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FOREWORD

This issue is redacted at another time of terrible loss in Israel, the bus bombing and terrorist attacks of February 22. Included among the

murdered, Matthew Eisenfeld z"l and Sarah Duker z"l were known to many members of this Network: Matthew, a rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary, scholar, poet, spokesperson for peace; Sarah, graduate student in science at the Hebrew University, scholar, poet, spokesperson for peace. "For those do I weep, My ears stream tears, Comfort has left me, None can restore My spirit, My children are desolate."

We do not yet know what contributions, if any, postmodern Jewish study may make to the understanding of Jewish political life or of Israel's place in the world. Are the Network's practices of dialogue, commentary, and relational thinking pertinent to the study of Israel's relations to others and to itself? In the midst of this most recent moment of tragedy, we have no ready responses. We wait for members of the Network to begin to speak to these concerns and to call the Network to its appropriate responsibilities with respect to them.

The two main sections of this issue have particular and unanticipated pertinence for this sad time. Our ongoing section on Talmud examines rabbinic views on martyrdom as an act of sanctifying the Divine Name, the theme of last summer's Postmodern Talmud Institute at Princeton. A new section on "Postcritical Christian Philosophy and Judaism" brings to light a more hopeful side of the people Israel's relations to other peoples: the work of Christian theologians whose work as Israel's loving "others" may lend some assurance to Jews who are forced now to relive only the frightening side of Israel's relations to others.

May the memory of the two young sages of Israel, along with all the others who were lost, be for a blessing. They dedicated their lives and profound talents to the life of God, Torah, and Israel, and to practices of study, dialogue and decision-making that embody many of the ideals Network members hold dear.

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NEW MEMBERS' INTRODUCTIONS

Stephen Hood: "I am currently a graduate student in religious studies at Rice University and an English teacher at Houston Community College. In 1994 I was graduated from the University of St. Thomas with a B.A.in philosophy. Previously, I have worked as an electronics technician–tubes, not chips–and a musician. I am "enthused" by mysticism, continental philosophy, Whorfian linguistics, cultural anthropology, and of course Judaism. Also, I have interest in space, time, and body metaphors and their relation to prepositions."

POSTCRITICAL CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY AND JUDAISM

Introduction

Philip Culbertson (U of St. John's, Auckland)

With this issue, the Network inaugurates a new section designed to address issues in Christian theology and thought which we believe are important enough to pull into the Jewish-Christian dialogue. In 1966, German theologian Karl Barth addressed the Vatican's Secretariat for Christian Unity. His speech suggested an act of personal teshuvah, publicly opening room in his theology for a positive evaluation of the relation-ship between Christianity and Judaism. Barth closed his speech with a now-famous question: "We should not forget that there is finally only one genuinely great ecumenical question: our relations with the Jewish people." (1)

Yet in spite of fifty years of post-Holocaust interfaith dialogue, it remains rare that deep theological issues are addressed jointly by these two faith traditions. Some have begun to read texts – biblical or otherwise- together (as we did at the AAR in Philadelphia with Elliot Wolfson), and their

findings bear out much that Roger Badham and Ola Sigurdson say about "the seventy faces of the Torah," or the challenging diversity of textual interpretation in our mutual histories.(2) But on a grander philosophical or theological level, the deepest issues remain largely unaddressed in dialogue. Some of these theological issues have been addressed in print, including by members of the Network such as Peter Ochs, Leon Klenicki, Michael Wyschogrod, and myself. Two of the most successful face-to-face dialogue groups on deep theological issues are the semi-annual meetings of the Christian Study Group on Judaism and the Jewish People in the US, and in Israel, the Shalom Hartman Institute's annual Theologians' Conference. But these dialogue venues-in print and in person-are not as widely known as they should be.

For this reason, the issues and emphases of Postliberal Christian theology may be unfamiliar to Jewish members of the Network. The controversial term "Postliberal theology" is generally attributed to Yale theologian George Lindbeck, from his 1984 seminal book, The Nature of Doctrine. Lindbeck did not equate "postliberal" with "conservative," but rather understood his term to signify a new stage of development beyond the liberal theology popular in the 1960s and 70s. A list of the intellectual influences on postliberal theology appears to be an illogical mish-mash: the theology of Karl Barth, Thomas Kuhn's philosophy of science, analytic philosophers like Wittgenstein and Gilbert Ryle, sociologists like Peter Berger, anthropologists like Clifford Geertz, and several literary theorists including Erich Auerbach and Stanley Fish. The majority of the present postliberal theologians have some connection with Yale University, and appear to be rooted in the work of Yale theologian H. Richard Niebuhr, younger brother of Reinhold Neibuhr.

Among the tenets of postliberal Christian theology is that the authority of scripture is not inherent, but lies in the ways in which it is used by particular communities. Postliberal theology grants no exaggerated authority to any one traditional source (as opposed, for example, to forms of Christianity which grant sole authority to scripture), but rather

understands Christian identity as the product of several "families of argument" which would include the scriptural text, the theological and historical traditions, and religious experience. Christian identity (and the meaning of scripture) is found where these "families" intersect within particular communities. Because different communities comprehend these sources differently, each community develops its own universe of discourse. The role of theological doctrine is simply to reinforce the ground rules of a community's discourse. Doctrine thereby also serves to reinforce a community's boundaries.

William Placher offers this summary of the basic concerns of post-liberal theology: "[it] attends to the biblical narratives as narratives rather than simply as historical sources or as symbolic expressions of truths which could be expressed non-narratively. But unlike some other theologians interested in narrative, postliberals do not let the stories of our lives set the primary context for theology. They insist that the biblical narratives provide the framework within which Christians understand the world. Christian theology…pursues apologetics, therefore, only on an ad hoc basis, looking for common ground with a given conversation partner but not assuming some universally acceptable standard of rationality." (3)

Narrative theory has had an effect on postliberal theology, though so far, few theologians have taken seriously the many different and sometimes conflicting narratives within scripture. Most postliberal theologians seem to speak as if there were a single coherent biblical narrative. The questions raised in the following article by Badham and Sigurdson about "otherness" and alternate narratives are largely unfamiliar territory within postliberal theology. Interestingly, Lindbeck has recently been involved in the Theologians' Conferences at the Shalom Hartman Institute, and it may be that he will ultimately publish something which corrects his previously narrow focus on Christian narrative alone.

Other authors of significance in postliberal theology include Hans Frei, Stanley Hauerwas, Ronald Thiemann, David Kelsey, Hans-Georg

Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Jurgen Habermas, Alisdair MacIntyre, and some of the most recent works of David Tracy. To the best of my knowledge, there are as yet few women theologians working in this field, perhaps because feminist systematic theology and feminist ecclesiology are commanding more of women's energy.(4) Most of these names just mentioned would be unfamiliar to the average American Christian parishioner, and even to most clergy who are more than ten years out of seminary. But the substance of postliberal theology is beginning to filter into local parishes through publications such as *The Christian Century*. While it remains controversial, and vigorously opposed by almost all of "the Christian right," postliberal theology holds great promise for the reconstitution of an increasingly shaky Christian identity as the church becomes more socially marginalized.

NOTES

1) The text of the address can be found in Paul van Buren, *A Christian Theology of the People Israel* (New York: Seabury, 1983), pp. 351-52. See also Karl Barth, *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings* (London: SCM Press, 1954).

2) For source citations on "the seventy faces of the Torah," see Philip Culbertson *A Word Fitly Spoken: Context, Transmission, and Adoption of the Parables of Jesus * (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 90 and notes, 190-191 and notes.

3) William C. Placher, "Postliberal Theology," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, edited by David F. Ford, vol. 2, p. 117 (London: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

4) [Katherine Tanner is one name to add to the list of postliberal theologians – Ed.]

Deep Calls to Deep: The De-centered Post-Constantinian Church

Roger A. Badham (Drew U) & Ola Sigurdson (U of Lund, Sweden)

Introduction

The a/theological cry that God is dead continues to be w/rung out across the once-Christian landscape of Western civilisation. While it is not certain whether that cry has been the triumph of (a) modernism or (b) postmodernism over traditional religious beliefs, it is certain that God's announced demise ought to have some significant effect on the way the Christian church views itself. For example, we might well ask, Is God only alive and well for Christians when they are in a position to guide society according to their religious, moral and political vision? Can the church only function within God's dispensations in the theological line of the Sadducees? Or are there other identities possible following the decentering and destruction of that vast temple of European Christendom which some of us are able to rename the Constantinian heresy? The meaning of this term is probably clear enough; by it we mean that development of political hegemony from the 4th century onwards which eventually made utterly porous the boundaries between church and society in Europe leaving little hospitable room for those whose identities could not be co-opted by baptism. Thus the other remained the outsider.

The Reformers made no reactive protest against the medieval marriage of church and society with the significant exception of the Anabaptists, whose alternate vision was at once anathema to Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran churches and their sovereigns alike. The Anabaptists became, in their radical otherness, a voluntary Christian counterpart to the Jewish communities in Europe. Like the Jews, they were seen as outside the homogenizing structures of society. Like the Jews, they offered Europe

early warning of the pluralism to come, and similarly were persecuted for their difference.

The Enlightenment can be interpreted as a courageous attempt to correct the problem of ecclesial hegemony. Increasing religious toleration led to the emancipation of the Jews, the church's power over education was broken, and society was released to develop the image of the mature individual with 'inalienable rights'. What the Enlightenment inherited uncritically from the medieval period was its allegiance to universals, albeit based upon reason rather than revelation. Michael Walzer suggests that when God is removed as the transcendent authority, other secular transcendent authorities are required when seeking to discover or invent new social codes(1). These often take the form, to use Thomas Nagel's term, of assuming "the view from nowhere." Alasdair MacIntyre's thesis in After Virtue is that these modernist theories are incoherent for rejecting the very ground from which they sprouted, which was a medieval synthesis of Aristotelian teleological ethics and a Christian teleological faith(2). The attempt to dismantle this cultural-linguistic world without jettisoning its ethical coherence has been part of the "failed modernist project," according to MacIntyre. We are now living in the fragmentary ruins of a past ethical worldview.

2. Speaking from the Heart: Protestant Social Ethics

It is our contention that Protestant social ethics, as heir to medieval and Reformation theologies and Enlightenment moral theories, has continued to function under the rubrics of universality. Mainline Protestant theology has largely refused to give up its role of speaking on behalf of the whole society. It has sought universally applicable rules and codes, by which a society can govern itself "self-evidently," reasonably and justly. Emory University's James Gustafson seeks to balance the Christian's responsibility to "absolute obedience to Jesus as Lord" and the universal applicability of Christian ethics to God's created human order. Representing one stream of post-Niebuhrian Christian social ethics,

Gustafson firmly asserts that any ethical position must be based upon a general, rational and universal order of moral discourse. For this reason he claims that any religiously-based ethics is not technically ethics at all when judged by the "highly restrictive" rationalist concept of ethics that he considers most appropriate for society as a whole. Instead, it is a collection of particular religious practices based upon revelatory and non-rationalist commitments.

This technical distinction, however, has contributed to a serious malaise within the congregations of many mainline Protestant churches. The problem has been that the external, rationalistic voice (Gustafson's "ethics") has dominated the more particularistic, revelatory, and "non-rational" voice ("religious practice") even within the church, erasing Gustafson's careful distinction and thereby rendering it irrelevant. It has similarly erased the distinctiveness of religious over-against secular ethics as a discipline in the academy. The Liberal Protestant church has been eager to engage in full dialogue with secularism. The movement reached its height in the seventies with the writings of Harvey Cox and David Tracy. Tracy, in his book Blessed Rage for Order, presents his correlational or "revisionist model" for theology. "The post-modern intellectual believes that he must remain in fundamental fidelity to the critical exigencies of the liberal period."(3) Accurately describing a secular commitment to the modern morality of scientific knowledge as a faith, Tracy writes:

The most basic expression of such faith…is probably best described as the faith of secularity: that fundamental attitude which affirms the ultimate significance and final worth of our lives, our thoughts and actions, here and now, in nature and in history. An explicit and full recognition of this faith as, in fact, the common faith shared by secularists and modern Christians is perhaps the most important insight needed to understand the contemporary theological situation in its full dimensions and its real possibilities.(4)

While Tracy more recently has made what he calls "the hermeneutical turn" and finds himself questioning more critically the secular modernist inheritance ("Something may be more drastically awry than even Freud or Marx…suspected: sin and avidya.")(5) the influence of his and others' earlier secular optimism has hardly waned in its negative effects within the liberal Protestant church. Juergen Moltmann has argued that "the loss of eschatology…as the medium of theological thinking as such — has always been the condition that makes possible the adaption of Christianity to its environment and, as a result of this, the self-surrender of faith."(6) We must therefore ask, Is this movement toward the secular the kind of interreligious dialogue that we need?

It is against this secularist assimilationism that George Lindbeck reacts in developing his cultural-linguistic theory. To describe Lindbeck's position very briefly, he urges us to consider the ways in which "religions resemble languages together with their correlative forms of life." They are thus similar to cultures. The function of church doctrines that becomes most prominent in this perspective is their use, not as expressive symbols or as truth claims, but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude and action."(7) Lindbeck attempts to develop a via media between what he terms the "experiential- expressive" dimension of religion and the "cognitive- propositional" dimension, by proposing his "cultural-linguistic approach." He claims that the more liberal theologies, represented in this essay by Tracy and Gustafson, fall under the rubrics of the first category, while more conservative theologies fall under the second. Without resorting to propositionalist strategies and to correspondence theories of truth, Lindbeck argues that doctrines articulate a particular religion's internal rules. If Tracy's logic can be interpreted as a move to secularize Christian religious language, Lindbeck's theory is a counter-attack, that has, he believes, the benefit of turning Tracy's logic on its head:

It need not be the religion that is primarily reinterpreted as world views change, but rather the reverse: …Jesus Christ, for instance, is in one setting

affirmed primarily as the Messiah; in another as the incarnate Logos….Yet amid these shifts in Christological affirmations and in the corresponding experiences of Jesus Christ, the story of the passion and resurrection and the basic rule for its use remain the same.

Hence, Lindbeck's interest appears intra- rather than inter-textual, and Tracy and Lindbeck can view each other suspiciously as being respectively amorphous and sectarian in their leanings. It is important to remember that Lindbeck's account pits intratextuality not against intertextuality but extratextuality, by which he means the importation of "extrabiblical materials [which] become the basic framework of interpretation."(8) With Barth, it appears that he seeks a specialized biblical hermeneutics not a general hermeneutics.

Lindbeck claims he is not arguing for homogeneity between communities of faith, but for a committed integrity within. This is precisely the appeal of his cultural-linguistic emphasis in describing communities of faith. His proposals have appeal if presented as strategies to overcome the amorphous malaise afflicting non-conservative Christian churches. However, they have much less appeal when they are promoted from the level of a strategy up to that of a full-blown theory. The reason for this is that there is internal conflict within Lindbeck's proposals. For example, arguing for a "proper" kind of typological reading, he makes surprising demands on how the symbol of the cross is or is not to be viewed, which might be described as overdetermined. There is a single "direction of interpretation," from Bible to world, and it seems that his theory includes rather precise demands about how communities are to go about their own hermeneutical task, whether in interpreting a biblical text or any symbol of the Christian church. He appears to insist (with Barth) that the reader submit to the text, and come without any "forestructures" (Heidegger), or "prejudice" (in Gadamer's non-pejorative usage) that affect the reading.

Both Heidegger and Gadamer have demonstrated that understanding demands these forestructures, that understanding demands a fusion of the

two horizons of text and reader (Gadamer). No greater example of such reading can be offered than the early church's Hellenistic readings of the Hebrew texts. Two worlds collided, the intratextual world of Christian biblical reading and the intratextual world of Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic philosophies, both of which were mostly external to one another prior to that. The transformative synthesis of these worlds led to the creation of many of the doctrines which Lindbeck seeks to describe as the rules of grammar for our thinking and which lie at the heart of Barth's Logos Christology. While Lindbeck calls for us, as readers, to be thoroughly "steeped in" the canonical writings, it is naive to think that we read without extrabiblical structures at work, however steeped we may become, and however much we attempt to submit ourselves to the text.(9) While it is perhaps a valuable hermeneutical tool to attempt to be guided as much as possible from within the sacred texts, it is a modernist pretence to think we come without other structures which are constantly forming and shaping our ways of reading and thinking. That is what it means to be formed culturally and linguistically in Geertz's broader sense. Again, it is valuable to assert that alien structures not become the "basic framework of interpretation," but there is no avoiding the interplay and interpenetration between worlds in the course of interpretation.

3. The Historically Decentered Voice: Judaism

Those who feel that the 'problem' of pluralism is not solved by assimilation, yet who are also wary of uncautious communalism may take a lesson from the contemporary forms of Judaism that have avoided these extremes. Both Frei and Lindbeck have suggested as much. Some Christians have now begun to realize that Jews have historically engaged in the tie of internal and external hermeneutic that is now required of the church. Jews have engaged in this community hermeneutic because they, like the Anabaptists, have not been in a position to speak on behalf of society as a whole. Now that the Protestant church has become one voice among many, rather than "the" religious voice of America, it needs to

learn from the historically decentered voices if it is successfully to reshape its own identity.

One way of reading the story of Judaism's passage into the twentieth century is to claim that it began with Franz Rosenzweig's rejection of neo-Kantian assimilationism and the realization of the importance of particularistic religious identity.(10) Yet Rosenzweig successfully avoided a myopicturn to the introverted community (a) through his dialectical understanding of the double covenant of Jews and Christians and (b) through the anti-idealist logic of his "bridge of speech." His philosophical exegeses were returns to the rootedness of the scriptural text as the locus of revelation.

In scripture we find prophecy, Rosenzweig asserts. But what is prophecy a sign of? That remains unknown until we see what happens. As Robert Gibbs puts it, "In retrospect, the signified displays that it was already signified by the sign. The linking of sign and signified, discovered retrospectively, is the miracle and so provides us with the revelation."(11) This re/turn to scripture is continued in the semiotic concerns represented by Peter Ochs. He suggests that growing numbers of postliberal or postcritical scholars, unlike strictly modernist interpreters, …practice what the semiotic philosopher Charles Peirce would call a three-part hermeneutic: claiming that the text (the first part) has its meaning (the second) for a normative community (the third), rather than identifying the meaning of the text with some historical or cognitive 'sense' that is available to any educated reader.(12)

Michael Walzer makes a similar point with regards to moral argument. The question, what is the right thing to do, floats free of any means of interpreting it "through an existing and particular morality." What is needed is the "crucial addition: what is the right thing for us to do?"(13) By "us" he is referring to the interpreting community historically located in its moral stream.

A second area where the church may be able to learn from Jewish practice is precisely in its reading of sacred texts. Some of the differences lifted up by Ochs between Jewish and Christian reading practices (paradigmatically, between Frei and Lindbeck on the one side and the rabbinic thinkers Moshe Greenberg and Steven Fraade on the other) may open up new possibilities of reading for Christians, with an interpretative freedom never-before dreamed of within the true-false, fact-myth, orthodox-heresy dualisms that have plagued modernist Christian reading practices. These tendencies within the church have driven liberals to all but disavow biblical reading and conservatives to be focussed primarily on issues of historical veracity. It is for this reason that Lindbeck's over-determination of how to interpret raises fears of a return of the same.

4. Speaking Within, Speaking Between: Intra- and Inter-Textuality Revisited

Ochs, indirectly echoing H. Richard Niebuhr, asserts that questions of truth may only relevantly be raised within the context of a normative community's exegetical practices. The internal growth of a community of faith is central to the concerns of postliberal thought, opening it to the charge of sectarianism. Lindbeck closes The Nature of Doctrine with words addressed to younger postcritical scholars. He writes, "May your tribe increase."(14) While this translates the Jewish words of praise yeshar kochekha, words better designed to provoke misunderstanding in the camps of liberal Protestantism are hard to imagine! Lindbeck's own ecumenical and interfaith dialogue should be enough to suggest that his concern is not only for a single introverted Christian community; but also for the internal, healthy integrity of religious communities. But his critics are bound to ask if his cultural-linguistic theory successfully acknowledges the validity of other differing normative communities, regardless of Lindbeck's own personal ecumenical commitments? Any proposed theory properly raises questions of its own hidden hermeneutical and ethical consequences.

Bradford Hinze suggests that, from a Roman Catholic point of view, even fairly sympathetic theologians are concerned about Lindbeck's theory on the issue of its "'regulative' approach to doctrines and their truthful and referential character" and about the "postliberal predilection for a hermetically-sealed text and canon, a Barthian reading of the gospel tradition…and an exclusive focus on biblical narratives."(15) Displayed in this characteristic critique of Barthian reading, is a Catholic-Protestant intertextual concern regarding how reading goes on within a certain religious community. According to the rubrics of a Geertzian cultural-linguistic "thick description," Lindbeck is likely to say that each community will properly find its own ways of reading, its own view of the canon. With his desire to construct a theory applicable to all religious practices and their use(s) of doctrine is Lindbeck not in danger of falling back into modernist universalizing tendencies? If he wants a general theory of religious doctrine, then perhaps David Ford is right in arguing that Lindbeck's emphasis on historical narrative, for example, biases his account toward Christianity(16).

If these concerns are accurate, perhaps newly decentered post-Constantinian Christians still have a lot to learn from historically decentered communities before a mature constructive postmodern theory can emerge that will genuinely hold the dialectical tension between particularism and pluralism. In a secularizing society, in which the epistemological taunt rings out, "Where is your God?" we trust indeed that deep may call to deep, Christian to Jew, Jew to Christian and that Christians especially may learn how to speak in the decentered dialogue of equals.

5. Speaking on Whose Behalf? A Postmodern Critique of Community

Perhaps solutions are not so easy, however. For perhaps post-modernity poses an insoluble dilemma for theology. On the one hand, the "death of the subject" (Foucault) tells us that persons are socially constructed, that there is no transhistorical nucleus of a person that escapes the historical,

contingent webs of nature and culture. Who you are depends on your social, cultural and confessional locatedness. This could be an argument for a higher evaluation of community. Even if one doesn't go as far as Foucault regarding the status of the subject, one could argue, as communitarians like MacIntyre, Walzer and Charles Taylor do, that identity is community-dependent.

Postmodernity may thus mean that one's community is the place for identity, a bastion against the total fragmentization of the subject. This has been an option for Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas, and others. Community–in this case, the Christian church–becomes the locus for identity and stability. Church has its base in the biblical narrative, which gives the identity of God and (Christian) persons. The biblical narratives, read in the Church, constitute the basis for the virtuous Christian and the communal ethic. This is a break with the Constantinian view, which came to identify church and state. Lindbeck and Hauerwas would say by contrast that the church constitutes its own "polis."(17) But, on the other hand, postmodernity is also suspicious of the claims of the community. Community can too easily become repressive, and imposes, physically or non-physically, its ideals and behaviours on its members. The consequence is an inevitable normalisation. The soul becomes the prison of the body!

Moreover, as Zygmunt Bauman has observed, the recent ideas of community often define themselves oppositionally.(18) To be a member in a particular community may be to define oneself against other communities. Would the unavoidable consequence of community in the postmodern world be internal repression and external aggresivitytowards the other? As Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey put it:

If the basic communitarian claim is that moral and political argument is validated within particular cultural discourses and practices, whose role in constructing human identity must be recognised, it is difficult to see

how one is to attain the critical capacity to judge the sexism, patriarchy or any other feature of the culture in question.(19)

Duke theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson writes: "One can no more concieve of purely religious communities as the origination of meaning than one can treat isolated interpenetrating subjects that way."(20)

Postliberal theology has rightly acknowledged the postmodern critique of the subject, but it has not responded to post-modernism's other critique, the critique of community. Even if its purpose is to make the church a prophetic and liberating voice in capitalist society, postliberal theology could also serve as to legitimate authoritarian theology that preserves injustices against classes, races and genders. Where does postliberal theology allow for internal criticism of these injustices? Where does it account for internal difference? Has the church in these cases really put the temptation of constantinianism behind itself?

6. Speaking to Our Neighbours, Speaking to Ourselves: The Church's Midrashic Identity

The problem might be posed as a dialectic between identity and openness. If postliberal theology strongly affirms identity, then where does it find room for openness? Could the post-liberal community be open to strangers, without either reducing the stranger to the same, or representing the stranger as a negative other? Could the community be open to self-criticism as well as critique?

This might be a problem of eschatology. Where does the Christian community exist, between the ages or in the fullness of time? Is the church identical with the kingdom of God, as St. Augustine sometimes suggested? Or is the kingdom of God still on its way, the church living in suspense between the 'already' of the first coming and the 'not yet' of the second? When any church theology begins to equate its own community

with the kingdom of God, that community is likely to develop protective strategies against external or internal criticism.

Today we are constituted by overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, communities. The plural life-world of society today also implies–for better or worse–that difference is not only between communities, but within communities and persons as well. The rift between the church and the world goes right through the believer's heart. And since the church shouldn't identify itself with kingdom-come, the difference between inside and outside is not a given. As Jeffrey Stout has it, following James' "Will-to-Believe," "We need not agree on all matters of moral importance to agree on many, and where our judgements happen to coincide, we need not reach them for the same reasons" (21).

Christian theology has rarely denied that God works outside the church. This was Josiah Royce's view regarding the beloved community. The relation to the surrounding world provides opportunity for renewing self-criticism in the church, not in any once-for-all manner but as a principle of continual change. A post-Constantinian church has to learn what it means to live in partial exile, both as community and as an interpreter of the sacred texts. This alien status does not mean, however, that it should adopt a closed attitude to other communities. The argument for the church's openness is an intratextual one, displayed centrally in the ministry of Jesus. Openness to the world remains a vital principle while the church lives in the tension "between the times," between the "today" and the coming of the eschatological kingdom.

The identity of the community must therefore be an identity on its way (corresponding to a theologia viatorum), and the difference between inside and outside of community must remain porous. This means that the narrative reading of Scripture is never an activity isolated from the surrounding "extratextual" or "extrabiblical" reality. Extra-biblical concepts are necessary to "get" the point of the Bible, since we can understand only through the fusing of horizons, of the text's and of our

own. Understanding is always a way of supplementing, or, as Gibbs call it, adaptation. Adaptation "requires not merely new terminology and argumentation, but also a certain refashioning to bring different tones into focus and change the old thoughts to conform to current circumstances"(22). According to Gibbs, "adaptation" is a kind of midrash. It is not a matter of accommodating Scripture to the surrounding culture, but a way to discover the semantic potential of scripture, its "surplus of meaning" (Ricoeur).

Here rabbinic midrash could be most helpful, since it is intertextual, dialogical, and not prone to closure. The search for identity is an ongoing argument that one does not do alone, whether as an individual person or as an individual community; identity is a function of this ongoing argument, rather than its result or presupposition. Jacques Derrida has warned us against the risks of both a total homogenizing of differences on the one hand, and total fragmentization on the other: "Neither monopoly nor dispersion….This is, of course, an aporia, and we must not hide it from ourselves"(23). Realistic participants in this dialogue must therefore be able to live with this aporia, where neither the unity nor the differences between and within communities should be universalized. The dialectical tension remains an inevitable aspect of the teleological life of the decentred beloved community.

NOTES

*) "Deep calls to deep," alludes to Peter Ochs' own intratextual allusion concerning George Lindbeck. See Ochs' essay, "A Rabbinic Pragmatism," in Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck, ed. Bruce Marshall (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990), pp. 213-248.

1) Michael Walzer, Interpretation and Social Criticism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) p. 16. Walzer considers Rawls to be one still making this attempt. See John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not

Metaphysical," Philosophy and Public Affairs, 14:3, 1985, p. 236. See also Thomas Nagel, The View From Nowhere (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

2) Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Philosophy (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2nd edition, 1984).

3) Tracy, Blessed Rage For Order (New York: Seabury Press,1975) p.12.

4) Ibid., p. 8.

5) David Tracy, Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 76.

6) Juergen Moltmann, A Theology of Hope (New York: Harper and Row, 1967.)

7) Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, op cit., pp. 18 & 82-83.

8) Ibid., p. 114.

9) Ibid., p. 117.

10) Franz Rosenzweig, The Star of Redemption (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, reprinted 1985).

11) Robert Gibbs, Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 83.

12) Peter Ochs, The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity (New York: The Paulist Press, 1993), p. 4.

13) Walzer, op cit., pp. 22-23.

14) Lindbeck, op cit., p. 135.

15) Bradford Hinze, "Postliberal Theology and Roman Catholic Theology," Religious Studies Review 21:4 (Oct 1995): 299-303.

16) David F. Ford, "The Nature of Doctrine," (review) Journal of Theological Studies 3 (1986): 280-81.

17) Arne Rasmusson, "The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Juergen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas" (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

18) Zygmunt Bauman, "Intimations of Postmodernity" (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. xviii-xxi, 134-139.

19) Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey, "The Politics of Community: A Feminist Critique of the Liberal-Communitarian Debate" (New York, London et al: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 141.

20) Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology", (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), p. 149f.

21) Jeffrey Stout, "Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Moral and Their Discontents (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p.226.

22) Robert Gibbs, "Correlations," op cit., p.32.

23) Jacques Derrida, "The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe" (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992),p.41.

Postliberal Identity and Christian Community: A Response to Roger Badham and Ola Sigurdson's "Deep Calls to Deep"

Philip Culbertson (St. John's, Auckland, Austalia)

Roger Badham and Ola Sigurdson have produced an important contribution to the Network discussion by summarizing some central issues in Postliberal Christian theology and then raising some serious critical questions, particularly in relationship to Christian community identity in the face of otherness. While I am fascinated by their arguments and believe they deserve a wide hearing within the community of faith, my own experience differs enough from their foundational assumptions that I found myself occasionally uncomfortable. I know neither Roger nor Ola personally, so I don't know how grounded they are in parish work. I must confess that my own response is shaped by fifteen years of full-time and ten years of part-time parish work, as well as eleven years of teaching counseling psychology in a theological seminary training Christians for ministry.

I was jarred by their opening sentence. I am not convinced that the "death of God" is an accurate explanation for the increasing marginalization of the church (I rather believe that it is being ignored to death because it has so lost touch with the daily concerns of most people). Surely many postliberal theologians would be uncomfortable with such a claim, for in granting authority (albeit not sole) to scripture, they imply that there is a God behind the narrative, even though God's nature and intention cannot be known apart from a narrative community. *A* god may be dead–the god assumed by many centuries of Western civilization as informed by Christian theology–but there remain many highly educated and deeply faithful Christians who are happy to let go of that God anyway, in order to obtain a clearer glimpse of the God who stands behind human perception. This "God behind" may be a God who rules yet does not yet reign (1), and indeed, most contemporary theologians speak of the "not-yet-ness" of both the Kingdom and the Messiah. Perhaps God cannot reign until the grip of Constantinian Christian theology in its most traditional dogmatism is finally broken.

Traditional Christianity has certainly sat uncomfortably within the tension between the mission imperative and xenophobia, like Janus looking both directions. In the South Pacific where I live, there is a clear 150 year history of missionary efforts to eradicate the otherness of indigenous beliefs and cultures. Ola and Roger's essay points to the problem of designating a "foreign" narrative as normative for new cultural contexts. Postliberal theology calls Christians not to bring the story down to their level, but to rise up into the story. As I cited William Placher in my introduction:

Unlike some other theologians interested in narrative, postliberals do not let the stories of *our* lives set the primary context for theology. They insist that the biblical narratives provide the framework within which Christians understand the world.

This is not an idea radically new to postliberal theology, but mimics the traditional discipline of the Ignatian lectio divina, a technique of spiritual meditation which called Christians to enter into the gospel story as an active participant, or even as an alter ego to one of its named characters. (2)

There is already difficulty in asking a Western monk to use a Western method to enter the Semitic and Hellenistic worlds of scripture. How much more destructive is it to ask, for example, a Sepak subsistence farmer from Papua New Guinea to use a Western method to enter the Semitic and Hellenistic philosophical and theological worlds? The dangers inherent in this narrative model might be softened if the story we were calling people to enter were not itself so often obsessed with "insider-outsider" rhetoric. The result in the South Pacific is that in some cultures, one village will be entirely Methodist while the neighboring village is entirely Anglican; in spite of being bound by a common ethnicity and culture, the two villages will refuse to cooperate in matters of faith, and perhaps even social justice issues, each convinced that its own universe of dogmatic discourse is

superior and must be protected from the neighbors. It is the nature of all narrative communities to create boundaries through the process of shaping their narrative and therewith the community's identity. This is what Alex Kozulin called "Life as Authoring."(3) But as Christianity becomes increasingly decentered, the boundaries between individual narrative communities seem to become increasingly rigid, a development easily justified by "rising up" to participate in a meta-narrative structured around "chosenness to be different from others," "peirush" (4), or being "in the world but not of the world" (John 1, 17,18).

Can postliberal theology make room for the alien other? Is there a place in decentered Christian communities for what Wayne Booth calls "the otherness that bites"? (5) Roger and Ola speak of the Christian communities' "need" to learn from others including Judaism. But my personal experience is that it is quite difficult to convince many Christian communities that they need at all to learn from anyone or anything outside of Christianity. This is perhaps a part of the continuing fallout from the xenophobia which results when narrative boundaries are fixed by a sense of superiority or uniqueness. To learn from others, one must first respect them, and Christianity's respect for otherness (including, or perhaps particularly, Judaism) does not have a good track record. In his important essay "Confrontation," Rav Joseph Soloveitchik defines the four necessary pre-requisites for dialogue to occur, and thus for each party to learn from each other: (a) Our radical differentness must be recognized in advance, and we must not be insulted by any language such as "I know just how you feel." Among other things, there is no such thing as a religious Judeo-Christian tradition, though there may be such a cultural tradition. uniqueness is paramount. Adam and Eve were created because God approved of them as autonomous human beings and not as auxiliary beings in the service of someone else. (b) The mystery of the logos must be appreciated. We can talk about cooperation in the secular world for the redemption of that secular world, but each community has its own private conversation with God, and must not be expected to justify, or even explain, it to an outsider. (c) Change should not be expected of either

partner. Otherness means that you cannot understand, and if you cannot understand, an opinion about what the Other is doing wrong is not welcomed.(d) Tradition, and especially the faith of the dead, must be respected fully. We must know quite clearly who we are and where we have come from, else confrontation with an Other will result in our being swallowed up (6)

These criteria are not easily reconciled with many historical forms of Christian theology, and perhaps equally uneasily with postliberal theology because of the isolation which results from being decentered. Is this the aporia of scripture: that as it teaches us to love our neighbors, it also teaches us to fear, to demote, and perhaps even to hate them? (7) Stanley Hauerwas, an important contributor to postliberal theology, co-authored a book with William Willimon which was extremely popular in parish circles about five years ago, called *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989). Citing the eschatological nature of the Christian message (and it is interesting to note that postliberal theology is moving toward eschatological interpretation of the New Testament just as the biblical world is moving away from it), Hauerwas and Willimon describe the church as "a beachhead, an outpost, an island of one culture in the middle of another." Hence the church is "colony", and its members are "resident aliens" in the midst of the world. But the book goes on to suggest that the pressing task is now for Christians to gather in the parish hall and re-examine their identity, "not to make the gospel credible to the world but to make the world credible to the gospel." This manner of thinking underlines the charges of "tribalism" with which some critics greeted Lindbeck's work. When Lindbeck closed *The Nature of Doctrine* with the words, "May your tribe increase," he opened the opportunity for Hauerwas and Willimon to prescribe tribal withdrawal as item #1 on the Christian agenda. In a post-Holocaust age, I find the call to tribal withdrawal vile and even immoral. Must we recapitulate the despair of Pastor Martin Niemoller when he wrote: "First they came to take the Communists and I was not a Communist, so I did not protest. Then they came to take the homosexuals and I was not a homosexual, so I did not

protest. They they came to take the Jews and I was not a Jew, so I did not protest. Finally, they came to take me and by then, there was no one left to protest"? (8) If all the Christians are busy working out their identity in the local parish hall, in a colony withdrawn from the world, who will be "out there" to listen when Jews or gays and lesbians or anyone else cries out "Save me, for the waters have come up to my neck!" (Psalm 69:1)

As a lecturer in counseling psychology, I must raise yet one more question concerning the use of narrative in decentered Christian communities. A common claim in narrative psychology, though patently hyperbolic, it would seem, is that because we spend our lives responding to the many messages, signals, introjects, and reactions we receive from others, our personal identity is no more than the sum total of everything ever said to us in our lives. This makes our "passive narrative self" (what we have been told) primary to our "active narrative self" (what we tell). It also raises the ethical dilemma of how far we should go in attempting to control what is said to us, and perhaps even identifies our avidya as the source of subsequent sin, in that avidya makes us susceptible to what is said to us and how it is received!(9) I want to ask how aware a community is of the basic vulnerability of its members, how far it is willing to bear full culpability for the effect its universe of discourse (doctrine, understanding of scripture, definition of boundaries, community-dependent identity, etc) has upon those who are listening? However much individual postliberal Christians are "rising up" to find themselves in the narrative, so too the narrative is finding them, and molding and liberating and confining them. This, of course, is the desired traditional outcome of Christian identity formation, but are we taking the psychological import seriously enough? Have we identified the narrative's shadow clearly enough to comprehend the ethics of what we are doing? Is this not the ultimate tragedy of failing to take Roger and Ola's questions about the "dialectic between identity and openness" seriously enough?

The intriguing concept of community identity as a "theologia viatorum" which Roger and Ola present in section 6, combined with the questions I

have raised about the formation-ethics of a community-dependent personal identity, suggest yet another question: where is the 71st face of the Torah, the one which is ultimately outside the pale of faithful interpretive possibilities? In a recent book, William Henn, of the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity, examined the term "unity of faith" (Ephesians 4:13) to see how much agreement he could identify within the long history of Christian theology. After searching the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the patristic literature, he concluded that there never has been a clear unity concerning the contents of the Christian faith or an official list of universals.(10) But postliberal theology causes us to ask new ethical questions about the limits of the "seventy faces" when decentering becomes destructive of both the faith and individuals.

As I mentioned earlier, there were some places in Roger and Ola's essay that made me uncomfortable. One was their naivete about the relationship among modern Judaisms. They almost image Judaism as conflict-free (see the beginning of section 3). My own twenty-five years of involvement in Christian-Jewish dialogue suggests that Judaism can be as fractured as Christianity and can produce just as many competing midrashim. There are also occasional hints of historical sloppiness in a couple of places. Near the end of section four, they suggest that post-Constantinian Christians can learn from a decentered Judaism, but this is not a new idea. Origen (185-255), *In Ioannis* VI.xiii(7)76, insists that any Christian who wishes to exegete a difficult Biblical passage must begin first by consulting Jews to see how they understand it. It is also not accurate, as they claim in section 6, that "Christian theology has rarely denied that God works outside the church." Though "Truth" was available outside Christianity, Salvation traditionally was not. Origen (*In Jesu Nave* 3,5), along with his contemporary Cyprian (c.300), are generally identified as the authors of the famous dictum *extra ecclesiam non salus* ("outside the church, there is no salvation"). Once this doctrine was formulated, it exerted a significant influence on the continuing development of Christian thought, at least until the mid-twentieth century.(11) Indeed, the history of this particular doctrine causes me to stumble (cf. Romans 14:13) over

Lindbeck's claim, for given the Crusades, the Inquisition, the pogroms, and the Holocaust, can we say that *extra ecclesiam non salus* is "merely" one of the ground rules of a community's discourse, or must we charge that doctrine with the crime of abetting murder?

Further, I wish that Ola and Roger had been more aggressive in their own critique of Christian community. If communities have boundaries, then certainly New Zealand has a boundary-to wit, many more miles of seashore than the US. Inside that boundary, there are many communities, one of the smallest being the church (only about a quarter of the population claims any church affiliation). Inside the church, there are many denominational communities, and inside each denomination there are many communities of interest groups. The Anglican church in New Zealand, to which I presently belong, is officially divided into three "streams"-Pakeha (white) Anglicans, Maori Anglicans, and Pacific Island Anglicans. (12) Each has its own rules of discourse, its own canon law, and its own protocol. Even the Pakeha Anglicans sub-divide into communities: evangelical, broad church, and liberal; traditionalist and feminist; pietists and social activists, etc. Within these communities inside communities, scriptural interpretation differs markedly, even to the point of "canceling each other out". I would love to see a discussion of how small a community can be and still retain a sense of authority to the meaning it discovers in scripture. Will it be like Abraham's bargaining: fifty righteous persons,. . . ten righteous persons? Do two people really make an identifiable community of scriptural discourse? Is there anything we can do to avoid devolving into that bane of Protestant thought: radically exaggerated individualism? If a community of two people calls everyone else in the world alien, does that charge retain any meaning?

Today the church is undergoing a change which some have compared to the impact upon the synagogue of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. However promising postliberal theology may appear–and in fact I believe it has a great deal to offer Christianity as the church enters a

period of great instability–it also has grave ethical questions to answer before it can retain credibility on the other side of the millennium.

NOTES

1) On the distinction between God's rule and God's reign, see Philip Culbertson, *A Word Fitly Spoken: Context, Transmission, and Adoption of the Parables of Jesus* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 103-05.

2) The pattern of the "Spiritual Exercises" of Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) consists in taking a scene from scripture, usually from the life of Christ and taking part in it as if it were actually occurring and one were participating in the event. One prepares the scene down to the slightest detail.... Then one puts oneself in the scene and observes, as it were, from the inside….The meditation always ends with a colloquy with the Lord….

3) Alex Kozulin, "Life as Authoring: The Humanistic Tradition in Russian Psychology," *New Ideas in Psychology*, Vol. 9, No. 3,Pergamon Press, 1991, pp. 335-351. See also Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 365.

4) Though the etymology of "Pharisee" is not clear: did they voluntarily set themselves apart or is it a pejorative term like "Quaker," used to denigrate difference?

5) "I embrace the pursuit of the Other as among the grandest of hunts we are invited to;…But surely no beast that will prove genuinely *other* will fail to bite, and the otherness that bites us…must have sufficient definition…to threaten us where we live." Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*,(Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 1990), p. 70. On the need to engage otherness, see Jose Ortega y Gasset, *Concord and Liberty* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1946), pp. 92-95.

6) Rav Joseph Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," in *Tradition* 6:2 (Spring 1964), pp. 5-29.

7) In private correspondence, Peter Ochs defines aporia as "the condition of perplexity unresolvable that comes from the incompatibility of some thought structure with itself."

8) Quoted in Yehiel Eckstein, *What Christians Should Know About Jews and Judaism* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1984), p. 286.

9) Avidya is a Buddhist term meaning the "primal ignorance" which leads us to develop a reality-perceiving consciousness which is in fact illusory, awaiting enlightenment. See David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 75.

10) William Henn, *One Faith: Biblical and Patristic Contributions Toward Understanding Unity in Faith*, (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995).

11) See my article "Known, Knower, Knowing: The Authority of Scripture in the Anglican Tradition," *Anglican Theological Review* 74:2 (Autumn 1991): 144-174.

12) See my article "Pastoral Theology and Multiculturalism" forthcoming in *Anglican Theological Review*, late 1996.

THE TALMUD AND POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY: "MARTYRDOM AS SANCTIFICATION OF THE DIVINE NAME"

Introduction

Steven Kepnes, Colgate U.

Last summer from July 31 to August 2 (1995), the postmodern Jewish philosophy network teamed-up with the Shalom Hartman Institute of Jerusalem to hold its first Talmud workshop. The workshop was organized by Menachem Lorberbaum (Hartman Institute), Robert Gibbs, and myself. Hillel Rabbi Jim Diamond provided the venue of Princeton Hillel. Our idea was to bring together about 12 people to try to extend the relatively short sessions which we have had at the AAR meetings to give postmodern Jewish philosophers and Talmud scholars a chance to study together and explore areas of confluence and difference between postmodern theoretical concerns, Talmud scholarship, and Jewish philosophy. We wanted to follow up our initial sense that the Talmud could provide a common text that would generate dialogue on theoretical issues of textuality, interpretation, discourse, gender, and postmodern logic. And we wanted to use the Talmud to help us to push across the boundaries between our different academic expertises, between text and life, and between scholarship and faith.

The theme of "Kiddush Hashem: Sanctification of the Name as Martyrdom" was taken from the June philosophy conference at the Hartman Institute in Jeursalem. We used relevent texts from Sanhedrin, Yoma, Berakhot, and Avodah Zarah. Our workshop followed the following format: text scholars presented a brief overview of a sugya, followed by havruta study for 1 and a half hours; then a philosopher led a group discussion that culminated in an attempt to summarize both the logic of the suyga and the insights gained into postmodern issues. What follows continues the conversations that were started at Princeton.

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Dialogues on the Theme of Martyrdom

Elizabeth Shanks (Yale U) and friends from the PMJP Talmud Institute

Fall 1995
Dear Institute Friends,

Yesterday was Yom Kippur. In anticipating the day, I remember Norbert Samuelson's comment last July, that the martyrology almost brings him to tears each year. This year, my rabbi, Jim Ponet, substituted a reading from a Holocaust survivor for the traditional liturgy. The excerpted piece was a woman's voice, speaking of the daily ordeal of morning role call in the brutal cold of winter. She spoke of the temptation she felt each day to die, her one moment of pleasure being fainting, which she would do every day. At that moment, her heart would become separate from her body, finally, and she would be at peace. How she treasured that moment of peace and longed to succumb once and for all to the total peace of death. But each day, her neighbor would rudely awaken her, and it pained her to come back to the bitter cold reality of the biting wind. As the reader brought us into the psyche of someone struggling daily with the reality of wanting to die, I was again humbled. Who am I to try to write about martyrdom? ...In fact, the literature that we read finds heroism in the act. Who am I to respond to the heroism, when I have not faced the terror of it? In spite of it all, I've written a few paragraphs, and I hope that they show enough respect for the gravity of the reality that they describe. I look forward to your responses.

SANCTIFYING GOD WITH OUR LIVES?

What is accomplished when one gives one's life to sanctify God's name? Is the sacrifice a preventive measure that averts harm, by refusing to take part in something awful that is happening to God's presence in the world? Or is it a positively conceived act that deepens one's relationship with a God who is ever present in death, as in life? Whether one identifies with the first description of martyrdom or the second depends on how one relates to God. The moment of martyrdom, with its heightened drama, can serve as a magnifying lens on even our own relationship with God. Two aspects of how one relates to God are particularly relevant to this

discussion: 1) whether the prospective martyr suspends or relies on her rational faculties in order to relate to God and 2) whether she locates God in the observable world or inside of herself. For the prospective martyr who uses her faculties of reason to relate to Godliness in the observable world, the value of martyrdom lies in preventing damage to the worldly Divine presence. Alternatively, if she suspends her faculties of reason and turns inside herself to find God, the value lies in affirming faithfulness to the internally perceived Divine presence. A careful reading of several talmudic sugyot serve as the basis for these two descriptions of the value of martyrdom.

II. God in the Observable World: Relating Through Reason

R. Johanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yehozadak: By a majority vote, it was resolved in the upper chambers of the house of Nithza in Lydda: For every transgression [that one might com-mit], if one is told, "Trangress and your life will be spared," one should transgress and let his life be spared. Only for bloodshed, forbidden sexual relations and idolatry [should one be killed.] But shouldn't idolatry be excluded from this list, in accordance with the opinion of R. Ishmael? [He said]: From where in Scripture do we know that if a person is told, "Worship this idol, and your life will be spared," that person should worship the idol and let his life be spared? Scripture says: And you shall live by them [the commandments](1):i.e., not die by them. Does [Ishmael's restrictive opinion, which excludes idolatry from the list of sins for which one must die,] apply even when the act is committed in public? Scripture teaches, Neither shall ye profane my name, but I will be hallowed [amongst the children of Israel].(2) [No, Ishmael's opinion does not hold for public acts of idolatry.] (Sanhedrin 74a)

Here, we encounter a voice that addresses the issue of martyrdom with the instruments of reason. It measures, sets limits and establishes criteria. It makes discerning distinctions on the basis of things learned from the observable world. A discussion ensues: what types of trangressions are so

heinous that it is preferrable to give one's life, rather than succumb to them and live in a perverted relationship with God? The council of Nithza and R. Ishmael disagree. The council of Nithza says idolatry, forbidden sexual relations, and bloodshed are the limits beyond which a Jew cannot trangress. If asked to commit these deeds or give up one's life, one must meet one's fate. R. Ishmael disagrees on the issue of idolatry, for he thinks through life itself we consummate our relationship with God. The significant difference between Ishmael's opinion and the majority decree is, to put it bluntly, whether or not idolatry is worth dying for. Idolatry, which later came to be the quintessential impetus for martyrdom, was in its initial context a disputed justification for martyrdom!

What values underlie these conflicting opinions? The value of martyrdom, as it is expressed in these rational statements, rests in not doing damage to the worldly Divine presence. The difference between the two opinions stem from differences in observation: Ishmael and the council locate the worldly Divine presence in different places. Ishmael finds that the essence of God's worldly presence is threatened by bloodshed and forbidden sexual relations, which are sins that occur between "man and man." It seems ironic that a disruption of social harmony threatens to desecrate God's name. What makes bloodshed and forbidden sexual relations violations of an absolute religious standard? I believe the commanding value of blood and sexuality is that they are Divine commodities that humanity has access to. They are the quintessential manifestations of Godliness in this world. While humanity can possess and manipulate them, we must refrain from perverting the Divine within them. We are given permission to kill animals for food only with the understanding that we will not eat the blood (Lv 17, Dt 23). The lifeblood belongs to God and returning it to its proper Master reminds us of our position as God's servants. Similarly, we are given the delights of human sexuality to act as a vessel for God's on-going creation. But our use of these gifts is limited by the divine purposes for which they were given, and excludes sexual pleasure outside of the family context (Lv 18, 20). To participate in bloodshed and inappropriate sexual relations is to violate the conditions

under which we are given Divine privileges and to make oneself a vessel for the diminution, rather than sanctification, of God.

When Ishmael stakes out his position on kiddush hashem, he wants to prevent a distortion of the Divine image that each one of us embodies. The loss of one's life is justified, indeed required, when one risks using it to diminish God within this world. It is on the basis of a God who leaves traces in the world, which Ishmael can perceive and evaluate, that he can make a rational decision to give his life.

What then do we make of the council's decision to include idolatry on the list of abominable acts? The sugya's analysis of R. Ishmael's omission implies that the inclusion of idolatry is justified primarily when the violation is performed publicly. I assume, then, that the public aspect of denying God accounts for the council's broader decision. If one denies God in a private setting, one's inner conviction and belief can remain as firm as ever, and then no tangible harm is done to God's presence in the external world. However, in a public setting, one must consider how one's actions will be perceived by strangers who cannot see into one's heart. Of crucial importance is how the public denial will affect the community of believers. A public denial might weaken the belief in the community and so diminish the God's presence in our midst. The council of Nithza differs from R. Ishmael only in the place it locates and observes the worldly Divine presence. For the council of Nithza, it is to be found not only in the human creature, but also in the collective community faith.

The decisions of Ishmael and the council are the product of rational judgments made on the basis of what is observable and knowable. Their powers of observation lead them to different conclusions, but that is because each finds the worldly Divine presence in a slightly different setting. For Ishmael, its in the Divine image which each of us embodies; for the council of Nithza, it is in the collective body of the community of faith. Regardless of their difference, both understand kiddush hashem as

a gift to a present God, who is ironically reflected in the very intelligence with which they discern the point at which to give their lives for God.

III. An Internal Faith in God: Suspending Reason

Humanity is, however, not constituted by reason alone. When danger lurks, we become frightened, a natural response that no amount of reason can defer. When the situation does arise, and God forbid that it does, that we face a threat to our very existence, how will we respond? Will the rational limits that we have set for ourselves still guide us? When the pain is imminent, will God feel so close? Would a God who resides in the world and is present in history permit our enemies to threaten us with mortal danger? At the moment of crisis, the world is not filled with observable traces of Godliness. Instead of seeking God in the tangible world, the believer must turn inside herself to find the God to whom she is faithful. In her precarious position, her faculties of reason may not serve her well. The cold logic of reason draws her into an untenable line of thought: Why has God done this to me? Either I'm a terrible sinner so I must deserve this, or maybe God isn't really there. But neither of these responses is adequate. The faithful believer needs to engage God and the world in a way that by-passes the traps of reason. If reason is deceptive and God is not readily perceptible in the world, then the value of martyrdom must be understood differently than we had previously surmised. Turning to two more sugyot, I will try to articulate an alternate model of relating to God, focusing on how it infuses the act of martyrdom with meaning.

Our Rabbis taught: Once the evil government issued a decree that Jews should not study Torah. Papus b. Yehudah came upon R. Akiba and found him bringing groups together for the study of Torah. He said to him, "Akiba, aren't you afraid of the authorities?" He replied, Let me tell you a parable. A fox was once walking alongside a river, and he saw fishes swimming in swarms from one place to another. He said to them: "From what are you fleeing? They replied, "From the nets cast for us by men." He said to them, "Would you like to come up on the dry land, so that you

and I can live together the way that our ancestors did?" They replied, "Do they really call you the cleverest of animals?! You are not clever, but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much more so in the element in which we would die." So it is with us. If such is our condition when we sit and study Torah, of which it is written For that is your life and the length of your days (3), if we go and neglect it how much the worse we shall be! (Berachot 61a)

In this parable, R. Akiba communicates to Papus b.Yehudah how to alter one's perception and engagement of the world so that belief can flourish in spite of adversity. The fishes' perspective is of greatest interest to Akiba, since the danger which threatens to distort their vision parallels the danger in which Akiba and Papus live. The question with which the parable grapples is how can the fish (and the Jews!) best survive, given the inescapable abundance of the fishermen's nets. Lurking beneath that is yet another question: how is survival measured? The fox suggests that jumping up onto dry land is a way out of their dangerous predicament. In the parable, the fallacy of the fox's suggestion is readily apparent, since everyone knows fish can't survive out of water. However, for Papus, the false logic of the fox's suggestion is not so clear. Papus wants to jump out of his own net-ridden waters by abandoning the study of Torah. Abika's parable is designed to clarify for Papus how the fox's logic misleads. While it may not be false in absolute terms — in fact the dry land is free of nets, while the stream is fraught with them — it is false in the relative terms of the fish. Akiba wants Papus to see his own situation from a similarly limited perspective. While objective logic might offer the dual possibilities of loyalty to and abandonment of Torah, the relative reality of being Jewish does not. Just as the fish must follow the vector of their own movement, so too the Jews must continue walking their distinctive path, in relationship with God. At this moment, however, they must turn within themselves to feel the relationship, for God is barely, if at all, visible in their external world. Ironically, having an internal locus for the relationship makes one so oblivious to the external world that it enables the very thing we might never imagine ourselves capable of: swimming

right into the net. Akiba says, if the strength of my own internal convictions leads to external harm, so be it. In such a situation, the value of martyrdom lies in its being the ultimate consummation of the relationship of faith. The martyr follows the only path she knows, that of Torah and God.

The path of internal faith requires a willful naivete. The prospective martyr behaves as if she were unaware that her position is precarious; yet it seems that she must condition herself not to react to what is in plain sight. In the following midrash about the moments before the Akedah, we -find Abraham embodying the frame of mind that epitomizes Akiba in his martyrdom. Like the fish in the previous parable, he is able to ignore the images of danger that lurk about him; relying on his internal faith in his Master, he "swims straight." And it came to pass after these words that God tested Abraham. What do the words "after these words" refer to? … On the way Satan came towards Abraham and said to him, "Might I try to have a few words with you?…Behold you have instructed many, and you have strenghtened the weak. Your words have supported those who were falling, and you have strengthened those of feeble knees. But now [trouble] has come upon you, and you weaken!"(5) Abraham replied, "I will walk in my integrity." (6) Seeing that he would not listen to him, he said to him, "Now a thing was secretly revealed to me,(7)thus have I heard from behind the Curtain: a lamb [will be offered] for a burnt offering, and not Isaac for a burnt offering." He replied: "It is the penalty of a liar that should he even tell the truth he is not listened to." (Sanhedrin 89b)

Like the fox in the previous parable, Satan offers an apparently acceptable way to view the situation. His perspective could destroy Abraham's internal commitment first from one angle, by offering a faulty logic on which to base his faith, and then from another, by undercutting his ability to act out of faithfulness. But Abraham's stride is so sure that he swerves neither when pushed from the left nor the right. He proves himself to be a master of willful naivite. In order to throw Abraham off his tracks, Satan acknowledges Abraham's devotion. Satan says to Abraham, "Pardon me,

I hate to bother you in your times of trouble… But surely you won't mind if I offer a little insight. You have been such a leader in our community of faith…. So how can it be that you of all people must sacrifice your son?!"

As a model of faithfulness, Abraham simply doesn't deserve hard times. If God is responsible, is such a God worth being faithful to? Abraham's replies that he does not seek evidence of God in world around him. All he can know is the rhythm and meter of his own holy trek. "In my innocence, I will walk forward," Abraham replies. It's true, he says, that my path is determined by God, but do not know the essence of that God. I only know my own faith, which will lead me to my fate, whatever it be. Once realizing the depth of Abraham's faith for God, Satan tries to pull a dirty trick. If I give away the outcome, Satan reasons, then Abraham's act will be deprived of all meaning. It will no longer be an expression of faith, but merely a mechanical acting out of God's will. Satan says to him, "Now, a thing has been revealed to me. I heard from behind the Curtain that it is a lamb that will be offered, and not your son Isaac." With this revelation, Satan is assured he will finally begin to fray the line that connects Abraham to his Master. Even if Abraham doesn't resent God when he learns of the deception (which Satan hopes he will), then at least the act itself will no longer be a testament to his faith. But Abraham is undeterred by the apparitions that appear in the tangible world: "Such is the punishment of liars: Even when they are telling the truth, no one believes them."

Abraham's faith survives precisely because it does not depend on the worldly Divine presence. It is rooted in something elusive and mysterious that Abraham knows in his heart. Ironically, it reveals God in the very places which reason suggests are empty of divinity. It enable actions that reason cannot fathom, but where God resides nonetheless.

IV. Conclusion

When the world is safe, God is everywhere. When the world around us becomes transformed by danger, we learn to seek God in different places with different parts of ourselves. Reason can fathom only some things. The value of Akiba's act is very different from the value that underlies Ishmael's rational statement. Akiba's act is infused with positive meaning. It continues a relationship that may have once been recognizable in the external world, but in the moment of crisis is centered in the deep core of his own heart. Ishmael, on the other hand, using the instruments of reason, sees God in the world around him; for him, martyrdom sanctifies by its refusal to participate in God's diminuition. Each of these rabbis experience their relationship with God through different parts of themselves and in different locii. They offer complementary ways to infuse the act of martyrdom with significance. May we also learn to find God in the world around us when our situation enables us to, and in our hearts when we cannot.

RESPONSE FROM BOB GOLDENBERG TO LIZ

Dear Liz,

You wrote in your first paragraph about "two aspects of how one relates to God," and then you offered the distinction(s) between suspending reason or relying on it, and between situating our relationship to God within ourselves or in the outside world. It took me a while to realize that you actually present those as two different formulations of a single distinction: we can rely on reason and situate our relationshp with God in the outside world, or we can move beyond reason and find our relationswhip with God within ourselves. I would like to suggest your original pair of distinctions are independent of one another: wherever we find our relationship to the Divine, it can be either our reason or something else that brings us to it.

An alternative reading of Akiva's parable of the fish will point to what I mean. In contrast to you, I think that the fish reject the fox's proposal

precisely because it is "false in absolute terms": the fox is asking them to exchange the uncertain danger of their present situation (they may get caught in the nets) for the certain danger of the dry land (outside the water, they'll die at once of "drowning"). No rational analysis could lead to accepting such a proposal, only a bizarrely irrational death wish with no religious meaning to redeem it. That is why the fish call the fox "stupid," rather than wicked or insidious or whatever. It may well be as you say that the fish must survive (or "find God") in terms of their own relative situation, but I don't see why that should necessarily demand the abandonment of reason. Only the most careful analysis of one's particular situation, what it allows and doesn't allow, will sometimes get one through it.

I myself can't relate to God in absolute terms through contemplating the cosmos or anything like that. By that route I could reach only the rather unconvincing God of the philosophers. Instead I find myself gripped by a kind of unrelenting Divine power when I consider that Jewish history rather than some other has placed me where I am in the world. That is not a rational conclusion: surely through the use of reason I could as easily see myself as the product of American history, or working-class upward mobility, or the Enlightenment, or whatever, and after all I am in fact the product of all those. Instead my Jewishness is a kind of pre-rational starting point that has the feel of a mountain inverted over my head like a trough. But this path to God has not meant for me, as you write, that "God is barely, if at all, visible, in the external world." It is only through the external world that this fierce pre-rational loyalty can lead me to God at all: Jewish history, after all, is not a product of my inner experience, even if my own Jewish identity is.

Taking my own experience as an example, I would therefore suggest both that the outer world need not, cannot be seen only rationally, and that acknowledging the non-rational grounds of our rational choices does not force us to turn within ourselves. Accidents of experience and

temperament lead each of us to combine those elements in our own unique recipe.

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to set these thoughts down,
Bob

REPLY TO BOB FROM LIZ

Dear Bob,

Thanks so much for your response. I enjoyed hearing from you. I, of course, am now tempted to "respond" to your "response." I absolutely agree with you that these two issues (where we seek God, and whether we use reason to do it) need not be connected. The point I wanted to make was that in "dangerous" situations, we function differently than we do in our day to day lives. The way in which Jewish identity is formed for you in your day to day life, may in fact be a non-rational process. But I think I wanted to claim something distinctive about the non-rational experience of God when the world is changed by danger. But your point is well taken, that the fish are in fact making a well-thought out choice, that relies on true logic. So even, in times of danger, reason may function. Maybe this artful use of reason to transcend reason is one more way of trying to describe the paradox of "willful naivete"? Again, it was nice to hear from you.

All the best, Liz.

RESPONSE TO LIZ FROM JACOB MESKIN (RUTGERS)

Dear Liz,

On a first reading, the distinctions you introduce seem to help us to portion out various talmudic readings on martyrdom in a very clear and useful fashion. However, I wonder if the great diversity of opinion

recorded in the texts about kiddush HaShem, and the open-ended, polyvocal Talmudic conversation itself don't end up winking slyly at your particular choreography here. Perhaps the two binary distinctions you employ–reason OR emotion, and God outside of us OR God inside of us–end up, despite the depths they most certainly reveal, freezing things a bit too much, closing off other parts of the talmudic conversation that do not fit, while also preventing succeeding generations from really getting into the dynamic flow of the living text? Believe me, even saying these things (on which I will expand in a moment) does not prevent me from admitting that actually, I do exactly the same thing when I read a piece of the Talmud (though maybe without your grace)–I try to "get it". What I want to suggest, though, is that especially when dealing with a topic like kiddush HaShem which can, and sadly all too often has become so existentially real and dire, perhaps we have to be very cautious about using the tools and distinctions of western philosophy, even if those very tools and distinctions are exactly how we may start to draw close to the Talmudic text at the beginning.

I guess I feel that having benefitted from your remarks on these texts, I am now in a position to re-enter the yam ha-talmud, both to seek out new insights which may not work within your framework, but also even more importantly to begin to have the experience myself (along with others in a study hall or chevruta) of immersion in a very complex turning and re-turning of crucial biblical verses and previous opinions of chazal. This seems terribly important to me because kiddush HaShem does not exactly mean "sanctification of the Name of God". It means, rather, something like the "showing to be Holy, the making Holy of HaShem", where "holy" retains, it seems to me, its sense of set apart–i.e. one who does kiddush HaShem dies for a God set apart, her martyrdom both witnesses to and somehow manifests the singularity and holiness of this God. In short, kiddush HaShem is a Jewish concept. And this returns us to the Talmudic conversation–the God for whom one dies in kiddush HaShem comes into and obsesses the lives of real, flesh and blood Jews at least in large part through encounters with the words of previous Jews, with the letters

themselves which transmit a message from that God to each new generation of Jews.

Perhaps one may say that in kiddush HaShem one dies for an idea–but if this is so (which I doubt) one is then dying for quite an idea. It would be the idea of a God who (as Levinas says) teaches in the form of texts, the point of which would be the educational analogue to tzimtzum, namely educating the students sufficiently to enable them to argue back, with, and against their Teacher.

So, this is why I worry about using western philosophical distinctions, except as one take on the texts, which would then cry out for others to come and continue the conversation. (One might incidentally go another direction here, and argue that the letters of the Hebrew language themselves are actually emanations of God, through which human beings begin to get into contact with God. In this sense, texts and text study in Judaism once again become central–and part of what one in fact dies for in kiddush HaShem, since this is how Jews draw close to God.) Something about textual immersion itself seems central to kiddush HaShem–indeed Daniel Boyarin argues in the last chapter of his Intertextuality and the Study of Midrash that R. Akiba's martyrdom will make much more sense if we see it as a kind of "being claimed by" certain p'sukim. R. Akiba fought to understand certain verses until in his own life his martyrdom finally supplied him with an answer. So here passionate involvement with texts–one might even say a being obsessed by and with certain texts, almost as if one were more receptive than active in the process–is key to understanding kiddush HaShem. (Boyarin leaves open the question as to whether this is exactly what "happened", i.e. whether this is midrash or rather should be read as the contemporary western genre known as "history".)

Finally, one might also want to use this conversation as a way of trying to situate western binaries with respect to Jewish tradition. 1) Such distinctions are certainly useful in order to help us get an initial fix on the

texts. 2) However, the texts themselves, animated as they are by a rare "disputational logic" of endless conversation and contestation from all and every angle, do not obey most western philosophical trajectories. This is why recent work exploring how we might bend and alter say literary criticism in light of talmudic texts–or rather, if Susan Handelman is right, how current fashions in literary criticism in fact come a lot closer to talmudic ways of reading and arguing–is important to this conversation. So once again, we must try to allow talmudic insights to "step out of" western categories when they seem to want to. 3) Lastly, it is important to try to distinguish between two different theses here: a) talmudic texts, given their richness and many-voiced encounters, cannot be captured by any straightforward set of binary categories (because the talmud is simply not, ultimately, the more single-voiced enterprise of philosophy), and b) the talmud does indeed employ its own set of distinctions which are different from more traditional western philosophical ones. I guess I definitely hold a) above, and sometimes think that I slide into b). B) would imply that there really is a "talmudic philosophy" waiting to be culled from the pages of the talmud. This would not be the same thing as just saying a) above–i.e. just saying that what goes on in the general process of talmudizing is not philosophy. Perhaps sometimes I try to express a) in philosophical terms–and then I slide into b), because I try to say the "new" things that the talmud has to contribute to western philosophy. But it may be, rather, that a) is really the right thesis, and so then talmud would rather interrupt western philosophy–or even maybe try to educate it, rather than really be playing the same game only in a different way.

Thanks for opening up this valuable conversation, Jacob

REPLY FROM LIZ TO JACOB

Dear Jacob,

Thank you so much for your stimulating comments. I find it particularly noteworthy that you contrast my neat binary categories to the chaotic

multi-vocality of the Talmud's discourse. Reading your comments, I am brought to the realization that the neat binary categories (which sometimes work more effectively than others, as some of the other responses have revealed) represent an attempt to render the sea of Talmud accessible from outside of the details of the individual arguments. They are an intellectual "coping mechanism" if you will. The more chaotic the sea of the Talmud, the more I need them to anchor me in the discourse. I need them to help me locate different components of the discourse and situate myself within the range of ideas precisely because the sea is so unpredictable and tumultuous. They are a response to the chaotic state of affairs in the texts themselves. Having internalized your insight, it is unclear if it remains for me to resist the coping mechanism, and learn to tread water without the aid the of a life vest. Or if the coping mechanism has an intermediary value, which is useful, but which must be transcended. Again, thank you for your provocative comments. Liz.

RESPONSE TO LIZ FROM ARYEH COHEN (GTU)
Dear Liz,

I have spent some time thinking my way out of your compelling framing of R. Ishmael's position–and of the parameters and possibilities for thinking about kiddush hashem. I confine my remarks to the first sugya and its implications for the larger discussion. You frame the first sugya (Sanhedrin 74a) as a "rational" discussion of, or engagement with martyrdom. I would like to engage that assumption on a number of points. You see the sugya as representing "a rational voice that reckons with the issue of martyrdom using the instruments of reason." In the disagreement between the council of Nithza and R. Ishmael, the latter sees no need to sacrifice one's life rather than worship idols "for he [R. Ishmael] thinks through life itself we consummate our relationship with God." You sum up the significance of this exchange by saying that "[i]dolatry, which later came to be the quintessential impetus for martyrdom, was in its initial context a disputed justification for martyrdom!"

First, I would maintain that within the parameters of b San. 74a-75a, dying for the sanctification of the name of God is not the topic of discussion. Kiddush hashem is, rather, a subset of the larger principle of "yehareg ve'al ya'avor" [he should be killed and not transgress]–itself a branch (if not a subset) of "matzilin oto benafsho" [those whom one can save by killing them]. This latter is the Mishnaic law which generates the sugya. It is quite possible that the three commandments for which are found under the rubric of "yehareg ve'al ya'avor" do not have much in common other than that very rubric. The obligation to die rather than murder one's fellow is not necessarily an instance of kiddush hashem. It is a result of sevara–what greater right to live do you have than anyone else? [That Rashi's rhetoric–haviv, etc.–ties all three together is significant. But it is still a reading of the whole sugya as generated by the ve-hai bahem–venikdashti dialecitc. This is not the only possible way of reading this sugya.] The idea of kiddush hashem is only introduced with the prooftext from Lev. 22:32: "Neither shall you profane my name, but I will be hallowed [ve'nikdashti] amongst the children of Israel…." Kiddush hashem, for this sugya at least, is inherently tied to idolatry.

The difference between R. Ishmael and the council of Nithza is in the way they value the "act" of forced idolatry. That is, is the act of forced idol worship, one which benefits/pleasures the worshipper? Or is it more akin to rape? Is the worshipper who is forced to worship idols seen as "karka olam" (as Esther is later characterized by Abbayye)? Or is he understood to have "benefitted" from the act–even though forced? R. Ishmael, by this reading, is saying that coerced idolatry is rape–and therefore the one who worships is not culpable. Therefore there is no reason to save him by killing him (since he doesn't need to be "saved"). Therefore, he needn't let himself be killed rather than worshipping. On the other hand, the position of the Council would be that idolatry — even though forced — is an act which benefits/gives pleasure to the worshipper. In this case the worshipper is culpable and there is an impetus to save him by killing him. Therefore he must let himself be killed rather than transgress. On the other hand , when the act is done in public, the act is defined by the community

of observers–and it no longer matters whether or not there is "really" benefit or enjoyment in it for the actor him/herself. The act is constructed as an act of idolatry (rather than "rape by idol") by the gaze of the community. Therefore even R. Ishmael agrees that in public one must submit to death rather than worship idols.

The basic terms of the discussion are the erotics rather than the logic of the relationship with God. To rephrase Liz's opening statement I would say now that the aspect of how one relates to God which is particularly relevant is whether the prospective martyr sees herself as karka olam in relation to God–or as an active and participant lover. It is the threat to the erotic or passionate relationship with God that demands martyrdom. If one's relationship with God is active–it cannot be subverted by "idol-rape". If one's relationship with God is as karka olam–then "idol-rape" is a threat.

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A Book Self-Review by Steven Kepnes

INTERPRETING JUDAISM IN A POSTMODERN AGE
New York University Press, 1996
Steven Kepnes, Editor
Volume 4 in the Berman Center for Jewish Studies of Lehigh University Series: "New Perspectives on Jewish Studies,"
General Editor, Laurence Silberstein

SK: I am extremely pleased to present a description of my recently published edited collection of essays which includes the work of many of the contributors to the Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Network. I would like to acknowledge now, as I do in the book, the significant debt I owe to Peter Ochs, Larry Silberstein and all the participants in the collective work of Postmodern Jewish Philosophy. Thanks so much for your stimulating comments and the help you have given me in my attempt to articulate the

parameters of our work. I begin simply with the Table of Contents, since it includes the work of so many Network members."

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For a more detailed overview, here are words from the book's Introduction:

The essays collected display the fruits of the application of an array of postmodern hermeneutical approaches to the study of Judaism. The work does not represent a "paradigm shift" in the Kuhnian sense of a movement to a shared new model with commonly accepted criteria. Rather what we see in the articles collected here are "family resemblances" and "selective affinities"; shared problematics and questions; recurring themes such as the importance of language, discourse, and interpretation in the variety of Jewish cultures; and a movement away from fixed foundations and

essentialized notions such as "Judaism" or "Jewish values" to an appreciation of the forces of cultural construction and transmission.

Generally, the articles in this collection can be grouped around two different poles, each of which finds its roots in different hermeneutical traditions of Western intellectual life. These traditions can be described as "deconstructive hermeneutics" with Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud as modern progenitors and Derrida and Foucault as their postmodern successors and "constructive hermeneutics" with Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Heidegger as modern progenitors and Gadamer and Ricoeur as postmodern successors. The former type of hermeneutic attempts to uncover the conditions and processes that lie behind the ostensive meanings of human cultural expressions and the latter seeks to disclose new possibilities of meaning within the fabric of cultural products themselves.

In a rough categorization one could say that the essays of Greenstein, Boyarin, Ophir, Hever, Wyschogrod, Silberstein, and Levitt mainly utilize deconstructive hermeneutics, and the essays of Ochs, Jaffee, Wolfson, Handelman, and Greenberg mainly utilize constructive hermeneutics. The structure of the volume follows a chronology of from the biblical to contemporary period. All authors were asked to include a methodological discussion in which they outline and distinguish the characteristics of the theoretical model they are using. Authors were also asked to illustrate the applicability of a particular postmodern approach to Jewish studies by performing an act of interpretation on specific Jewish texts. Therefore, in each essay the reader will find a different presentation of the recent theoretical movement in academic scholarship and its implications for Jewish studies.

The scholars utilize a wide range of postmodern approaches. One will find a Derridean analysis in the essay by Edward Greenstein, a Gadamerian analysis in the essay by Martin Jaffee, a Deleuze and Guattarian analysis in the essay by Hannan Hever, a semiotic analysis in the essay by Peter

Ochs, a new historicist analysis in the essay by Daniel Boyarin, and an analysis employing feminist theory in the essay by Laura Levitt. In including essays from different hermeneutical poles in the same volume and in suggesting that every hermeneut necessarily employs deconstructive and constructive hermeneutical strategies, I hope to encourage the continuation of the creative dialogue between scholars of different hermeneutical orientations on the most productive ways to interpret Jewish texts and cultures in the postmodern period.

Editor to SK: Could you say a few more words about the process of putting this collection together?

SK: The idea for putting this collection together came to me after I saw 150 people show up at a panel I put together at the 1990 Association for Jewish Studies meetings on "Theories of Interpretation and the Study of Judaism." After struggling for a couple of years, along with Larry Silberstein and Peter Ochs, to get sessions accepted at the AJS and the American Academy of Religion and the Academy of Jewish Philosophy on topics related to contemporary theory and Jewish Studies, the AJS meeting in 1990 seemed to be something of a breakthrough. This was followed by exciting Spring meetings in 1992 and 1993 at the Berman Center for Jewish Studies at Lehigh University where a small group of scholars from different fields in Jewish Studies and from both America and Israel met to see if our respective interests in postmodern theories of interpretation and culture could allow us to explore connections in our work. A number of us were energized by Buber's notion of dialogue, by Rosenzweig's notion of "speechthinking," and by the kind of rich interchanges we saw in Talmudic discourse. We wanted to be able to talk about ourselves, our universities, our Jewish communities and about Israel, about Jewish men and women and also about God and torah and prayer. It could not be some Jewish Esalen session because poststructural theory gave us our focus but still we wanted to move through the theory to address in new ways vital issues that concerned us. We all had come to a similar conclusion that the older methods of Jewish scholarship were

deficient in providing us with the profound analyses of Jewish texts and cultures that we wanted and that characteristically modern critiques and solutions to problems of modern Jewish life were no longer capable of adequately addressing contemporary "postmodern" problems.

Hopes were very high for the first night session at Lehigh in May 19, 1992 when about twenty of us met to introduce ourselves and to say how we came to contemporary theory. And, as I probably should have expected, the evening was a disaster. The Israelis almost walked out and it was not sure that they wanted to continue the next day. After hours of late night postsession review and analysis we came to a realization that our theories could have provided us with before we began: that we each came to the meeting with different preconceptions and expectations and that the distance which separates American Jews from Israelis is extremely significant for the ways in which we conceptualize our scholarship and the issues of contemporary Israel and Judaism. Our first important lesson was thus a lesson in difference. Having realized this and having tacitly agreed to try to make our differences productive, we returned to our discussions of theory, talmud, gender, Hebrew literature and Jewish philosophy and sustained extremely fruitful and enriching dialogues at Lehigh in 1992, 1993, and 1994. These dialogues were displayed and continued in the e-mail network which Peter set up and David Seidenberg is now sustaining, in this electronic journal, and in the sessions which we ran at the AJS, AAR, and the Academy of Jewish philosophy. Last summer, (1995) Bob Gibbs and I joined together with the Hartman Institute to the Talmud Institute (see earlier). In Spring, '94, Gene Borowitz convened a meeting of us all HUC. And we look forward to our June, 1997 gathering.

These events, along with the considerable number of recently published books in Jewish Studies that employ postmodern approaches shows that we have reached a point of academic respectability and acceptance. But as we have gained this acceptance it is obvious that our differences are being brought into sharper focus. Each one of us utilizes and synthesizes theory

in ways which are unique and tied to a specialized field. Peter suggested in the last issue of this journal that the logic of postmodern Jewish reasoning is "shaky" like the staves which hold up a sukkah. I would add that the fabric which holds us together as postmodern Jewish scholars is as flimsy as the walls of a sukkah. As far as we have come in establishing a new approach to Jewish Studies we often seem close to walking away from each other and returning to enlarge the moats and sure up the defenses of our precious and unique intellectual castles. So as I look to our future I would bring us back to the initial impulses and motivations that brought us together. Wearied by the isolation, pettiness, and nastiness of much of public academic life, We came together to be energized by the ideals of dialogue and difference and to do serious thinking together about issues that vitally affected us and the larger Jewish communities in which we live.

To close with a personal reflection I would say that 7 years after the AJS panel which energized me to put together my collection I am no longer as enamored as I was then of postmodern and poststructural theory. As powerful and complex as the variety of theories are I have lost something of my earlier zeal to articulate and uphold postmodern intellectual doctrines. In fact turning these theories into doctrine seems to contradict the spirit of creativity and openness inherent in the theories and is more a display of decline than celebration of them. Yet if my allegiance to certain tenets of postmodernism has waned a bit my commitment to the modes of interchange in postmodern Jewish thinking which we have developed has not. I am only more convinced of the power and rewards of the thinking together that is done when we converse through e-mail and when we meet together face to face. In these interchanges the abstractness and rigidity of theory is overcome. Our jargon is emptied into a common colloquial usage where its pragmatic value and truth can be weighed. Our differences are highlighted for sure but we also come to see what we hold in common. So for the future I want to encourage us to remain in the sukkah of postmodern Jewish thinking and scholarship as shaky and flimsily held together as it is and to continue to converse together on the

very important issues of postmodern Jewish scholarship and life which lie ahead.

FUTURES

OUR GRATITUDE TO THOSE WHO HAVE MADE GENEROUS CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR FUND DRIVE FOR THE JUNE 1997 CONFERENCE ON "TEXTUALITIES." Our thanks to Steven Kepnes, Michael Zank, Nancy Levene, Perry Dane, Peter and Vanessa Ochs, Marilyn Katz, Aryeh Cohen, Peter Knobel, and Martin Yaffe for their generous sh'lach manot!

OUR SECOND, URGENT CALL FOR ASSISTANCE: In the last issue, we made our first call, in five years, for financial assistance. The Network is published with only minimal clerical assistance: the rest of the work is volunteered by thinkers and academics like you. To raise any significant funds for the Network, we need to be more widely known. Our June, 1997 Conference will help make us known. But, in order to receive grant funding for that Conference, we need to show, SOON, that our membership has first given its strong support. Last issue, and through email, we have asked for you help. We are grateful for the contributions received so far, and now we have only 228 more of you to go! Please, fellow scholars, offer us this material sacrifice, along with your words! As we work toward our goal of $63,000 more, would you contribute from $20 to $250? Please make your tax deductible checks out to Drew University-PMJP and mail c/o P. Ochs, Program in Jewish Studies, Drew University, Madison, NJ 07940.

NEXT ISSUE: Among other items, we'll be featuring an essay on Scriptural hermeneutics, for discussion at our 1996 AAR annual meeting; Aryeh Cohen will present Part II of our responses to the 1995 Talmud Institute at

Princeton; there will be writings on pedagogy; and book reviews on Samuelson and Novak.

PEACE, WAR, POLITICS AND LOSS: We welcome submissions on postmodern Jewish philosophy's means of responding to the agonizing issues of peace, war, and politics in Israel.

NETWORK MEMBERS

A list of the members of PMJN will be sent to the e-mail recipients of 5.1 under separate cover. Please send us your updates at that time. To see a copy of the "POMO@jtsa.edu" list, write to "listserv@jtsa.edu" with the command "rev pomo". You must be a subscriber to "pomo" to use this command. To subscribe, send the message "sub pomo Your Name" to the same address. To get a list of the additional members of PMJN, or for more information about the "POMO", write to _____.