielded the sword, the radicals generally (but not always) practiced non-violence or non-resistance.[77]

Having established these features, Yoder goes on to ask "[i]n what sense can it be said that these movements represent 'an alternative perspective' on Christian history?"[78] Yoder lists three ways in which this can be said. First, Yoder notes that the radicals had a unique view on what makes renewal and reformation truly possible within the church. The restitutionist, according to Yoder, sees the present state of the church as not containing the resources necessary to renew the church. Echoing his convictions expressed in "Anabaptism and History," Yoder appeals to the language of "organism" to describe the church as fallen. Perhaps intensifying his comments regarding the fall in "Anabaptism and History," Yoder notes that "Christendom does not merely need improvement around the edges; it has become disobedient at the heart."[79]

The radical restitutionists, according to Yoder, could not accept that reformation could truly occur in continuity with the "organism" that claimed to be the body of Christ at that time because that organism, that body, was sick at its core, to such an extreme so as to be beyond repair or renewal.[80] What was the nature of the sickness? For Yoder, the organism that was "the church" at that time was, as it were, *incurvatus in se*. As we saw already in the previous essay, for Yoder a church that is "turned inward on itself" cannot be truly critical of its own path in history and neither can it take criticism from any authority external from itself. It cannot, in other words, truly and authentically declare that Jesus is Lord.

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[76] Yoder, *JCSR,* 136.
[77] Yoder, *JCSR,* 137.
[78] Yoder, *JCSR,* 137.
[79] Yoder, *JCSR,* 137.
[80] Yoder, *JCSR,* 137.

Here Yoder draws in the terms "defectibility" and "apostasy" again to argue that just because a particular people *claims* to be the church or the faithful people of God, does not mean, in fact, that it is. For him, to be faithful means to act like the Christ and if that action is absent, it can be reasonably assumed that so too is the God of Jesus Christ absent in that people. "God," says Yoder, "might have been abandoned by the people claiming to act in his name."[81] According to Yoder, because of their own commitment really to act in God's name, the radicals recognized the need for "a new beginning, to correct for a fundamental wrong turn in the past."[82] But what resources do these radicals draw upon in pursuing this "new" beginning if not resources already within the organism that is the 'fallen' church?

This question is answered by Yoder when he notes a second way that the radicals offer an alternative perspective on history. The radicals had a different understanding of the way in which scripture is authoritative for the community. According to Yoder, the reformers assumed a hermeneutical framework that was defined in advance by "the existing structures" of the church. The structures of the church, then, were the basis upon which to understand the apostolic task of the church as described in scripture.[83] Yoder notes that the radicals were biblicist, however, and that this meant that no pre-existing structure, other than the "objectivity of Scripture" could limit their interpretation. There is no need to consult a hierarchy to understand the pertinence of the texts. Scripture alone is thus the fundamental resource of the church as it pursues renewal. This being the case, rather than scripture having to resource the church within already pre-established apostolic offices, "new" forms of "apostolicity" will arise out of scripture itself.[84] The church will, in essence, be made in the moment of the Spirit's action, mediated through scripture. The

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[81] Yoder, *JCSR,* 137.
[82] Yoder, *JCSR,* 137.
[83] Yoder, *JCSR,* 138.
[84] Yoder, *JCSR,* 138.

resources for the restitution of the church are therefore external from the church as it is in that moment.

Third and briefly, Yoder notes that the radicals offer an alternative perspective on Christian history because their views demonstrate "the seriousness of history."[85] Here again Yoder intimates the necessity of historiography for theology, stating that "[o]nly if specific judgements on particular histories and specific infidelities are confronted by new beginnings does the historical crunch take on the kind of earnestness it has within the Bible itself."[86] While this statement is somewhat cryptic, it is reasonable to assume that what Yoder is referring to is the task of the prophets in Israel who would call Israel back to a fundamental faithfulness to YHWH.[87] Indeed, elsewhere Yoder seems to identify the church as carrying forward specifically "the prophets' line" of Israel's history.[88]

As one can see, all of what has just been summarized above is in many ways a parallel account of the movements that Yoder described in "Anabaptism and History" with some slightly different emphases. Where this essay becomes particularly unique is where Yoder takes his own advice from his earlier essay, and applies the restitutionist perspective to "the reading of other crises."[89] This is where Yoder begins to address how the "shift in church/world relations" which the restitutionist perspective on history has the capacity to discern due to its critical view of history, had specific implications for the church's relationship to Judaism.[90]

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[85] Yoder, *JCSR,* 138-139.
[86] Yoder, *JCSR,* 139.
[87] Yoder, "Peace Without Eschatology?" in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 153.
[88] Yoder, "If Christ Is Truly Lord," in *The Original Revolution*, 58.
[89] Yoder, *PK*, 130.
[90] Yoder, *PK*, 129. Yoder himself, in a footnote, notes that "If twentieth-century restitutionism needs correction or refinement at this point, it would be to look for still earlier or deeper predispositions toward the Constantinian shift (*anti-Judaism?* Neoplatonism? creeping empire loyalism despite the commitment to pacifism?)." *PK*, 208, emphasis mine.

Essentially, the implication that Yoder draws in the following section is that the shift in church/world relations symbolized by Constantine resulted in the loss of the Jewish and "Hebraic" view of history itself which, for Yoder, is a view of history similar to the restitutionist radicals that he had previously been describing.[91] Where Yoder has been treating the antinomies between reformers and restitutionists, he now treats what he sees to be the accord between the radicals and the Jewishness of Jesus. Jesus, as a Jew, is part of the fabric of the particular history in which the God of Israel calls his people to faithfulness. Jesus does not reject Israel's scriptures but "confirms" them; he doesn't usher in a totally new ethic but, in recognition of the imminence of the Kingdom of God, takes up the ethic of Jeremiah who, in exile, sought the peace of the city where God has sent him.[92] This human and Jewish Jesus is, for Christians, "the norm" and so Jesus' own particularity as part of the history of the Jews becomes the criteria upon which to judge faithfulness to the God of Israel in either the first or the twentieth century. As norm, Jesus can never be a universal principle, a doctrine, or a justification used to prop up human authority structures because the God of Israel does not save through principles, doctrines, or human authority but rather events of salvation.[93] Restitutionist readings of history are "Hebraic," says Yoder, in that they critique events in history, such as moments of apostasy, "on the grounds of criteria [other events] drawn from the same story" and not from principles abstracted from the story.[94]

The restitutionist view is also Jewish, notes Yoder, because it is concerned with the "unity of *halakah* and *aggadah*," or as Yoder put it earlier, the "consonance of method and

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[91] As we saw above, Yoder also articulated this "shift" in his essay "Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," in *PK*.
[92] Yoder, *JCSR*, 72, 77.
[93] Yoder, *JCSR*, 139.
[94] Yoder, *JCSR*, 139.

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message."[95] Ethics and dogma (or teachings) are of a piece. Furthermore, this unity is, for Christians, understood principally through Jesus, and so through one who was an "interpreter of Torah," offering "ethical guidance" for his disciples.[96] Finally, Yoder notes that the restitutionist perspective is Jewish in its affirmation of apostasy and defectibility. Here Yoder wonders a bit, suggesting "only as an hypothesis," that Hebrew understandings of "the refractoriness of history" would suggest that the Hebrew people would have understood indefectibility as belonging only to the promise of God, "never becoming negotiable as our appropriation of it."[97]

In relation to this latter claim of Yoder's regarding indefectibility, an anecdote from the life of one of Yoder's teachers, Karl Barth, will be instructive for further testing Yoder's specific "hypothesis" and measuring it against charges of supersessionism. Michael Wyschogrod, the Jewish theologian, recounts a particularly vivid encounter that he had with Barth on a "sunny morning in August 1966."[98] In the course of their encounter, Barth had made the somewhat typical Christian quip at Wyschogrod that "You Jews have the promise but not the fulfillment; we Christians have both promise and fulfillment."[99] Responding to Barth, Wyschogrod said "With human promises, one can have the promise but not the fulfillment. But a promise of God is like money in the bank. If we have his promise, we have its fulfillment and if we do not have the fulfillment, we do not have the promise."[100] Evidently Barth, the preeminent theologian, had "never thought of it that way."[101]

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[95] Yoder, *JCSR*, 138, 140.
[96] Yoder, *JCSR*, 140.
[97] Yoder, *JCSR*, 140.
[98] Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations,* ed. Kendall Soulen, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 211.
[99] Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise,* 211.
[100] Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise,* 211.
[101] Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise,* 211.

While certain resonances exist between Yoder and Barth's views on a number of topics, in many ways Yoder's account of defectibility, grounded as it is in his account of "the fall," is at odds with both Barth and Wyschogrod's accounts as provided here. For Yoder, it is not quite right to say, with Barth, that "we [Christians] have both promise and fulfillment." For Yoder, neither the promise nor the fulfillment is ours to "have."[102] "The church's mission is not to share what she has," says Yoder, "but to proclaim a promise."[103] In this respect too, then, Yoder differs from Wyschogrod in that, to say that "a promise of God is like money in the bank" is too close to saying that God funds or credits his elect people's existence regardless of whether or not they are faithful.

While no doubt Wyschogrod would want to affirm the seriousness of Israel's sin, that sin never would be understood, for Wyschogrod, as the site of a total separation between Israel and God.[104] How could it be, as Israel, even unfaithful Israel, only exists because of God in the first place?[105] Apostasy or defectibility, in other words, never results in a real and total loss of the promise for Israel. While Yoder no doubt affirms God's relentless pursuit of the apostate, he would not want to say that the apostate "has" God's promise (and so God's fulfillment) in spite of their apostasy. How could the apostate have it since, strictly speaking, neither do the faithful? Wyschogrod's assertion of the fulfillment of the promise being "in the bank" sounds too much like exactly the kind of possession and guarantee that Yoder's restitutionist theology seeks to unmask by pointing out how history and reality are far too refractory and contingent for such guarantees.

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[102] Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, 283.
[103] Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, 283.
[104] Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise*, 224.
[105] Wyschogrod makes this point powerfully in his *The Body of Faith: God In The People Of Israel* (London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996).

Thus it might be, on account of a comparison with one modern Jew, that Yoder's hypothesis regarding a Jewish understanding of the refractoriness of history (which is supposed as also a Free Church vision), does not accord, at least not neatly, with a Jewish vision expressed by a contemporary Jew who is nonetheless as concerned as Yoder is about the sin of the people of God. Here it is helpful to ask whether or not Yoder's account of the restitutionist vision finally reduces the promise of God to a completely transcendental ideal that can never, strictly speaking, be spoken of as carried or possessed in any people in the world. Since, for Yoder, restitution has to it the supreme character of an event whose continuity in recurrence can only be experienced in events of newness and not captured or had in a particular tradition, the promise of God really does remain only a promise transcendent of a fleshly people.

This latter point has been made more explicit in a recent work by Tommy Givens when he notes that because "Yoder's theological historiography of the people Israel is typological...the identity of the people [Israel] *inheres in the particular political type*" and not in the people "constituted by God's faithfully holding Israelite faithfulness and unfaithfulness together with remembrance and forgiveness."[106] The "theological historiography" that Givens references here is Yoder's restitutionist perspective. The "political type" that Givens refers to is essentially the kenotic politics of Jesus which, as we saw above, was Yoder's answer to the problem of the fall; the radical renewal that could overcome, but only for a time, the dialectic of apostasy and faithfulness in history.

For Yoder, says Givens, the logical result of this historiography is that there is finally "no *authentic* people, no *real* promise."[107] It is difficult to imagine a "harder" form of (economic)

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[106] Tommy Givens, *We The People,* 99-100. Emphasis mine.
[107] Tommy Givens, *We The People,* 100. Emphasis mine.

supersessionism than this. Furthermore, this is extremely ironic as, for Yoder, the church is always and everywhere to be a visible people. Yet if Givens is right then the church Yoder describes really is, finally, invisible. Yoder himself seems to (unknowingly?) concede this point when he states that "[t]he future of the Church is sure in the sense that God is a God who gives life to the dead. Yet the future of *our* church, that of any given community, enjoys no security."[108] But if the church is only the visible church, then what church can there be but "our" church, stains and all? Put differently, if Israel is to be a people of the flesh, then what Israel can there be but the entirety of Israel as she has existed diversely throughout history?

Conclusion

Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic has now been critically engaged through two primary texts and evaluated in light of Soulen's account of supersessionism. His theology was shown to replay certain forms of economic supersessionism, not only in relation to the people Israel but also in relation to the church; to the people of God, that is, generally. Yoder's account of the first movement of the restitutionist vision, the norm of the incarnation, resists any strict supersessionism. However, when Yoder turns to address the "fall" and the "radical renewal" of the church, he begins to advocate the supersession of an apostate Israel/church with an ideal Israel/church. An imagined Jewish response by Wyschogrod has also been offered. This inquiry now turns to address the key question that will occupy the final two chapters: how can Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic be reformed so as to avoid his supersessionism? The next chapter lays the groundwork of an answer through an engagement with the Jewish philosopher Peter Ochs.

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[108] Yoder, "The Forms of A Possible Obedience," in *JCSR,* 123.

Chapter 3

Peter Ochs: Philosophy, Scripture, and Jewish Identity After Modernity

Introduction

Above, the claim was made that Yoder's supersessionism arises in significant measure out of his particular use of a restitutionist hermeneutic for evaluating history. While this was a necessary first step, on its own it is not enough to chart a path forward for reforming those elements of Yoder's theology in order to avoid economic (hard) forms of supersessionism that result particularly from his visions of the fall of the church and the church's radical renewal. In this chapter, I lay the foundations for reforming Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic through a further treatment of Ochs' critique of Yoder.

In order to adequately hear that critique, however, it is my conviction that Ochs' own hermeneutical convictions as a pragmatic philosopher must be adequately understood. In order to make Ochs' hermeneutical convictions heard I perform a broad reading of his scholarly corpus, including significant developments in his philosophical convictions. Ochs often highlights the particular development of his thought with explicit reference to the concrete contexts in which he wrote and developed as a thinker in almost every one of his publications. As will be shown below, this aspect to Ochs' writing is not an exercise in narcissism but is actually a key methodological requirement of Ochs' particular convictions as a "pragmatic" philosopher.[1]

While in the following treatment of Ochs I have done my best to integrate details of Ochs' biography in such a way as to avoid unnecessary details, the reader will nonetheless notice the biographical flavor with which Ochs will be treated. Again though, it should be stressed that

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[1] What exactly is all entailed in being a 'pragmatic' philosopher will become clear in the course of this chapter.

Ochs' biography is not *adiaphora* in the context of this inquiry but integral for showing how his own way of reasoning has been profoundly shaped by the various individuals and communities that Ochs has engaged over the years. Throughout, I draw Ochs' critiques of Yoder in *JCSR* back into focus in order to show the foundation of Ochs' criticisms. I end by arguing that Ochs' criticisms of Yoder, founded as they are on his hermeneutical convictions as a pragmatic philosopher, also suggest specific paths for repairing (Ochs' term) or reforming Yoder's theology in such a way as to make Yoderian theology without supersessionism possible.

Peter Ochs and Reparative Hermeneutics

If in the analysis above, Yoder could be identified as a "restitutionist" who was concerned to assist the whole church in providing a witness to Christ's Lordship in the world, how might Ochs be identified? Ochs and Yoder's works have distinct parallels in that they both are concerned with the reformation of their respective communities. Yoder was concerned with reforming, or better, restoring an original vision of Jesus to the church that, surprisingly, centered on Jesus' Jewish identity. As was shown above, an important part of restoring this vision, for Yoder, involved employing a restitutionist hermeneutic. As a Jew, however, Ochs has pursued his concern for the reformation of his Jewish community through his own distinct hermeneutic which is quite different from Yoder's. Examining Ochs' hermeneutic is thus necessary in order to adequately hear his concerns with Yoder's own alternative vision of the Jewish-Christian Schism.

From a broad reading of his work, it becomes clear that Ochs seeks to employ what might be called a "hermeneutics of repair," or "reparative hermeneutics." Elsewhere, Ochs has

described his hermeneutics as a kind of "reparative reasoning."[2] What such a hermeneutics encompasses will now be explored below with reference to what I see as three significant stages in Ochs' scholarly career. The first stage briefly signals Ochs' initial excitement with several enlightenment philosophers and their use of reason as a powerful tool for addressing the wounds of the world. The second stage details his subsequent move to return to traditional Jewish sources of wisdom for articulating an alternative form of reason after being disappointed with the project of enlightenment. The third stage signals, as it were, Ochs' attempt to reconcile reason and revelation, not through a simplistic synthesis, but through a complex understanding of the relational dynamic joining the two together. Throughout each of these stages, I draw in Ochs' criticisms of Yoder in *JCSR* in order to make better sense of them.

Aftermodern and Post-Critical Inquiry: In Search of Reparative Reason and Logic

Ochs notes that early in his scholarly career while he was studying anthropology and philosophy at Yale, he took "to embark upon the rationalist program of the Enlightenment: to become familiar with Descartes, Hegel and, above all, Kant, as if they were long-awaited prophets."[3] What Ochs hoped would be found in Kant was "rational clarity and coherence, and hope that all the world could be conceived and lived as a universal symphony and, at least on some level, in potential agreement."[4] Ochs has thus described his own scholarly passions in the past and, it should be noted, up to the present, as geared towards a desire for a way of "reasoning that would be a light of truth and a salve to all of humanity's wounds."[5]

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[2] Peter Ochs, "Reparative Reasoning: From Peirce's Pragmatism to Augustine's Scriptural Semiotic," *Modern Theology* 25, no.2 (2009): 187-215.
[3] Peter Ochs, "Another Enlightenment," *Christian Century*, January 25, 2011, 28.
[4] Ochs, "Another Enlightenment," 28.
[5] Ochs, "Another Enlightenment," 31.

At the heart of much of Ochs' scholarly corpus is the question of which practices of reasoning can adequately address human woundedness in its many manifestations. Put a little differently in terms that will later be shown to be crucial for Ochs, what practices of reasoning can repair the wounds of the world and what will these practices look like in the communities they are located? These questions, as will become clear below, have led Ochs into a rich variety of disciplinary investigations, spanning ethnographic, rabbinic, and philosophical studies.

Early engagement with the modern rationalist program epitomized in Descartes and Kant would do more, however, to make Ochs question the prophetic value of the aforementioned philosophers than it would to fulfill his youthful hopes in their potential. Rather than finding rational or logical resources for conducting humanity's universal symphony, Ochs notes that instead he found in Kant "the circularity of ego-centered self-reference."[6] What was missing in Kantian philosophy, for Ochs, was the recognition that Kant's own style of critical reasoning was indebted to particular developments within pre-existing traditions that made such critical reasoning possible.[7] By not admitting the traditioned quality of its own reasoned discourse, however, the *ratio* of Kantian philosophy tended to perpetuate a false sense of universal objectivity on the part of the reasoner.

This false sense of objectivity also carried with it, as a consequence, a colonial style of reasoning, inasmuch as rival forms of *ratio* that did not fit the modern paradigm would be deemed "subjective" and thus overtaken by "objectivist" forms of inquiry.[8] Ironically, then, the modern rationality that Ochs hoped would repair human woundedness only created a new site of

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[6] Ochs, "Another Enlightenment," 28.
[7] Peter Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 37, 40. (Hereafter, references will be to *PPLS*.)
[8] Peter Ochs, "Introduction," in *Textual Reasonings: Jewish Philosophy and Text Study at the end of the Twentieth Century,* ed. Peter Ochs and Nancy Levene (London: SCM Press, 2002), 5.

woundedness, only this time at the fundamental level of thought itself. If modern reason held the potential to address the wounds of humanity, but the shape of that reason itself was wounded or wounding, then the task of repairing the world only became that much more complicated. Diagnosis would now be needed, not only of the wounds created by overt acts of violence among particular communities, but also of the wounds created by logical and reason-based systems of thought that aimed, at least in theory, to seek a method for repairing the world through conceiving of it through a universal frame of reason.

Ochs' formative education in anthropology, in which he did ethnographic research in Micronesia, began to prepare him to diagnose the extent and seriousness of this deeply embedded wound within a variety of disciplinary contexts.[9] Ochs notes that in his work in Micronesia, he began to see that the assumptions of "modern western inquiry," which were the basis for certain forms of "ethnoscience" operative at the time, could not make sense of the "powerful forms of rationality" that were indigenous to the people of the Micronesian Islands.[10] The wound of modernity, for Ochs, presented itself most explicitly in its exclusionary tactics, prohibiting *a priori* forms of rationality unique to different cultures and peoples.

In an essay titled "The Liberal Arts Disease and Its Neo-Scholastic Cure," written years later, Ochs argued that the wound of modern reason had become inimically embedded in the modern phenomenon of liberal arts institutions to such an extent as to label it, in continuity with the other medical terminology he employs, a "disease." [11] Ochs claimed that the liberal arts

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[9] Peter Ochs, "Response: Reflections on Binarism," *Modern Theology* 24, no.3 (2008): 491. In his recently delivered Stanton Lectures titled "Scripture and Reason: The Philosophy of Biblical Language and Interpretation," Ochs returns to reflection on his work in Micronesia. (University of Cambridge Faculty of Divinity Stanton Lectures, University of Cambridge, March 2-11, 2015).
[10] Ochs, "Response: Reflections on Binarism," 491.
[11] Peter Ochs, "The Liberal Arts Disease and Its Neo-Scholastic Cure," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 65, no.4 (1982): 465-475.

disease was observable in the systemic willingness of liberal arts institutions to "join Kant in…compensat[ing] for excessive despair about the insufficiencies of traditional wisdom with excessive optimism about the potential of reason to repair those insufficiencies."[12]

According to Ochs, however, the potential of reason, while real, was in a Kantian framework, limited to its power to critique tradition, not to found its own tradition of repair or address particular wounds within previous traditions. Ochs came to believe that the critical reasoning typical of modernity should thus never be its own source of wisdom, but rather a tool employed within particular traditions of wisdom that seek to address particular wounds. What disillusioned Ochs about Kant was the way in which his *Critique of Pure Reason* had tended to mistake the critical reason that is necessary to keep "excessive traditionalism" in check, with the wisdom that is necessary to avoid the despair that comes from "excessive skepticism."[13]

With the above narrative account in mind, it is instructive to draw in one of the "burdens" Ochs discerns in Yoder's arguments in *JCSR*. In the introduction I summarized four forms of supersessionism that Ochs saw operative in Yoder's work on the Jewish Jesus. What is clear from reading Ochs' commentaries, however, is that these forms of supersessionism are only possible on the basis of a peculiar logic that animates them. This "logic" of supersessionism is what will, throughout this chapter, become increasingly evident.

Yoder, argues Ochs, demonstrates modern tendencies to "mistrust all inherited traditions" and as a corollary "to place excessive trust in immediate or direct disclosures of knowledge."[14] With reference to the above analysis on Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic, we might say that Yoder is most 'Kantian' when he uses restitutionism as a kind of critical reason that could

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[12] Ochs, "The Liberal Arts Disease," 469.
[13] Ochs, "The Liberal Arts Disease," 470.
[14] Yoder, *JCSR,* 39. Emphasis in original.

radically critique oppressive forms of tradition.[15] Since Yoder was so critical of traditions, the

knowledge that funded his understanding of radical renewal for the church ended up having to be

procured directly, without the mediation of a particular people or tradition. Yoder saw it, in a

sense, in reverse. The churches of the establishment were the ones that placed too much trust in

their tradition as a kind of "natural disclosure of knowledge" with no mediation of the Spirit. But

in a sense Ochs' question to Yoder is, if there is no trust in your tradition whatsoever, then where

do you even get a notion to make the critique you are making? Yoder might answer that he gets

it from scripture and the objective history of Christ, but Ochs would only reply that these are

realities that are always encountered *through* tradition, and never directly.

Ochs' dissatisfaction with Kant's tradition-critical approach led him to a point of

realization that if a salve to all of humanity's wounds was really to be found, it would be found

through a recovery of the reparative resources within diverse forms of traditioned wisdom. Thus,

while Ochs would agree that, historically, the development of modern rationalism was and

continues to be important within the world's wisdom traditions, it nevertheless could not and

should not be seen as the pinnacle of rational development, especially for those concerned with

the task of repairing human woundedness or suffering. Ochs' suspicion that the modern,

rationalist program failed at times to offer a sufficient account of its own contextual form of

rationality, and the adequate means of repairing or mending wounded humanity, led him to

consider more intentionally how other forms of rationality could offer "guidance and healing" to

communities in a broken world.[16] Ochs describes how this realization brought him to The

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[15] In a discussion of "Biblical Realism," Yoder even suggests that there is a 'Kantian' flavor to his approach to the scriptures. However, he notes that Biblical Realism, in its "completion of the Kantian revolution is at the same time its revocation." Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 131-132. Perhaps Ochs demonstrates how the *aufheben* of the Kantian revolution which Yoder thought Biblical Realism could achieve never quite made it.

[16] Ochs, "Another Enlightenment," 28. To be clear, Ochs did not feel as though the rationalist program was without

Jewish Theological Seminary of America, where he "submitted the *ego cogito* to retraditioning"

through study under the rabbinic scholar Max Kadushin.[17]

The Reason of the Rabbis: In Defense of 'Indigenous Rules for Repair/Reform'

Kadushin was a formative teacher for Ochs as it was under him that Ochs saw a way of

reasoning in engagement with traditional rabbinic texts that, while indebted to the critical

intelligence of modern rationalism typical of Kant, was unapologetically concerned with learning

primarily from the wisdom and reason "indigenous" to the traditional sources of Rabbinic

Judaism.[18] Ochs notes that Kadushin's work centered on addressing a key problem in modern

interpretations of the 'mind' of the rabbis. The problem in those interpretations was that they

required the reasoning of the rabbis to conform to a system or style of reasoning that was not

itself indigenous to rabbinic thought.[19] In light of this, Kadushin was concerned to show how

rabbinic theology did not set out to communicate its values through logical statements or

propositions that could be systematically defended vis-a-vis the criteria devised by modern

rationalism, but rather sought to communicate values through fundamental "value concepts."[20]

Explaining Kadushin's science of value concepts would require much more time and space than

is possible or pertinent at this point, but a basic definition, pulled from Ochs' engagement with

him in his essay "Max Kadushin as Rabbinic Pragmatist" will suffice for the present purpose of

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merit, rather, he narrates his move away from the rationalist program as the desire to be schooled in a "second instruction."

[17] For more details on the relationship between Ochs and Kadushin, see *Understanding the Rabbinic Mind: Essays on the Hermeneutic of Max Kadushin*, ed. Peter Ochs (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), xx-xxv.

[18] Ochs, *PPLS*, 3-4. Also see *Understanding the Rabbinic Mind,* 170. (Hereafter, references will be to *URM*.)

[19] In other places, Ochs identifies this 'modern' interpretive move as being itself yet another instance of the 'wound of modernity.' See, for example, "The Bible's Wounded Authority," in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*, ed. William P. Brown, 113-121 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

[20] Ochs, *URM,* 181.

this chapter.[21]

Ochs describes Kadushin's value concepts as concepts that "represent fundamental or irreducible elements in the valuational life of, in his case, the rabbinic community."[22] These fundamental or irreducible elements are not exposed on the surface of rabbinic statements but, according to Kadushin, lie "behind the statements."[23] While these fundamental elements lay behind rabbinic statements, however, they are alluded to by the "rabbinical authorities" by the names they give them such as, to cite one example, "*middat hadin* ("God's attribute of justice")."[24] In this way, according to Ochs, Kadushin attempted to provide a conceptual framework from which to identify the fundamental critical norms that give rabbinic Judaism its coherence, fundamental unity, and reformational capacity, while leaving open the question as to the definition of rabbinic norms as such definitions would be performative and context specific.[25] The problem with modern approaches to interpreting the mind of the rabbis, according to Kadushin, was that modern interpreters assumed that the critical norms advocated by the rabbis could be statically defined and so conceivable according to propositional systems of logic which would allow them to be abstracted from the variety of contexts in which such norms would be practiced and tested by rabbinic communities.

In opposition to this modern hermeneutic, Ochs notes that Kadushin "sought to identify rabbinic Judaism's *indigenous rules for reform*, which, he argued, constitute Judaism's "non-

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[21] The volume *Understanding the Rabbinic Mind* is the best secondary resource to use in order to gain a broad understanding of Kadushin's thought. See his chapter "Max Kadushin as Rabbinic Pragmatist," 165-196. Also, within that volume are several important Christian engagements with Kadushin's thought.
[22] Ochs, *URM,* 182.
[23] Ochs, *URM,* 181.
[24] Ochs, *URM,* 182.
[25] Ochs, *URM,* 182.

philosophic" (or non-a-prioristic) rationality."[26] The rationality of a particular collection of

rabbinic texts, described in this way, is irreducibly particular, containing rules for the repair or

reform of a particular community facing particular problems. The fact that these rules are

indigenous to a tradition is significant, as whatever rules for reform are discerned in any given

context they can never be presumed as universally valid forms of reform to be applied across

diverse communities in time and space. In this way, these indigenous rules cannot, strictly

speaking, rely on a universal form of reason akin to Cartesian or Kantian conceptions of reason

described above. As a consequence, Ochs calls Kadushin an "aftermodern" thinker. For, rather

than seeking a universal form of reason to address wounded humanity, a reason, that is, that

required a fundamental suspicion of inherited traditions as with Kant, Kadushin's concern was to

"identify, within the practices of classical rabbinic Judaism, behavioral norms pertinent to *his*

own community of Jewish practice,"[27] and use those norms in order to repair "problems in

contemporary Jewish practice."[28]

While Ochs notes that he appreciated what he saw as Kadushin's overall aftermodern

intentions, however, he is also critical of Kadushin where he feels Kadushin showed himself to

be an "incomplete aftermodernist."[29] According to Ochs, in spite of his intent to the contrary,

Kadushin let the social scientific tools that he used to analyze rabbinic Judaism shape the subject

matter to a degree too reminiscent of modern rationalist approaches.[30] In particular, the

organicist philosophy that Kadushin used for developing his account of value concepts,

according to Ochs, "retained the reductive sciences' dichotomies between analysis and analysand

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[26] Ochs, *PPLS,* 301. Emphasis mine.
[27] Ochs, *URM,* 175. Emphasis mine.
[28] Ochs, *PPLS*, 302.
[29] Ochs, *URM,* 184.
[30] Ochs, *URM,* 186-187.

and between objective and subjective inquiry…"[31] In other words, the incompleteness of Kadushin's aftermodern inquiry was due to a lack of hermeneutical transparency and humility typical of modern rationalism, as the rationalist tools of social science that Kadushin used for interpreting the rabbinic mind were finally used to mask his own particular subjective motivations as an interpreter of rabbinic Judaism in the interest of showing rabbinic Judaism's "coherence" and so legitimating "his judgments."[32] Here the insidious nature of certain uses of modern reason or logic is on display, as even when inquirers seek to combat its colonial reach or repair the wounds it has created it is still employed as the foundational thought-framework.

Here again it is instructive to draw in some of the "burdens" that Ochs discerns in Yoder. Before getting to more of the specific complaints that Ochs mentions it is helpful to draw some parallels between what Yoder sought to do in his writings through his use of the restitutionist perspective and what Kadushin sought to do in his science of value concepts. Remember that Kadushin's science of value concepts attempted to provide a conceptual framework from which to identify rabbinic Judaism's norms while leaving open the question as to the definition of those norms as such definitions would be performative and context specific. There is a striking parallel here with what Yoder sought to do in his own account of the first 'movement' of the restitutionist thought pattern. For Yoder, the "norm" of the church can be articulated through the value concept "Jesus is Lord." Since Jesus' Lordship, as a norm, implies a distinction between Jesus and the community called 'church' in any given age, what Jesus' Lordship means from age to age will always be a context specific question. Here Ochs would see Kadushin and Yoder at their aftermodern best.

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[31] Ochs, *URM,* 187.
[32] Ochs, *URM,* 187.

Where Ochs identifies Kadushin's error, however, is exactly where he identifies Yoder's error. Both start with the right intentions. In the first essay of *JCSR*, Ochs sees Yoder arguing rightly for recognition of the plurality of Jewish-Christian identity in the first century so as to problematize and challenge the view of a clean split between an edifice called "Judaism" and "Christianity" somewhere in the first few centuries CE. "There was," Yoder argues, "no such thing as normative Judaism" to break away from.[33] Rather, says Yoder, there were many competing visions and norms, all vying for recognition. Kadushin offered somewhat of a similar challenge to modern interpretations of rabbinic material that sought to conceive of that material as a univocal mind. The modern interpretations of the rabbinic mind sought inappropriately to capture the diversity and plurality of rabbinic thought into a conceptual edifice derived from a tradition and source (modernity) external to the tradition of the Rabbis.

Then, however, Kadushin and Yoder make an error of judgement. Kadushin goes on to recommend *his* science of value concepts as the right way to understand the rabbinic mind and Yoder goes on to recommend a "normative" vision of the Jewish Jesus and Jeremiac Judaism as the right vision of Judaism and Christianity.[34] Should Yoder be faulted for this? After all, Yoder claims that he is not making this claim as if he has total access to the truth. Rather, Yoder notes, Christians "*confess* a truth which has taken possession of us through no merit of our own."[35] And yet, while this confession would perhaps not be scandalous if addressed in such a way as to build up a particular *Christian* community, it becomes scandalous when the confession makes a possessive claim on behalf of all Christians *and* Jews. For Yoder, however, the Gospel is

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[33] Yoder, *JCSR,* 31.
[34] Ochs, "Commentary," in *JCSR,* 68.
[35] Yoder, *JCSR*, 142.

precisely the "scandal of particularity."[36] In suggesting that Jesus' particularity is something that can be expressed by a Christian in Jewish terms, however, Yoder seems to go beyond mere Christian confession.[37]

Ochs thus critiques Yoder, just as he did Kadushin, for not admitting the context specific case he himself is making and the reality that if the case were made in another time or place, it would have to be open to change in principle. Ochs diagnoses Yoder's error as demonstrative of a modern "tendency to uncompromising judgements, which tendency reinforces and is reinforced by a doctrine of fulfilled or messianic time: that in Jesus Christians have the potential to live in fulfilled time."[38] In other words, the use of the value concept "Jesus is Lord" in Yoder tends to resolve or suspend the hermeneutic task involved in the ongoing work of reformational activity within a given community rather than open it up. Yoder, in other words, seems to have too ready access to what radical renewal should always look like.

While it is impossible to engage in any form of reparative or reformative inquiry without interpretive tools, the difference between modern and aftermodern inquiry, for Ochs, is the degree to which the reasoner involved in the inquiry assumes or ascribes objectivity to the inquiry process as a whole or to the individual inquirer apart from her place within a community of interpreters. What Ochs calls the "wound of modernity" is not that it reasons towards making normative judgments, but precisely that it ascribes objectivity or universality to a particular form or procedural use of reasoning toward norms, without admitting the subjective origin or

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[36] Yoder, "The Free Church Syndrome," in *Within The Perfection Of Christ: Essays On Peace And The Nature Of The Church*, ed. Terry L. Brensinger and E. Morris Sider (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1990), 175.

[37] Thus, Ochs notes that "Yoder's foundationalism is not displayed in his adopting the Gospel narrative as the standard for human life on earth; belief in this narrative is not 'foundationalist,' because the narrative's meaning is neither directly intuited nor articulated in clear and distinct propositions. Yoder's foundationalism appears instead when he offers such propositions about Israel's life: that Jewish life in exile is a direct illustration of the meaning of Jesus's narrative." See Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 161.

[38] Yoder, *JCSR,* 40. Emphasis in original

performative context of the form or use of said reason. The corrective and promise of aftermodern forms of inquiry is, for Ochs, to be especially aware of the subjective or hermeneutical component of all dimensions of inquiry.

Where Ochs thus faults his teacher Kadushin and where he also faults Yoder is where he feels they abandon their own best insights regarding, on the one hand, the indigenous nature of the rabbinic value concepts (Kadushin), and on the other hand, what might be called "the contingency of the present" under the rule of God (Yoder). They do so by attempting to postulate their own social scientific method or restitutionist hermeneutic as providing "universally warranted readings" of Judaism rather than one way of performatively engaging Jewish texts among others in *their* own time and place.[39] According to Ochs, Kadushin sought to use an organicist model in order to avoid reductionistic or dichotomous judgements when interpreting rabbinic texts, he ironically re-employed the method of reduction and dichotomy by not subjecting his own method and motivations to the same scrutiny of context-specificity that he required of the rabbinic texts.[40] If Kadushin was right that rabbinic forms of reasoning held the potential to repair the wounds of his community, then the methods by which such reasoning would provide suggested cures or rules for repair would, according to Ochs, have to be chastened by the limits of the critical enterprise typical of modernity. Universally warranted readings of rabbinic Judaism, in other words, would have to be avoided as they only replayed modernity's exclusionary tactics by not allowing the texts of the rabbis to continue to speak in new ways and in new contexts.

Appreciative of Kadushin's method, in that it made great strides towards aftermodern

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[39] Ochs, *URM,* 187.
[40] Ochs, *URM,* 192, 196. Also see p.302 in *PPLS*. This analysis of Kadushin may sound familiar to those who have read Ochs' critical analysis of Yoder's writings on the Jewish-Christian schism and below some parallels will be drawn between the two analyses.

forms of inquiry, but feeling like something more was needed to make his method more consistent, Ochs returned to his *alma mater* and entered into Doctoral studies in Philosophy, a decision which his teacher Max Kadushin apparently did not take kindly.[41] Ochs notes that he found himself compelled, however, to "improve my understanding of the philosophical-hermeneutical instruments that might serve his [Kadushin's] theological project" through graduate work on the American Pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce.[42] What Ochs hoped Peirce would provide him with was "a logic for reading rabbinic texts" that could repair errant tendencies in the modern readings that Kadushin at once moved beyond and yet, in his own way, recapitulated.[43]

Philosophy Again: Reading Pragmatically as the Repair of Systems of Repair

Ochs would go on to write his PhD dissertation on Peirce.[44] In his magnum opus, *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture*, published eighteen years later, Ochs notes the particular interests that he brought with him to his study of Peirce. These interests serve as a helpful summary of much of Ochs' concerns already explored above, as well as the concerns that seem to continue to animate Ochs' scholarly endeavors to this day:

> I brought with me interests I imagine other readers may share: a concern to find reasonably precise ways of talking about imprecise things *without losing the meaning of the imprecision itself*; a belief that phenomena of everyday language, including the everyday practices of religion, are among those things; a love of critical reasoning but an acquired distrust of criticism that has lost sense of having a purpose; *disillusionment with 'modern' or Enlightenment attempts to make a metaphysics—and also a religion—out of*

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[41] Ochs, *URM,* xxv. Ochs describes it thus: "Kadushin slammed the door after me when I told him I planned to leave to do doctoral work in philosophy."

[42] Ochs, *URM, x*xv.

[43] Ochs, *PPLS,* 42.

[44] Ochs' dissertation on Peirce, supervised by John E. Smith, was titled "Charles Peirce's Metaphysical Conviction" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1980), and was the groundwork for many other essays and finally in his *PPLS*.

the rational critique of inherited traditions of knowledge and practice; a conviction that post-Enlightenment anti-rationalism—including romanticisms, emotivisms and a variety of totalizing ideologies of power, history, experience and so on—may prove, logically, to be the other side of the rationalist coin; *fascination with the irrevocable contextuality—* temporal, historical, linguistic, social, biological—*of rational judgments, but also with their persistent 'rationality'…*[45]

It was through his study of Peirce's pragmatic method in particular that Ochs found his interests directly stimulated and enriched. While even a basic summary of Peirce's pragmatism is itself beyond the scope of this inquiry (Ochs himself refers to Peirce's work as "labyrinthine"), Ochs' own use of the term will be the primary point of reference for what follows.[46] Ochs begins his study by defining Peirce's pragmatism as a "theory about how to correct inadequate--because *overly precise*--definitions of imprecise things."[47] To be sure, such a definition is itself quite vague, and appropriately so based on the particular concerns Ochs had. That being said, the definition takes on a greater degree of clarity when one keeps in mind Ochs' concerns about the modern rationalist program. Descartes and Kant, and their progeny, were too precise in their definitional judgments and as a consequence the systems of thought they developed had become the source of deeper wounds within many of the structures of society. Ochs saw Peirce's pragmatism as a helpful method by which to offer corrective or reparative reasonings precisely for this type of precision.[48]

Peirce's pragmatic reasoning developed through critical engagement with what Ochs calls the "Cartesian-Kantian tradition of epistemology."[49] As already indicated, Ochs himself had

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[45] Ochs, *PPLS,* 4. Emphasis mine. It should also be noted that Ochs further describes his motivation for studying Peirce as his "search for a logic for reading rabbinic texts…" (42).

[46] Ochs, *PPLS,* 3. In his essay "Assessing Peter Ochs through *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture*," *Modern Theology* 24, no.3 (2008): 459-467, David Lamberth has also emphasized the immense challenges brought to any reading of Peirce and so equally to Ochs' reading of Peirce.

[47] Ochs, *PPLS*, 4. Emphasis mine.

[48] Ochs, *PPLS*, 4-5.

[49] Ochs, *PPLS*, 20.

already engaged both Descartes and Kant with an expectation of their promise and with a subsequent sense of skepticism as to whether or not what their philosophies represented were viable methods for repairing wounded humanity.[50] According to Ochs, pragmatists see the Cartesian-Kantian tradition as representing a failed attempt at "a rationalistic method of problem solving."[51] This method failed since, although it wished to address particular problems within a tradition of practice, it assumed that it was itself a new tradition with no integral relation to the tradition(s) it sought to repair.[52] For the pragmatists, however, problems can only be addressed by way of inquiry that follows "basic rules from the tradition."[53] The result of the emphasis on the newness of the rationalistic method (itself a false newness) was to actually cease to offer adequate means of repair for particular problems in a given community. Peirce's pragmatic method takes its starting point to be the Cartesian-Kantian tradition and its "problems," outlined above, which he wished to repair.

Generally speaking, the aforementioned problem in the Cartesian-Kantian tradition can be further defined as a hermeneutical problem. Ochs finds Peirce helpful as a hermeneutical guide in his writings when he begins to unfold his semiotic theory of language. For Ochs, Peirce's theory of semiotics defines all inquiry as involving a relationship between a "sign, object, and interpretant."[54] Peirce's pragmatic maxim, found in the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:16, "Ye may know them by their fruits," demonstrates this relationship in that the verse

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[50] Ochs, *PPLS*, 20.
[51] Ochs, *PPLS*, 21.
[52] Ochs, *PPLS*, 21. Elsewhere, Ochs notes that the tradition that Descartes was seeking to repair (albeit without acknowledging it) was that of "scholastic science." See Ochs' article "Reparative Reasoning," 188.
[53] Ochs, *PPLS*, 21. Here, resonances with Kadushin's emphasis on the indigeneity of rules for reforming a given tradition become apparent.
[54] Ochs, *URM*, 190.

suggests that the "meaning of a sign is disclosed only with reference to its interpretant."[55] This is precisely, as was suggested above, what the Cartesian-Kantian tradition often claimed to avoid by "identify[ing] the meaning of a sign (for example, a conception, or a text) with its object, alone, which object is identified with some conception precisively abstracted from the sign."[56]

For Ochs, however, while Peirce's writings (especially his later writings) exemplify a corrective reading of the Cartesian-Kantian tradition, they also reenact the problems latent within the Cartesian-Kantian tradition. In light of this latter fact, and as a pragmatic reader of Peirce, Ochs describes his reading of Peirce as itself a "corrective performance *of* pragmatism."[57] He does so because, in a way analogous to Ochs' evaluation of Kadushin's "incomplete aftermodernism," Ochs finds Peirce to be, in his methodological inconsistency as a "pragmatic realist," operating with an "incomplete pragmatic theory."[58] In turn, in *PPLS*, Ochs identifies what he sees as inconsistencies in Peirce's pragmatic writings and posits his own repair of Peirce's writings on pragmatism for a particular community of Peirce scholars.[59]

Ochs helpfully describes the kind of pragmatic and corrective activity that he feels Peirce recommends (in spite of his own inconsistencies) and that Ochs himself wishes to perform, through analogy to the twofold medieval Jewish mode of interpreting texts through their *peshat* (plain-sense) and their *derash* (interpreted sense).[60] Ochs explains that the Rabbis usually approach a given text first by way of *peshat* but such readings move to *derash* when "something

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[55] Ochs, *PPLS*, 36.
[56] Ochs, *PPLS*, 36.
[57] Ochs, *PPLS*, 5. Emphasis in original.
[58] Ochs, *PPLS*, 62. Ochs explains the method of the pragmatic realist as consisting of what Peirce called "multiform argumentation." Put simply, multiform argumentation takes seriously, the community that is supposed in the argument, the reasonableness or reliability of the supposed community, and the "social foundation of our shared logic" which prohibits solitary reasoning. (60) Keeping in mind the brief elucidation of the problems of the Cartesian-Kantian tradition outlined above (particularly its claims to 'newness'), it should be clear how pragmatic realism would present a challenge to such the Cartesian-Kantian tradition.
[59] Ochs, *PPLS*, 6.
[60] Ochs, *PPLS*, 6.

burdensome in the plain sense stimulates them to do so: some apparent contradiction…or textual difficulty."[61] *Derash*, it should be apparent, only becomes necessary in the context of *particular* burdens, discerned by "a particular reader in a particular context."[62] What Ochs does in his own reading of Peirce is to begin with the plain-sense of Peirce's writings, and move to an interpreted sense of Peirce's writings when he finds that there are "burdens" or inconsistencies therein. [63] Ochs associates this corrective performance as a form of *derash* or, with reference to Peirce's method, with what he calls "pragmatic reading."[64]

While the finer details of Ochs' pragmatic reading of Peirce are not essential for the purposes of this inquiry, what is necessary is to provide a rough outline of the contours of pragmatic reading as Ochs understands it in his study of Peirce. Ochs notes that pragmatic reading includes three stages of interpretation. The first stage of interpretation is, within a given tradition, "to identify which errant practices…may serve as stimuli for the prototypical…reform."[65] In the Cartesian-Kantian tradition which Ochs is speaking from by way of his study of Peirce, one of the errant practices has already been indicated above. The errant practice which stimulates the prototypical Cartesian-Kantian reformer is visible in that, although the inquirer is involved in a form of reformational inquiry that arises out of an already pre-existent tradition, the inquirer claims to be doing otherwise (performing inquiry as if from a totally new tradition of practice).

The second stage of interpretation is "to identify the errant practices that may serve as

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[61] Ochs, *PPLS*, 6.
[62] Ochs, *PPLS*, 6.
[63] Ochs, *PPLS*, 7. Also important, for Ochs, is that his readers are to be aware that his reading of Peirce is itself a contextually specific reading, for particular readers of Peirce.
[64] Ochs, *PPLS*, 20ff.
[65] Ochs, *PPLS*, 39.

stimuli for a particular…author's *own* efforts to reform an antecedent tradition of practice."[66] In

the context of his study of Peirce, Ochs identifies Descartes' "intuitionism" as the errant practice

that stimulated Peirce's own reformative inquiry.[67] Finally, the third stage of interpretation is "to

identify the errant practices that may have stimulated both levels of *his/her* reform: first, the

attempt to reform behavioral problems and, then, the attempt to reform the…[given tradition's]

method of reform.[68] This third stage requires that "the pragmatist must apply to him-or herself

the same method of interpretation that was applied to the Cartesian-Kantian author."[69] Ochs feels

that Peirce does not complete this third stage. Peirce, according to Ochs, attempted to reform

Descartes intuitionism rightly through the method of pragmatic realism, and errantly by way of a

"conceptualist" method. While Peirce's pragmatic realism sought the repair of problems in

Descartes intuitionism with reference to the common suppositions of his own particular

community, Peirce later utilized a conceptualistic logic which sought to simply replace

Descartes' intuitionism with "an opposing doctrine."[70]

Here it is instructive to draw Ochs' criticisms of Yoder in again in an attempt to

contextualize them even more. In his commentary in *JCSR*, Ochs registers concerns over what he

sees as Yoder's "tendency to draw stark distinctions between true and false judgements and to

assume that what appears to be contrary of a true judgement must be a false judgement."[71] For

example, Jewish faithfulness in exile precludes Jewish faithfulness in the land. Ochs' criticisms

arise out of what one might assume is his own pragmatic reading of Yoder's restitutionist

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[66] Ochs, *PPLS*, 41. Emphasis in original.
[67] Ochs, *PPLS*, 51. Ochs summarizes Peirce's understanding of Descartes' intuitionism as the thesis that "our cognition must be grounded in some "absolutely inexplicable" cognition." (53)
[68] Ochs, *PPLS*, 41. Emphasis mine.
[69] Ochs, *PPLS*, 41.
[70] Ochs, *PPLS*, 63.
[71] Yoder, *JCSR,* 39-40. Emphasis in original.

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corrective (restitutionist hermeneutics here being a kind of attempted 'pragmatic' vision of

Christian history). While Ochs himself is not explicit about his critiques of Yoder being based

off this method of reading, he gives hints through use of the term "burdens" with reference to

elements of Yoder's writings. Ochs employs that same "burden" language in his pragmatic

reading of Peirce.[72] Thus, it is instructive to ask, with Ochs, what a pragmatic, and so reparative,

reading of Yoder might look like.

In the first stage of reading, one might say that in Yoder's writings he identifies the errant

practices of the church that serve as stimuli for the prototypical radical reform. These errant

practices are evident in the fact that the Magisterial Reformers sought to reform by way of

correcting errors in ecclesial content (doctrine, etc.) while failing to correct the errors in ecclesial

form (hierarchy, etc.). As a result, their reform/repair was ineffective. In the second stage, Yoder

then identifies errant practices that stimulate his own efforts of reform. These errant practices are

many, but they are summed up for Yoder under the banner of Constantinianism which, as was

shown above, Yoder believed to be just as much a problem in the modern world as in the fourth

century. What of the third stage of interpretation? Ochs argues that the third stage requires that

"the pragmatist must apply to him- or herself the same method of interpretation that was applied

to the [previous] author."[73] Does Yoder do this?

While it is true that Yoder identified the insidious nature of Constantinianism in "its

success in 'brainwashing' its adversaries, so that even when they react against it they do so in the

same terms," [74] nowhere does Yoder seem to self-consciously test his own reading according to

this judgement. Said differently, Yoder does not test his own interpretation against the norm of

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[72] Ochs, *PPLS*, 6.
[73] Ochs, *PPLS*, 41.
[74] Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical*, 107.

the incarnation so as to test whether or not he may have succumbed to his own "Constantinian temptations." Just as Peirce didn't complete this third stage, so too one might imagine that Ochs would argue that Yoder failed to complete it as well. This is so since, while Yoder sought to reform the Church rightly through recognizing errant practices of reform, he also did so errantly by way of a "conceptualist" account of the incarnation which failed to account for his own theological performance as one instance in a long line of an Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Instead of seeking the repair of problems in Constantinian Christianity through attention to the Jewishness of Jesus, Yoder sought to replace a false Constantinian church with a true restitutionist/Jewish church, a false body with a true body.

As one might already suspect, the problem with this "either-or," replacement approach is that it fails to see how a "false" church may not be totally false but distorted and in need of repair. In other words, the choice need not be between a true or false church but between reparative church practices and wounded church practices in need of their own repair. In his more recent *Another Reformation*, Ochs explicitly notes that the problem with hermeneutical models that are still captive to supersessionism is that they engender

> *a way of reading that confuses the practice of formation with that of reformation*, thereby reducing the church to some historically particular "way of life," and a way that no longer has available to it the capacity for radical criticism, repair, and reform. Such a church would no longer have available to it the capacity to read Scripture as the living Word of God.[75]

Based on what we've read above, it is reasonable to say that Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic would fit Ochs' description above. Where Yoder begins by recommending the thesis that the Jewish-Christian schism "did not have to be" (a reformative claim), he turned to recommend a "way of life" that, against his intentions, involves the wholesale supersessionism of significant

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[75] Ochs, *Another Reformation,* 62. Emphasis in the original.

traditions of Judaism and Christianity to pull it off (a formative claim). Ochs, on the other hand, writes as a Jew who has "worried that a doctrine of 'nonsupersessionism' might seem to leave Christianity too beholden to Judaism."[76] In other words, Ochs is concerned that Christians not empty themselves of the traditioned basis of their confession in an effort to reform Christianity because then they would be exchanging their tradition for a supposed universal ethic or way of life. Yoder's "it did not have to be," Ochs might suggest, ended up being construed, in certain moments, according to the logic of just such an exchange.

Having reviewed the three stages of interpretation in pragmatic reading, it is important to also point out that these stages end "with recommendations about how the pragmatist may repair the behavioral problems that underlie his or her entire inquiry and how, analogously, the…reform may also be repaired."[77] For Ochs, Peirce's pragmatism can be repaired through attention to his later "pragmaticist" writings which represent "a pragmatic reading and correction of his earlier pragmatism" and which, precisely in remaining vague and unfinished texts, present themselves as fruitful soil for future readers to complete the unfinished reform.[78]

In *JCSR*, Ochs has suggested that Yoder's radical reform could be repaired by future students of his work as they "continue the new order he introduced, and let go of the old one that he had failed to let go of himself."[79] How might this look? In this regard, Ochs has explicitly

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[76] Ochs, *Another Reformation,* 61fn23. In another respect, however, Yoder's 'nonsupersessionism' may still be not beholden enough to Judaism in terms of actually respecting the entirety of its tradition-forms. In this respect, someone like Daniel Boyarin is instructive to listen to as he all at once argues that Yoder "truly and successfully supersedes supersessionism," and yet is also concerned with the fact that Yoder "reads so many Jews somehow right out of Judaism." Daniel Boyarin, "Judaism as a Free Church," 12, 19. At issue here, then, is what "superseding supersessionism" results in. In effect, Ochs' point would be to say that by superseding supersessionism, you simply recapitulate the same problematic method.
[77] Ochs, *PPLS*, 41-42.
[78] Ochs, *PPLS*, 162, 181. Ochs notes that the term "pragmaticist" was used by Peirce, not so much as a term meant to denote a new method, but rather, a way of recovering his intentions for pragmatism from what he saw as misrepresentation in the works of other "pragmatists" who were contemporary with him. (161)
[79] Yoder, *JCSR*, 68, 120.

identified Chris Huebner's work on martyrs and his particular appropriation of Yoder's "peace epistemology" as a hopeful example of how the new order in Yoder's work might be continued.[80] In the final chapter of this inquiry, several other possible ways of repairing Yoder's restitutionist vision will also be offered.

For now, however, it is instructive to return to Ochs' scholarly trajectory in order to ask, what does his reading of Peirce have to do with his earlier search for a rabbinic logic? Surprisingly, Ochs describes his pragmatic reading of Peirce as his recommendation of Peirce's pragmatism to communities of what Ochs calls Christian or rabbinic pragmatists or "scriptural pragmatists."[81] The final section of *PPLS* is addressed to this latter group of "scriptural pragmatists" whom Ochs feels can learn much from Peirce's pragmatism. Just as Peirce understood pragmatism to be a "corrective" or "reparative" activity in response to a particular problem in some particular community (in his case, the Cartesian-Kantian school of inquiry represented by the texts of Descartes and Kant), so too, Ochs suggests, might scriptural pragmatists understand scripture as

> the prototypical narrative of how certain musers, often labeled "prophets," were stimulated by their observations of human suffering *to undertake corrective-and-diagrammatic inquiries* that terminated in the musers' dialogues with God. God was known to them as the One who created the universe, who would repair, or redeem, the suffering in it, and who usually ended these dialogues by ordering the musers to tell their communities to care for their sufferers. To provide this care, the communities were often required to change their everyday practices, *to change the methods they used to evaluate these repairs*, and to change the ways they learned about these methods. These communities of philosophers read this Scripture as an authoritative graph of God's creative, redemptive, and instructive activities...[82]

Here it becomes evident that Ochs sees repair within the context now, not only of

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[80] Ochs, *The Free Church and Israel's Covenant,* 36-37. See Chris Huebner, *A Precarious Peace*.
[81] Ochs, *PPLS*, 247, 286-325.
[82] Ochs, *PPLS*, 287-288. Emphasis mine.

pragmatic inquiry as defined by engagement with modern enlightenment thinkers like Descartes and Kant, but also within the practices of contemporary traditions that read scripture as the norm of the community. Thus, while much more could be said in regard to Ochs' reading of Peirce in *PPLS* and how it relates to his own understanding of a scriptural pragmatism,[83] more instructive for this latter purpose, will be to attend to how Ochs' contextually specific involvement with rabbinic and Christian theorists demonstrates his understanding of scriptural pragmatism in action. From this, a further understanding of where Ochs differs with Yoder in terms of methods for reading scripture will become apparent.

Bodies of Logic: Reasoning Relationally in Philosophy and Theology

Above, Ochs was cited stating that in his early years he sought a way of reasoning that would be a salve to wounded humanity. The failure of modern rationalism as a total, universalizable system of reason, in conjunction with the reformation of reasoning that Ochs experienced in his studies in rabbinics under Kadushin and then through studies of Peirce's pragmatism, led him to rethink the possible power and scope of differing modes or practices of reasoning "indigenous" to diverse human communities. Further, it led Ochs to consider how those differing modes of reasoning might, in certain contexts, relate and overlap with those of others. As a Jew, Ochs began to see within his own community one particular area of overlap occurring between Jews that practiced "Jewish philosophy and theology" with the express intent

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[83] For example, what is not clear above is the role of what Ochs calls an "authoritative graph" in Peirce. Space does not permit a full discussion of the significance of graphing in Ochs' interpretation of Peirce. For readers interested in gaining a greater understanding of this complex dimension to Ochs' thought, see *PPLS*, 195-228, 248-249.

of probing difficult questions of the time in light of a diverse range of Jewish literature.[84] Eventually, a community developed around these overlapping practices and came to be known as a society of "Textual Reasoners."[85]

"Textual Reasoners," as described by Ochs, are characterized by their tendency "both to affirm and to reform the practices of both traditional Judaism and modern rationality" through examining each form of practice "in the terms of" the other (never, however, privileging one over the other), for the purpose of achieving the goals of *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world.[86] Assumed, in other words, in this mode of examination is that neither the practices of traditional Judaism on the one hand or modern rationality on the other are sufficient to reach the goal of the repair of the world. Repair, as a polyvalent concept that refers ultimately to a divine activity, thus functions within varieties of reason or logic, at once modern and at once rabbinic.

When reading Ochs, it quickly becomes evident that many of the characteristics of *TR* accord nicely with the pragmatic method that Ochs appreciates in Peirce. This is the case as, a key dimension to Peirce's pragmatic method is that it introduces "the category of 'reparative claims' as distinct from the more recognizable category of constative claims and…urge[s] a specific set of reparative claims about the modern logic of inquiry."[87] Within these terms and in light of some of the biographical details surveyed above, Ochs himself will be shown as consistently concerned with offering reparative claims about the modern logic of inquiry,

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[84] Peter Ochs, *Textual Reasonings*, 2. (Hereafter, references will be to *TR*.) Ochs lists some of the "difficult questions" as follows: "What form of Jewish religion remains possible after the Shoah? How do the Jewish survivors of this latest Destruction now understand the covenant between God and the people Israel? What place does the people Israel now have in the Western civilization that housed them, for better or for worse, over 2000 years, that may have brought them to the brink of extinction, but that now appears to house them still? What relation should Judaism and the people Israel have to the Christianity that has shaped so much of Western civilization?" (TR, 3)
[85] Ochs, *TR*, 3.
[86] Ochs, *TR*, 5.
[87] Ochs, "Reparative Reasoning From Peirce's Pragmatism to Augustine's Scriptural Semiotic," 190.

specifically through his own practice of "resituating reasoning within rabbinic practices of text-reading."[88] That being said, bearing in mind that *TR* takes it as axiomatic that both critical reasoning and traditional Judaism should be performed together as mutually enriching practices, Ochs most certainly also works to "bring rationality into the study of traditional rabbinic…," and it should also be noted Christian, "…sources."[89]

While *TR* represents one area where Ochs and others began to see differing forms of reasoning overlap in generative ways, namely those of philosophy and theology, a similar area of overlap also became significant in Ochs' own engagements with Jewish and Christian text scholars while on leave to do postdoctoral work.[90] It was during that time that seeds were planted that would later produce a collection of essays edited by Ochs called, *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation.* As stated in the introduction to the volume, postcritical scriptural interpretation, a phrase that Ochs holds rather loosely, "refers to an emergent tendency among Jewish and Christian text scholars and theologians to give rabbinic and ecclesial traditions of interpretation both the benefit of the doubt and the benefit of doubt…"[91] Here a correspondence is evident between how *TR* was described above as a method of reasoning with texts that employed multiple logics (traditional and modern).

The "benefit of *the* doubt" that these scholars give to traditions of interpretation is that such traditions have their own indigenous logics by which they dictate "rules of action" along

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[88] Ochs, *TR*, 6. See, for example, his chapter "Talmudic scholarship as textual reasoning: Halivni's pragmatic historiography" in the same volume (120-143).

[89] Ochs, *TR*, 6. Near the end of the volume, George Lindbeck, David Ford, and Daniel Hardy all offer Christian reflections on the implications of Textual Reasoning for Christian theology.

[90] Peter Ochs, ed., *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 5. For another account of the influence of these Jewish and Christian scholars, see Ochs' *Another Reformation,* 21. (Hereafter, references will be to *RSJC*.)

[91] Ochs, *RSJC*, 3.

with "rules for interpreting the traditions themselves, including the tradition's primary texts of scriptures and of scriptural commentary."[92] In other words, modern critical rationalities need not, as Ochs had already learned from Kadushin, provide the fundamental rules to evaluate scripture or scriptural traditions. That being said, post-critical scholars also give traditional texts the "benefit of *doubt*" in that critical rationality can have a clarifying function when purged of its own overconfidence and when employed in appropriate measure.[93] Ochs goes on to list three stages of postcritical scriptural interpretation as a reparative or reformative activity which in some ways parallel the three stages of interpretation that Ochs described in his pragmatic reading of Peirce. First, the postcritical scriptural interpreter is to

> *identify mediating or modern interpreters as interpreters who reduce biblical interpretation to a dyadic semiotic by assimilating the mediating or modern interpretant of a biblical text to its meaning or referent.*"[94] [Second, the interpreter is to] "*identify the consequences of a dyadic scriptural semiotic.*"[95] [Finally, third, the interpreter] "*is to locate signs of a triadic semiotic within the biblical text itself, in particular as it is read in the primordial communities of rabbinic or of Christian interpreters.*[96]

A brief elucidation of these stages is necessary with reference to the analysis offered above. The mediating or modern interpreters in stage one are distinctly modern in that they perform inquiry on the basis of the assumption that the process of interpretation involves only a subject and object (a dyad). In the context of modern scriptural interpretation, the subject is the scriptures (or a particular text) and the object is the meaning of the scriptures. Modern scriptural interpretation is identifiable in the way in which it often assumes that the meaning (object) of the

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[92] Ochs, *RSJC*, 1. Incidentally, Stanley Hauerwas has briefly suggested that Yoder is himself a "textual reasoner," precisely for this reason. See Stanley Hauerwas and Chris K. Huebner, "History, Theory, And Anabaptism," in *The Wisdom Of The Cross: Essays In Honor Of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 396.
[93] Ochs, *RSJC*, 1, 40.
[94] Ochs, *RSJC*, 13. Emphasis in original.
[95] Ochs, *RSJC*, 13. Emphasis in original.
[96] Ochs, *RSJC*, 13-14. Emphasis in original. Here Ochs' description is highly indebted to the work of Hans Frei. See especially his *The Eclipse Of The Biblical Narrative: A Study In Eighteenth And Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (London: Yale University Press, 1974).

text in question (subject) corresponds "intrinsically" to the logical framework of the interpreter, without acknowledgment of the interpreter's role.[97] Here is being replayed at once what Ochs saw as Kadushin's "incomplete after-modern" tendencies, Peirce's "incomplete pragmatic theory," and Yoder's conceptualist or foundationalist tendencies. Texts of scripture need not be reduced to a timeless meaning through a "publicly self-authenticating foundation of logic."[98]

Of course Yoder himself claimed to reject this hermeneutic approach. He claimed that the reduction of scripture to timeless, propositional meanings was typical of "High Protestant Scholasticism," not the Free Church's (and his own) biblical realist and restitutionist hermeneutic.[99] Indeed, Yoder even argued that "the Jesus of history [is] mediated by real history (the traditioning process of the community)…"[100] Elsewhere, in an essay commenting on the theology of Karl Barth, Yoder also notes positively that for Barth "because the meaning of Jesus was known within the categories of ordinary historical reality, he must be re-known, re-presented, on through time in a celebratory recounting that ties the particularity of his history to the particularity of ours…."[101] Then he continues, however, stating that such re-presenting must occur "without trusting to the 'bridge' of some mediating generalizations about the nature of things."[102] The question for Barth and Yoder, however is, while just any mediating generalizations should indeed not be trusted outright, are the traditions of the church to be thought of as examples of such generalizations? Building on Barth, Yoder's application of the restitutionist hermeneutic to the Free Church vision and its Jewish prototype seeks after "the real

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[97] Ochs, *RSJC*, 13.
[98] Ochs, *PPLS,* 63.
[99] Yoder, "The Authority of the Canon," in *To Hear the Word,* 88.
[100] Yoder, "The Authority of the Canon," in *To Hear the Word,* 95.
[101] Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology Is Social Ethics: Gospel Ethics Versus The Wider Wisdom," in *The Royal Priesthood,* 110.
[102] Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology Is Social Ethics, 110.

Jesus" without the bridge of tradition and at times Yoder seems to suggest that the meaning (object) of Jesus (subject) corresponds intrinsically to the community, as it is resurrected in newness and not through the dynamic and relational context in which the community finds itself over time.[103]

In the second stage of postcritical scriptural interpretation, the interpreter is to ask what consequences the (above) modern approach has. The first consequence being that a dyadic semiotic undermines the living and relational component of the text. The text becomes locked into "dichotomizations…between text and ostensive referent; between the text's reference and its performative…force."[104] Here again, in Ochs' terms we might say that Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic seeks to discover, behind the diverse texts that witness to Jesus, the Jeremian core (ostensive reference) that captures the meaning of the textual witness to Jesus. By so capturing that meaning, however, there is a third component missing.

The third stage is to, against the grain of a dyadic semiotic, seek to discover a "*triadic semiotic*," a process of inquiry that involves not only subject and object, but also an interpretant, *within* the scriptures.[105] The interpretant within the scriptures can be described in various ways. In the context of Ochs' engagement with Kadushin, the interpretant was Kadushin himself. Had Kadushin recognized himself as the 'missing' third component to his inquiry, he might have avoided error.[106] In many ways, the same could be said with regards to Ochs' treatment of Yoder and his judgement that Yoder finally offers an unintended supersessionism.

In his study of Peirce, Ochs describes the interpretant as also the symbol, the agent which serves a given community's "deep-seated rules of knowledge" by the way in which, on the one

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[103] Yoder, "The Authority of the Canon," in *To Hear the Word,* 95; *JCSR,* 139. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 161.
[104] Ochs, *RSJC*, 13.
[105] Ochs, *RSJC*, 13-14.
[106] Ochs, *URM,* 187.

hand, it "*influences* the way its interpretant attributes meaning to it," and on the other hand, in

the way it also "grants the interpreter some freedom to transform the way in which that meaning

will be retransmitted."[107] Post-critical scripture interpreters seek to repair the practice of

scripture reading by attending to these symbols apart from errant modern logics.[108] Here Ochs

appeals again to the distinction between plain-sense and interpreted sense readings. Where texts

offer no particular "burdens" in the plain-sense, then modern logics are often, according to Ochs,

helpful. When, however, there are burdens in the text, this is precisely a situation where the text

in question might be functioning symbolically and where it thus requires the interpreter to seek

out its interpreted sense. If errant modern logics are utilized in this search, unsatisfactory results

will follow as the text will be stripped of its life or agency in relation to the interpretive

community. Post-critical scriptural interpreters seek to repair or reform modern logics so that

they can be made useful for interpreted sense readings.[109]

Postcritical scriptural interpretation is thus presented, by Ochs, as a type or performance

of triadic semiotics, as these diverse Jewish and Christian interpreters of scripture all find

themselves, in the context of their postcritical inquiry, hearing the complaints of scripture in the

face of errant practices of reading.[110] In this sense, repair functions for Ochs here in instances

where triadic semiotics are embraced and pursued philosophically (in *TR* and elsewhere) and

theologically (in rabbinic and Christian text scholars) for the purposes of repairing practices

within communities of textual reasoners. Ochs notes that through the process of his postdoctoral

work and his participation in a Yale seminar led by Moshe Greenberg on biblical interpretation,

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[107] Ochs, *RSJC*, 40. Emphasis mine. Here, perhaps, Yoder's account of the significance of the role of scribes in the community resonates with Ochs' understanding of the role of the "symbol" in the interpretive community.

[108] For another important and more recent article making a post-critical argument, see Bradley H. McLean, "The Rationality of Early Christian Discourse," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 30, no.1 (2015): 43-65.

[109] Ochs, *RSJC*, 40.

[110] Ochs, *RSJC*, 40.

he developed relationships with those he identifies as postcritical scripture interpreters, principle among them being Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, and through them others who were engaged in similar types of inquiry.[111]

Related to his encounter with Frei and Lindbeck, and through a series of other events, Ochs also struck up a friendship with Stanley Hauerwas and in 1996 became co-editor with Hauerwas for the book series called Radical Traditions: Theology in a Postcritical Key.[112] It is within the context of his friendship with Hauerwas and his work with him on the Radical Traditions series that Ochs' engagements with Yoder and through those engagements, with many other Mennonite interlocutors, became a reality.[113] How to further build on Yoder's work in light of Ochs' own work and his critical response to Mennonites will be the subject of the next chapter. For now, a brief summary of what has been covered in the above survey of Ochs' work is necessary.

Thus far we have seen that reparative hermeneutics functions in Ochs' work in a number of ways. In relation to his early study of philosophy, repair functioned as a hoped for mode of addressing human suffering by way of the universal reach of the powers and precision of modern reason. Recognizing the limits of modern reason and the deeply embedded wounds that it created, Ochs learned to situate and perform the task of repair within the indigenous logics of rabbinic Judaism. Under Kadushin, Ochs saw that the writings of the rabbis, rather than offering propositional claims about universal reality, offered a framework of normative values (identified but not pre-defined) through which, in every new age, communities of Jewish practice could

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[111] Ochs, *RSJC*, 5.

[112] In his memoir, *Hannah's Child* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), Stanley Hauerwas notes that his "first encounter" with Peter Ochs was "at the University of Dayton during a conference on narrative." (250)

[113] Ochs' formal engagements with Mennonites have occurred through conferences at Eastern Mennonite University in 2007 and Canadian Mennonite University in 2009. He has also been a teacher to a number of Mennonite students.

discern rules for reforming their own communities. Recognizing Kadushin's relative failure, however, to avoid finally presenting his understanding of the rabbis in propositional logic, Ochs learned to further understand repair as a pragmatic activity that always takes place within the "irrevocable contextuality" of a given community and its practices.

Further, Peirce's pragmatism taught Ochs to think of rabbinic logic within the framework of scriptural pragmatism, seeing the reading and interpretation of scripture itself as the context within which communities discern rules of reform or repair that can address particular instances of suffering in the world. Until the Lord returns, the people of God are called to this task of repair, and that means that this people will never see a single work of God as the end-point of their inevitable hermeneutic task, but will be called to continual encounters with the works of God in the earthy tasks of the people among whom God has made the divine presence known.

Conclusion

In light of the above analysis of Ochs, including his criticisms of Yoder, what paths might be made available for repairing Yoder's theology in such a way as to make Yoderian theology without supersessionism possible? As an interpreter of Yoder and as a member of the Mennonite tradition of which Yoder was also a part, I see two necessary paths (although I'm sure more are available). First, Ochs' emphasis on the importance of disclosing the performative context of reformative inquiry and specifically the particularity of the interpreter involved in the inquiry suggests that if Yoder's theology is to be reformed, the particular context and tradition that informed his work will need to be adequately disclosed. Ochs' own analysis has begun to do this, but more analysis is required. Furthermore, having exposed Yoder's inquiry to the criterion of context specificity, a pragmatic reading of Yoder will have to be offered that completes the

third stage which, as was noted above, Yoder never completed. That third stage, it will be

remembered, involved submitting the reformative activity of a particular agent of reform (Yoder)

to the scrutiny of their own criteria for reform (for Yoder, the incarnation). Second, Ochs'

emphasis on an alternative logic for interpreting scripture suggests that if Yoder's theology is to

be reformed, alternatives to the way he read scripture and, I suggest, also tradition, will need to

be provided. Taking up these two tasks in the final chapter, I now conclude this inquiry.

Chapter 4

Repairing Restitutionist Hermeneutics

Restitutionist Hermeneutics: An Ancient or Modern Vision?

In chapter two above, it was argued that Yoder's restitutionist vision could not finally be identified as a Jewish vision. Yoder's restitutionist vision required too radical a commitment to the notion of a fall that led him to imagine that those chosen by God to be representatives of the reign of God could so reject that divine choice that they would be totally cut off and replaced by a new people that obediently accepted that call, if only for a short time. A question that was not addressed at that point, but that can now be addressed is if the restitutionist hermeneutic is not a Jewish vision, is it a Christian vision? A Mennonite vision? Or is it something else? In order to explore an answer to this question, I bring in two critiques of Yoder that further expose the peculiar logic operative in restitutionist hermeneutics.

The first critique, from Dennis Martin, identifies Yoder's restitutionist perspective as a distinctly modern vision. In the last chapter, an analysis of Ochs' own hermeneutic, along with his criticisms of Yoder, demonstrated that Ochs too believed that Yoder's supersessionist tendencies exhibited a logic that was distinctly 'modern' in character. Martin's critiques will help reinforce and nuance Ochs' critiques. The second critique comes from Gerald Schlabach whose own reading of Yoder is particularly helpful for two reasons. First, Schlabach helps further disclose the performative context of Yoder's use of the restitutionist hermeneutic. Second, by further disclosing that context Schlabach effectively completes the third stage of a pragmatic inquiry that Yoder never completed for his own reformative efforts. He does so by showing how

Yoder's own theology might be seen repeating forms of Constantinianism. In concluding this inquiry, I then turn to imagine an alternate account of Yoder's thesis, "it did not have to be," which seeks to build on the positive dimensions of Yoder's thesis while also incorporating some of the more suggestive trajectories in recent Christian theologies of Judaism and some of Ochs' key methodological convictions.

Dennis Martin on Restitutionism, Mennonites, and Modernity

Regardless of Yoder's attempts at carefully nuancing the restitutionist perspective on Christian history, critics still voiced their concerns. In his 1987 essay, "Nothing New Under the Sun: Mennonites and History," Dennis Martin sought to expose what he believed to be a critical hindrance to Mennonite communities being at once able to sustain themselves past the first generation and adequately locate their Christian identity within the greater traditions of the one holy, catholic Church. That hindrance, according to Martin, was the presence of the restitutionist motif in Mennonite discourse, which Martin noted had remained the one constant in a tradition that had otherwise developed and changed its views on any number of important topics related to Christian self-understanding.[1]

For Martin, the restitutionist motif represents all of those things that Yoder sought to distance himself from in "Anabaptism and History:" a rejection of history, an Edenic idealization of the first two centuries of Christian history, and the almost exclusive focus on (and perhaps even worship of) the new, the novel, and therefore supposedly superior manifestation of the spirit

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[1] Dennis D. Martin, "Nothing New Under the Sun: Mennonites and History," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 5, no.1 (1987): 2.

in the radically renewed church of the present and future.[2] Martin's critique of restitutionist perspectives generally and of Yoder's use in particular, is expressed concretely by him through the cipher of "modernity." Martin argues that, rather than being a Judeo-Christian view of history that serves as the critical basis for reform in any given age (as Yoder argued), the restitutionist critique of tradition is a distinctly *modern* or enlightenment outlook on history that is suspicious of and rejects all tradition. By buying into the modern myth of progress, Martin claims that restitutionist readings of history inevitably encourage the church to disavow her roots in the very tradition that made it possible in the first place. In this way, Martin's account of the ills of restitutionism as typified by the loss of its "roots" has striking similarities to Yoder's own account of the ills of Constantinianism but with vastly different conclusions.

In an essay which contains many resonances with "Anabaptism and History," Yoder argued that the shift in church/world relations represented by Constantine had disastrous effects on the church's witness.[3] Martin's critique in "Nothing New Under the Sun," is best read as an alternate account of the "shift" Yoder described as "Constantinian" and is thus most helpful in understanding what makes Martin suspicious of the restitutionist perspective.[4] In his well-known essay "Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," Yoder outlined seven key shifts that

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[2] Martin, "Nothing New," 2.

[3] See his "Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," in PK, 135-147.

[4] It is interesting to note that whatever differences may finally exist between Yoder and Martin's positions materially, formally, they both claim to be pursuing an understanding of these two terms, restitution and reformation, in service to an ecumenical pursuit. The only added nuance to this formal similarity, however, is that Martin's ecumenical interests are articulated primarily in the form of an admonition to Mennonites, as he wishes to argue for the importance of "re-evaluating our relationship with mainstream heirs to the Christendom tradition (Evangelicalism, Calvinism, Catholicism, Anglicanism) and for cooperation with these mainstream groups in an apocalyptic age that challenges both the mainstream and the sectarian understandings of Christian teaching." Martin, "Nothing New Under The Sun," 2. Yoder's audience was admittedly broader. While it no doubt included Mennonites, Yoder believed his account of the restitutionist thought pattern had a broad ecumenical usefulness in holding all churches to a high standard.

occurred in the "new era" of Christianity represented by Constantine.[5] For the present

engagement with Martin's critiques, two of the shifts that Yoder mentioned are of particular

importance, namely the shift in "ecclesiology" and "eschatology."[6]

First, according to Yoder, with Constantine's ascendency the church became

"everybody" and so ecclesiology took on a whole new definition.[7] No longer did it take

conviction to be a Christian because the law of the land made you one. However, "everybody"

did not act in ways that were identifiably Christian and so Augustine crafted the notion of the

invisible church to account for how there could be a small number of true Christians among a

much larger group of those falsely claiming to be so.[8] As a result of all of this, claimed Yoder,

the church became more readily identifiable with the specialized hierarchy rather than with the

people who, through persecution and minority status, demonstrated true commitment to their

Christian convictions.[9]

Linked to this first shift, Yoder claimed that Constantine's legitimization of the religion

of Christianity with state support and power produced a second shift, this time with respect to the

original apostolic understanding of Christ's Lordship. Where the original eschatology which

funded this original Christian confession was characterized by belief in God's hidden providence

amidst persecution and the belief of God's future return, Constantine now became the visible

manifestation of God's providence in securing the victory of the church over the world in the

present. Yoder claims that these shifts, among others, effectively amount to a description of the

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[5] Yoder, "Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," in *PK*, 135.
[6] Yoder, *PK,* 135-138.
[7] Yoder, *PK*, 136.
[8] The claim that it was Augustine that created the notion of the invisible church has been disputed. In fact, there are those that claim that Augustine would not have supported the concept of the invisible church. See Patrick Barnes, *The Non-Orthodox: The Orthodox Teaching On Those Outside Of The Church* (Salisbury, MA: Regina Orthodox Press, 1999), 46.
[9] Yoder, *PK,* 136.

fallen system the church finds itself in and to which "efforts to renew Christian thought regarding power and society remain the captives."[10]

Here one can see Yoder unpacking again his understanding of specific dimensions to the fall of the church with references to the history of the third and fourth centuries. The way back to faithfulness in light of this fall, notes Yoder, is "to repent of the whole 'where it's at style' [of Constantinianism] and to begin again with *kenosis*."[11] Kenosis here is, as can be intimated from the above analysis of Yoder's treatment of the restitutionist thought pattern, the radical renewal which restitutionists desire. In emptying themselves of all attachment to the "where it's at" style of what had come before, those seeking radical renewal can be most adequately prepared to be filled with the newness of the Spirit.

At a key point in his critique of Yoder and his use of the restitutionist motif in Mennonite theology, Martin notes that "[n]early all the characteristics of 'Constantinianism' that Yoder adduces are more recognizable in the modern world than in the ancient or medieval world (dualism, establishment power, utilitarianism)."[12] Yoder too argued that what he called "Constantinianism" had modern parallels. In fact, Yoder argued that as the original shift faced challenges external to it, it only dug in its heels all the more, producing new forms of Constantinianism (Yoder lists four) such that it became increasingly difficult to "be concretely critical" of the Church's past.[13] Where Yoder finds the Constantinian shift throughout much of Christian history but tends to concentrate mostly on the earlier centuries, Martin locates the problematics that Yoder identifies with Constantinianism primarily in modernity. Martin's

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[10] Yoder, *PK,* 144.
[11] Yoder, *PK,* 145.
[12] Martin, "Nothing New," 8.
[13] Yoder, *PK,* 144.

purpose in "Nothing New Under The Sun" is to demonstrate how Yoder's primary enemy should be modernity, not the "Catholic period of church history."[14]

Turning the strategy and logic Yoder uses in his essay "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics" against him, Martin argues that the restitutionist motif in Mennonite theology effects a shift in previous definitions of "church" (ecclesiology) and the church's understanding of the relation between "past" and "future" (eschatology) that were original to the Judaic-Christian heritage.[15] First, Martin argues that the church was understood by pre-modern Christians to be a unity of body *and* spirit and as such, it was understood that the church's essence would always be embodied, regardless of the "limits, tragedy, and ambiguity in history."[16] While failure and deep corruption no doubt occur within that body, the church will always be defined by the embodied tradition that carries it and never apart from it in a "recoverable body of facts" or in a purely spiritual essence that manifests itself periodically.[17]

In fact, Martin claims that it is inconsistent for the restitutionist to argue at once that the church must be embodied and visible and then to turn against that visible body for the purposes of rejecting it as false. Following from this, Martin argues that reform will never be achieved through a rejection of history since a rejection of history, even with its examples of corruption, implies a rejection of the church's embodied spirit. Against Menno Simons' attempt to secure the church's continuity through the Spirit, Martin wonders

> how 'spiritual continuity' counted for much in the face of Menno's vicious polemics denying any spiritual validity to the existing 'old church.' To split the institutional from the spiritual is, in effect, to deny continuity if one begins with the sacramental, embodied, institutional theology of Catholicism and its pre-modern context. Only if one is already committed to a modern and Reformation

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[14] Martin, "Nothing New," 2.
[15] Martin, "Nothing New," 4, 12.
[16] Martin, "Nothing New," 13.
[17] Martin, "Nothing New," 5.

perspective can a dualistic distinction between spiritual and institutional be maintained.[18]

Since continuity must always be embodied, for Martin, eschatology also had a meaning for pre-moderns that was different than that prescribed by modernity. Modernity, says Martin, can only conceive of eschatology in linear terms as an imminent event or a future state. For the pre-moderns, however, "future" was itself thought of as of a piece with the present and the past. Eschatology was immanent and thus did not refer to a future time but a timefulness that encompasses the past, present, and future.[19] As a result of this different view of eschatology, the reform of the church was not understood as occurring through new beginnings constructed out of an ideal past, but through "re-presentations" of the newness that is already constitutive of "creation, incarnation, [and] salvation."[20]

Does Martin's critique serve to confirm suspicions regarding Yoder's supersessionism? Here it is pertinent to question to what extent Yoder privileges the present and future over against a robust account of the past. Against Martin's critique that restitutionism privileges the new, Yoder would likely want to say that the new that deserves privilege is the newness of Jesus' sovereignty which manifests itself in every age, not the newness of human innovation and knowledge as described in modern myths of progress.[21]

But again, Yoder's views on the fall, the real possibility and indeed actuality of apostasy, coupled with what amounts to his generally shallow treatments of the depths of Christian history, would seem to suggest that this newness can never take root over the long haul of history but must always manifest itself in an almost episodic way. As a result Yoder seems to promote a

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[18] Martin, "Nothing New," 4.
[19] Martin, "Nothing New," 4-5.
[20] Martin, "Nothing New," 12.
[21] See Yoder, *Theology of Mission*, 279. Yoder notes, "*Mission* is the salvation history word; *progress* is the world-history word." Emphasis in the original.

kind of "ecclesial actualism," an occurrence of the church-form in history which, because it is only an occurrence, in effect prevents any guarantee of institutional continuity.[22] Thus, in any given age, an instance of economic supersessionism may be necessary to move beyond what had, at one time, been a faithful form of the church, in order to replace it with a new church-form.

While Yoder is no doubt right to be critical of any total guarantee that institutions can be reliable vehicles of continuity, Martin is also right to wonder why such suspicion requires the rejection of institutions as nonetheless necessary vehicles of continuity. One might say that what Yoder's account of the restitutionist thought pattern fails to adequately account for is Christian faithfulness in history.[23] The more difficult work, the work which Yoder did not choose to take up in those contexts, would have been to refuse rejecting previous history by the category of Constantinianism or the fall or any other movement in history and instead examine "each institution and each period of history for its own sake."[24]

Gerald Schlabach on Yoder and Continuity

In a much more recent essay, Gerald Schlabach brings similar critiques to bear on Yoder, although not through direct concentration on Yoder's restitutionist perspective. In the same vein

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[22] The term "ecclesial actualism" here is meant to reflect a creative (which is *not* to say positive) extension of what is often referred to in studies of Karl Barth's theology as his 'actualist' understanding of God into an actualist ecclesiology. For Barth, God's actualism is the basis for understanding his relation to us as always having an 'event' like quality in which God is always acting "from the outside." For an interpretation of Barth's actualism, see George Hunsinger, *How To Read Karl Barth: The Shape Of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 30-32. For a particular instance where the phrase "ecclesial actualism" is used in theological literature, see Paul Avis, *Paths To Unity: Explorations In Ecumenical Method* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), 118.

[23] For what it's worth, in my books, what Yoder has done in critiquing the church as fallen amounts to an odd kind of reversal of supersessionism in Karl Barth. Where in Barth, Israel could only be conceived as obstinate and sinful and the church as obedient, in Yoder the church seems to be conceived as sinful and only those restored by faith the obedient.

[24] Martin, "Nothing New," 19.

as Martin, Schlabach situates the theology of Yoder and the Concern Group[25] he was a part of in terms of a strategy for "how Mennonites might relate faithfully to the modern world."[26] Schlabach locates Yoder's theology, both in its genesis and development, as characterized by a strategy he attributes to the Concern Group in general, namely, their "heroic pneumatology." Schlabach describes heroic pneumatology as a call for "a radical movement of the Spirit to renew the church."[27] Much as Martin locates a shift in accounts of ecclesiology in modernity which separate spirit and body, Schalbach argues that the "stated ecclesiology of the Concern Group was almost entirely 'pneumatic' from the beginning, understanding the church to be dependent on the renewing work of the Holy Spirit and sometimes, it seemed, on little if anything else."[28]

Yoder's theology, notes Schlabach, no doubt develops in such a way that he nuances his earlier writings to "state the role of tradition in relatively positive ways."[29] In spite of this, Schlabach argues that Yoder's Concern Group roots continue to be "at the bedrock of Yoder's thought throughout his career."[30] Schlabach thus notes a tension in Yoder's writings between, on the one hand, wanting to affirm the incarnation as an event in which God really does appear in a particular body and, on the other hand, wanting to protect that body from being carried forward in any "line of transmission that might proceed unbroken even for a while."[31] Schlabach argues

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[25] The concern group consisted of seven men who wrote eighteen pamphlets addressing their concerns regarding, the relationship between church and state, the "lukewarm quality of individual discipleship and Christian community life" and the rise of denominationalism in the North American church. See Vogt, *The Roots of Concern*, vii-ix.
[26] Gerald Schlabach, "Continuity And Sacrament, Or Not: Hauerwas, Yoder, And Their Deep Difference," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 27, no.2 (2007): 174.
[27] Schlabach, "Continuity And Sacrament, Or Not," 179.
[28] Schlabach, "Continuity And Sacrament, Or Not," 181.
[29] Schlabach, "Continuity And Sacrament, Or Not," 182.
[30] Schlabach, "Continuity And Sacrament, Or Not," 182.
[31] Schlabach, "Continuity And Sacrament, Or Not," 182.

that Yoder sees the incarnation of Christ as something that one can "replicate" or that can recur in time through the power of the Spirit, but not re-present.[32]

Schlabach wonders, however, to what extent the pneumatic character of Yoder's theology, while at once funding a robust critical imagination needed to address a lack in Christian moral imagination, might have finally restricted his imagination from perceiving other forms of "moral imperatives."[33] Schlabach lists several such moral imperatives like "continuity," "stability," and "sustainability."[34] It should be clear from Yoder's account in "Anabaptism and History" why these are not his imperatives. If the fall of the church is precisely its attempt to sustain itself or create its own center of stability, then these same imperatives cannot be seen as morally worthy of the church.

Schlabach detects an irony in Yoder's rejection of these imperatives, however. While rejecting the imperatives listed above, Yoder and the Concern Group were nonetheless sustained by their roots in the Mennonite tradition, whose attention to the importance of these imperatives made possible their work. Thus, Schlabach notes, the imperatives for stability were achieved "in spite of" Yoder and the Concern Movement's efforts at radical church renewal which sought to reject those same imperatives.[35] Yoder and the Concern Group stood, after all, "in greater continuity than they themselves acknowledged with the Mennonite communities that formed them."[36] The logical consequence of Schlabach's point here is that, if Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic produces any form of supersessionism, such as economic, then it does so only

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[32] Schlabach, "Continuity And Sacrament, Or Not," 182. In Yoder's essay, "The Authority of the Canon," he uses the term "*resurrect*" in place of recur. "We can learn much from skeptical historiography, but the one thing it is not equipped to resurrect for us is the real history." "The Authority of the Canon," in *To Hear the Word,* 95.
[33] Schlabach, "Continuity And Sacrament, Or Not," 183.
[34] Schlabach, "Continuity And Sacrament, Or Not," 183.
[35] Schlabach, "Continuity And Sacrament, Or Not," 188.
[36] Schlabach, "Continuity And Sacrament, Or Not," 193.

discursively and not in reality. For in reality, Yoder has in fact superseded or replaced nothing or no one within his own tradition. This is not to totally vindicate Yoder, only to demonstrate how the church's indigenous capacity for reform is stronger than one particular group's potentially destructive ideas.

The attempt to secure the "true" body of Christ from any particular appropriation of it was, after all, a failed attempt. The Mennonite body of which the Concern Group was a part, located as it was in particular times and spaces, was defined by a long tradition that had come before it and not solely by an unmediated spirit working through the scriptures. The Concern Group was Christian and radical then, not because it was able to throw off the fetters of tradition in order to recover a more basic vision of discipleship, available only in discontinuity with what had come before, but rather because what or more precisely who had come before them had provided the roots from which their radical critique was made possible.

This critical reading of Yoder is profound and substantial, not because it calls into question the overall corrective function that Yoder's theology (or that of the Concern Group) played and continues to play in the broad streams of Christian theology, but because it situates that corrective squarely within his particular performance of theology, within his belonging to a people who have not only been established periodically as church but have, through the creation of structures and institutions, tapped into the same resources of creation that the church has utilized since its earliest days. Schlabach thus completes the third stage of pragmatic inquiry discussed in the analysis of Ochs above. Schlabach critiques Yoder and the Concern Group's "pneumatic" emphasis for how it replays a kind of Constantinian rejection of accountability to the incarnation. Only in Schlabach's case, the incarnation that Yoder failed to consistently be accountable to was the incarnation of Christ in time in the body of the people called the church.

Revising Re-visions, Reforming Restitutionism

This inquiry approaches its end. But significant work remains. Yoder's restitutionist hermeneutic has been shown to produce forms of economic supersessionism, particularly as it endorses the view of a fall and a form of radical renewal which seems to preclude any indigenous and continuous operation of reform within the pre-existing people of Israel or the church. Now, however, further questions present themselves. Acknowledging the modern context in which Yoder wrote and which informed his restitutionist perspective in negative ways, can Yoder's otherwise helpful insights regarding Jesus' important teachings of the sovereignty of God and the summons to obedience be upheld while avoiding economic supersessionism?

Ochs offers one helpful answer to this question: yes, in its best moments Yoder's critical hermeneutic of the restitution of the church can help the church remember its place in a contingent and fallible reality; a reality that is at times filled with ambiguity, vagueness, and in which God's reign operates at times in what seems to be arbitrary ways. The fact that Jesus was incarnate in such a reality should be enough to help Christians remember this. As we also saw, however, for Yoder Jesus is the reign of God in the flesh and this meant for him that by seeing Jesus Christians could have privileged access to "the grain of the universe."[37]

As we saw with Soulen and Ochs, this privilege, while not totally unwarranted as a Christian confession, at times led to Yoder making statements that engendered economic supersessionism. Yoder's initial insight that the Jewish-Christian schism "did not have to be" was appropriate when it attested to what Yoder described as the meaning of the incarnation, namely, that God sovereignly chooses to call people on no account of their own and for purposes

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[37] John Howard Yoder, *The War Of The Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence And Peacemaking*, eds. Glen Stassen, Mark Thiessen Nation, Matt Hamsher (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 179.

that they do not initially set the agenda for. Yoder's "it did not have to be" became

supersessionist, however, when he located the schism as an instance of the "fall" of the church

and in turn offered a clear statement regarding how Jews and Christians could "be" together in

the event of radical renewal. This renewal, however, seemed to read "so many Jews somehow

right out of Judaism," and Christians right out of the Church.[38]

Repairing/reforming what Yoder identified as the last two movements of the restitutionist

thought pattern, the fall and radical renewal, could thus be one way to carry forward Yoder's

work without reproducing the errors he made. Such a repair/reform would necessitate

transforming the harsh logic of a fall into the more scriptural logic of sin or unfaithfulness. The

scriptures know of no epic fall or, for that matter, an ongoing series of falls within history. If the

language of a fall is to be retained, it would have to be qualified so as to demonstrate how such a

fall is not a state of being cut off, whether such a cut is self-inflicted or inflicted from on high.

Similarly, the language of radical renewal would have to be transformed into the language of

forgiveness and repentance through time. God's reign does not only disclose radical moments of

falling away and being radically renewed. Rather, God's reign is disclosed in the slow movement

of history in which disciples are called to "regard the patience of our Lord as salvation" (2 Peter

3:15).

How might such repair/reforms in the logic of fall/radical renewal impact Yoder's

provocative thesis? In drawing this inquiry to a close, I take these repaired/reformed views on the

fall and radical renewal to heart in order to provide a sketchy alternative account to Yoder's

central thesis in *JCSR*, "it did not have to be." By doing so, I hope to recommend this as one

tentative and potential way that Mennonite communities today might carry forward Yoder's

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[38] Daniel Boyarin, "Judaism as a Free Church," 19.

insights in *JCSR* in a way that avoids the supersessionist tendencies which Yoder himself failed

to avoid.

Repairing The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited:
"It Did Not Have To Be, But It Happened"

In *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, Yoder began by laying out several

assumptions that he saw at work in the Jewish-Christian dialogue of his day which he felt needed

to be challenged.[39] The "standard account," as Yoder called it, basically asserted that the "mutual

exclusiveness" of Judaism and Christianity as they came to be defined by the end of the third

century, was "inevitable" from the beginning.[40] Against this, Yoder argued that the split "did not

have to be."[41] As we already saw, Yoder argued this on the basis of what amounts to generally

well-received assertions regarding the plurality of Jewish identity in the time of Jesus (there was

no one normative Judaism) and Jesus' own positive relationship to the law as one who

"confirmed" it rather than freed people from it. Yoder also suggested that Paul's own mission to

the Gentiles was a distinctly *Jewish* mission to the Gentiles.

As we also saw, however, the way in which Yoder made these arguments, specifically in

his use of the restitutionist hermeneutic, was not immune from its own forms of supersessionism.

How might Yoder's well-received correctives be carried forward and the problematic dimensions

left behind in revisiting the Jewish-Christian schism? A collection of essays arising out of a

conference on "Jews and Christians: People of God" in 2001, contains hopeful signs of an

imagination that could address questions like these.[42] One of the essays included therein is

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[39] Yoder, "What Has To Change In The Jewish-Christian Dialogue And Why," in *JCSR*, 30-38.
[40] Yoder, *JCSR*, 31.
[41] Yoder, "It Did Not Have To Be," in *JCSR*, 43-66.
[42] Carl Braaten & Robert Jenson, eds., *Jews and Christians: People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

written by the Lutheran theologian Robert Jenson, a regular contributor to Jewish-Christian dialogue in North America and around the world. Jenson's article makes a number of constructive suggestions to which I will appeal in the following few pages.

The first comment that deserves attention is one that Jenson made in an earlier publication, the second volume of his *Systematic Theology*.[43] There Jenson builds on the work of the Catholic Alfred Loisy to suggest that, according to the Gospel of Luke, "the church is…an eschatological *detour*."[44] For Jenson, this detour is recognizable due to the fact that, after Jesus' departure to the right hand of the Father, the Kingdom did not come in fullness. This detour then points, as a rule, to the fact that "the church is neither a realization of the new age nor an item of the old age. She is precisely an event *within the event* of the new age's advent."[45] What is the nature of this event? To be sure a key aspect to this event is that the Gentiles are gathered into Israel in some way. But history reveals that something else happens as a result of this event. Over time, the "lineage of Abraham and Sarah [from which Jesus descended] vanishes into a congregation of gentiles…"[46] How should Christians interpret the reality of the church in light of this reality?

For Yoder, loss of Jewish identity within the church represents a fall from a more normative state and therefore the renewal of the church involves a renewed relationship to the Jews. Jenson, in a sense, agrees when he claims that, as far as the church was concerned, the schism should not have happened either. Jenson's conclusion, however, regarding the fact of the schism, is radically different from Yoder's. Where Yoder offers the suggestion that "it did not have to be," Jenson notes that because the fulfillment has not yet come, both the church and the

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[43] Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Works Of God*, Vol.2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[44] Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Works Of God*, 170-171.
[45] Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Works Of God*, 171.
[46] Jenson, "Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism," in *Jews and Christians*, 13.

synagogue might understand their identities under the rubric of "detour," signifying that neither the church nor Judaism expected what actually occurred in those first few centuries and that both await future fulfillment of the promises they were uniquely given. What is the nature of this detour, for Jenson? The detour is, for Jenson, a providentially ordered reality in which Jews and Christians are called by the one God to different paths. This reality, which is a result of schism, is a reality that God, the church must confess, has chosen.[47]

How does Jenson arrive at such a conclusion? Would not Yoder object that such a reading of the schism fails to take full account of the tragic shift and the apostasy that occurred when the church lost its Jewish vision and received a Constantinian vision instead? Perhaps, but for Jenson to claim that this shift is in fact a divinely ordered occurrence is not to endorse a natural theology whereby whatever happens in history must be providentially ordered. Rather, it is to read empathetically the New Testament witness in order to notice how, from the very beginning, before the church was apparently co-opted by the state, the early church had begun dividing at the seams. Jenson appeals to the clash of Paul and Peter at Antioch as the prototypical example here.[48] Table-fellowship between Jews and Gentiles was bound to cause severe disagreements and, eventually, open the door to schism. Somehow, God had unthinkably called the church into being and gave it a task that would not accord well with many Jews.

In arguing against standard accounts of the schism, however, Yoder suggested that historians would do well in their discipline to avoid interpreting the story according to a logic of "causation," and instead seek to "honour the dignity and drama of their struggle."[49] Jenson

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[47] Jenson, "Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism," 8.
[48] Jenson, "Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism," 9.
[49] Yoder, *JCSR,* 44.

wonders, though, "was this vision [Paul's vision of table-fellowship] an actual possibility?"[50]

Was Paul's vision of Jew and Gentile together, in other words, the *one right* vision for the people

of God after Christ? This type of wondering might be seen, in Yoderian terms, as already giving

up on the dignity and drama of the early Jewish-Christian struggle; it would assume, in other

words, that by virtue of Paul's vision of table-fellowship, the schism had to be.

While Jenson's wondering surely sets him apart from Yoder here, the key difference

between Jenson and Yoder really arises once it becomes clear what Jenson reads into the schism,

namely, that God wants "to have a people identified *by descent* from Abraham and Sarah."[51]

Yoder too may have agreed with such a statement, but would have understood the meaning of

"identified by descent" more according to the passing on of the calling of Abraham and Sarah,

and not the particular *flesh* of Abraham and Sarah. For Yoder,

> You cannot get to Abraham by going back. Abraham's entire life was one of leaving
> security behind and going forward to a promise. That is the very meaning of faith or
> faithfulness…You can't get to Moses either by going back. Moses was looking forward,
> away from Egypt into the desert, off the banks into the bed of the sea, away from Sinai
> into the desert again. He was looking ahead to a land he would never get to enter…The
> fathers will not be saved by more careful reading of history...If there is one thing we have
> learned in the struggles of the last decades, it should be that one cannot *preserve* a
> heritage, if that heritage be one that is devoted to the praise of God and the following of
> Jesus. The very fences which are meant to defend the heritage stifle it. Only if the grain
> of wheat dies will its fertility be renewed in its offspring. Only when it springs forth in a
> new creative synthesis, where the past has proven the power to take the present up into
> itself and be renewed, can the past survive at all.[52]

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[50] Jenson, "Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism," 9.
[51] Jenson, "Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism," 9. Emphasis mine.
[52] Yoder, "Turn, Turn," in *He Came Preaching Peace*, 141-142.

The church is, for Yoder, the "new creative synthesis" that God, in Jesus Christ, made possible for the salvation of the world. This church's heritage is precisely a "renunciation of the claim to govern history," including one's own place within that history.[53]

For Jenson, however, "the church as it is will not provide" for the kind of heritage that Jews of today continue to understand the Old Testament witness to Abraham and Sarah to speak of. For Yoder, the schism did not have to be because Christianity was originally a Jewish vision and as such was already plural and diverse. But, for Jenson, there was an element to Jewish life that was not plural and that was that the Jews were called the people of God on the basis of their elected flesh, established through God's decision and thus on no account of the choice of any particular Jew. In the church, however, once the gentiles are welcomed in with open arms, suddenly this normative element to Jewish identity is, mysteriously, threatened and must providentially be protected. Thus, Jenson proposes that "God wills the Judaism of Torah-obedience as that which alone can and does hold the lineage of Abraham and Sarah together during the time of detour."[54] For Jenson assumes that, in the detour that became Judaism, Israel is still called according to the flesh. Their flesh matters, not in a general sense, but in its particularity and for this reason, Jews cannot, strictly speaking, believe that "you cannot get back to Abraham by going back."

Jenson is well aware that such claims are not traditional Christian claims and that, for that reason, they must be grounded "christologically" if they are going to be well received.[55] This can be done, for Jenson, precisely because of Jesus' flesh as embodied Word and Torah. "The Word who has come in the flesh," says Jenson, "belongs to the lineage of Abraham and Sarah, and this

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[53] Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus,* 236.
[54] Jenson, "Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism," 9.
[55] Jenson, "Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism," 11.

fact belongs to his identity, to what traditional Christology calls the 'one hypostasis' of the Word who is Jesus."[56] The church, as it is today, is not descended from Abraham and Sarah according to the flesh, and yet its risen and ascended Lord is. "Going forward to a promise" is only possible when it is believed that God has been made available to the world in some substantial way. If the God of the enfleshed Jew Jesus Christ is to be made available, however, it must be made so, for Jenson, "in the form of the church *and* an identifiable community of Abraham and Sarah's descendants."[57] For these and other reasons, Jenson argues that the church might discern that God wills this *dual detour* in the time before the fulfillment of Judaism and Christianity's eschatological hopes.

Conclusion

In concluding, it is instructive to bring Ochs back into this conversation in order to ask in what way Jenson's approach might be received by him as a corrective to Yoder's approach.[58] In 2009, Peter Ochs was invited to deliver the J.J. Thiessen lectures at Canadian Mennonite University. Prior to his second lecture, Ochs began with a prayer that, with respect to our brief treatment of Jenson above, is worth quoting at length:

> *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*

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[56] Jenson, "Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism," 12-13.
[57] Jenson, "Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism," 13.
[58] Ochs has taken up analyses of Jenson's theology on a number of occasions, two of which are worth mentioning here. See his "A Jewish Reading Of Trinity, Time And The Church: A Response To The Theology Of Robert W. Jenson," *Modern Theology* 19, no.3 (2003): 419-427 and his chapter length treatment of Jenson, "Robert W. Jenson: The God Of Israel And The Fruits Of Trinitarian Theology," in *Another Reformation*, 63-91.

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.[59]

Here Ochs seeks to be true to his reparative hermeneutic in his reading of the schism. He reads the history of the Jewish-Christian schism, not as a sign of a fall, but as a sign that there is indeed a "unity of [divine] identity" in which Jews and Christians have a place in spite of their difference and division. One can thus accept Yoder's thesis that "it did not have to be" in the sense that it may not have been, while also looking back at the schism and confessing, in the words of Ochs, that "you may have divided us by your Will."

This way of putting the matter seeks to recommend a corrective to the burdens that Ochs discerns in Yoder in that it positively acknowledges Yoder's reading of the schism while offering a vague suggestion as to "who we want to be together" as Jews and Christians in dialogue in a world where two thousand years later we are very different peoples. Nonetheless, in our difference, the Church and Israel are still people who take up service to the name of the God of Israel, praying that the name of God would indeed be one.[60] The vagueness of this suggestion is necessary precisely because the end of the age has not yet come. For Ochs, the pursuit of Jewish-Christian unity is thus a potentially good task for Jews and Christians today, but how that unity is pursued must not ever be decided once and for all for that would mean the end of the age had arrived. In the meantime, the unity that Jews and Christians can share will always be a "unity in difference."[61] Perhaps had he lived long enough to engage Ochs in dialogue, Yoder too might have agreed, claiming that, from a Christian perspective, the unity of Jews and Christians at this stage of history is simply "hidden in Christ."[62]

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[59] Ochs, *The Free Church and Israel's Covenant,* 24. Emphasis in the original.
[60] Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited,* 62.
[61] Ochs, *The Free Church And Israel's Covenant,* 45.
[62] Yoder, "The Nature of the Unity We Seek," 223.

For Ochs, the most helpful example of one potential way that this unity in difference may be visible in communities of Jews and Christians today is in the practice of "scriptural reasoning." Scriptural reasoning consists of gatherings of Jews, Christians, and Muslims (the Abrahamic religions) around selected texts from each of their traditions. Those gathered sit together, reading the text, and allow unexpected insights to come through the process of study, only discovering later "what kinds of study might tend to nurture…'unity-in-difference.'"[63] While in a number of places throughout Ochs' writings he goes into much more technical depth in describing this practice, at its most basic Ochs describes it as "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."[64]

Of course one of the most crucial dynamics to this practice is that it forms individuals who belong to particular communities of faith. Scriptural reasoning thus has immediate implications, not only for those so bold enough to sit down together for long periods of text study, but also for communities that look to their scriptures as authoritative for discerning faithfulness in the present. This is important to point out and Ochs makes a special mention of the fact that the first gatherings of *SR* occurred, not because of an attempt at designing a new mode of interfaith peacemaking, but because of a confluence of individuals who were invested in their respective traditions and who were mutually concerned with the stifling ways in which scripture was being read in their communities.[65] The goal of *SR* was, in a sense, to allow the text

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[63] Ochs, *The Free Church And Israel's Covenant,* 59.
[64] Ochs, *The Free Church And Israel's Covenant*, 59. In my own academic context at the University of Waterloo, I have become a part of a Jewish-Christian text study group that takes up exactly this task. I am often surprised and wonder at the kinds of insights and discoveries that come out of the *process* of engaging each other's texts.
[65] Ochs, *The Free Church And Israel's Covenant*, 58-59.

to speak apart from any desire to use it as "denomination-defined set of doctrines."[66] Mennonites today would do well to take up this task as I fear that too often Mennonite distinctives regarding the centrality of the peace witness have become just such a "denomination-defined doctrine" that may predetermine how the community reads the text in advance of the task of reading it. Yoder too was at times a critic of this type of reading. That being said, Yoder's own theology demonstrates an attempt to think so consistently about "seeing Jesus" through an ethical lens, that it is no wonder that many Mennonite communities today see Yoder as the foundational figure for establishing the theological basis of the Mennonite church's peace witness. As we saw above, however, this is problematic because it closes down the meaning of the text too soon. If Christ really is to be the "Christ of Scripture," notes Ochs, then he will be one who is "read and interpreted in community and, thus, vaguely."[67]

Might Free Church traditions of the Christian church locate their own convictions regarding the importance of scripture as an entryway into practices of scriptural reasoning like the ones Ochs describes above? Having read Ochs' critiques of Yoder's own use of scripture for his thesis regarding the Jewish-Christian schism, it becomes apparent that, for the Mennonite community, engaging in such practices will only produce fruit if restitutionist hermeneutics operative within such communities are repaired. Then, practices of scriptural reasoning will, for Mennonites, involve a slow and unpredictable process of establishing, where appropriate, relationships with Jews in which individuals trust each other to read each other's scriptures under the conviction that the scriptures so shared become signs of God's oneness amidst our division.

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[66] Ochs, *The Free Church And Israel's Covenant*, 58.
[67] Ochs, *Another Reformation,* 163.

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