

# Another Reformation

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POSTLIBERAL CHRISTIANITY  
AND THE JEWS

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# 1

## Introduction

### CHRISTIAN POSTLIBERALISM AND THE JEWS

**T**his book introduces and tests one hypothesis: that as demonstrated through the efforts of a recent movement in Christian theology, there is a way for Christians to rededicate themselves to the gospel message and to classical patristic doctrines of the church without at the same time revisiting classical Christian supersessionism.<sup>1</sup>

Here *supersessionism*—or *replacement theology*—refers to a Christian belief that with the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, Israel’s covenant with God was superseded and replaced by God’s presence in the church as the body of Christ. Otherwise stated, this is the Christian belief that God’s love for the church replaced his love for Israel. Jews of the premodern period—and both Jews and Christians of the Enlightenment period—already expressed alarm at this doctrine. They argued that classical Christology was onerous because it was inseparable from supersessionism. Since the Shoah (the term is Hebrew for “Utter Destruction” and is the preferred term for the Holocaust), Christian as well as Jewish concern about supersessionism has grown more urgent. The argument is typically twofold. The first charge is that while classical supersessionism is not itself an expression of racial anti-Semitism, the doctrine has in fact engendered anti-Semitism among Christian populations. In turn, that anti-Semitism has in fact stimulated or justified Christian persecution of the Jews. The second charge is that while Nazism was itself anti-Christian,

1. My thanks to Daniel Weiss and Jacob Goodson for helpful comments on this chapter, and to Rodney Clapp for his significant edits.

it inherited the anti-Semitism that was a de facto consequence of Christian supersessionism. Thus, whatever its formal, theological justification or non-justification, supersessionism shows itself to be lethal as a public teaching.

After the horrible lessons of the Shoah, what should Christians do about this heritage of supersessionism? Rosemary Ruether's *Faith and Fratricide* offered what I will label the prototypical response of liberal, modernist Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Reiterating the Enlightenment argument, she concludes that Christology itself is the problem: since it necessarily engenders supersessionism, Christians are faced with the either-or choice of affirming classical Christology *or* freeing themselves of the evils of supersessionism.

The premise of this book is that the movement I will label "postliberal Christian theology" offers an alternative to this either-or choice. It offers a way to reaffirm classical Christology while eliding its supersessionism. To be more precise, my basic hypothesis divides into three more detailed hypotheses.

Subhypothesis 1: There is a logic of postliberal Christian theology according to which the reaffirmation of classical Christology after modernity is inseparably associated with the rejection of supersessionism.

This first hypothesis shapes the way I have compiled the central chapters of this book. To test it, I made a list of what I consider prototypical postmodern theologians: in the United States, George Lindbeck, Robert Jenson, and Stanley Hauerwas; in the United Kingdom, David Ford and Daniel Hardy; plus those among the "next generation" of postliberal theologians who address the issue of supersessionism.<sup>3</sup> I then constructed a vague (not overdefined) model of the patterns of postliberal reasoning that appear in selected writings of all of these theologians. Observing that each of them also argues against supersessionism, I collected and compared their different arguments and constructed another vague model, this time of the shared features of postliberal nonsupersessionism. Finally, I observed that each of these theologians argued for postliberalism in a way that correlated 100 percent of the time with an argument against supersessionism. If the reader wonders why I have not yet defined what I mean by *postliberalism*, it is because I had no clear definition of it throughout the project. I used the term to label whatever appeared, by the end of the project, to be the primary characteristics of the theologians I guessed merited study. By the end of this book—in the epilogue—I shall indeed relent, sum up these characteristics, and then compare them to descriptions some scholars have

2. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974). I comment on Ruether's account of supersessionism in Peter Ochs, "Judaism and Christian Theology," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed., ed. David Ford (London: Blackwell, 1997), 607–25 (at 615–16).

3. Kendall Soulen et alia: I review these in the appendix to this chapter.

offered of the “postliberal theologians” (my primary source will be the work of James Fodor).<sup>4</sup>

Subhypothesis 2: When evaluating a theology that claims to be “postliberal,” we can, in a vague sense, “measure” the consistency of the theology’s “postliberalism” by testing its nonsupersessionism. A theology that proves to be supersessionist will, on further inspection, prove to have been guided by some model other than postliberalism—that is, by a modern liberal or antiliberal model. Conversely, a theory that proves to be liberal or antiliberal will, on further inspection, prove to be supersessionist.

This second hypothesis offers a means of identifying “exceptions that prove the rule” of the first hypothesis, by alerting us to theologies that are postliberal *except in ways that also correspond to their supersessionism* (or that are nonsupersessionist except in ways that also correspond to their liberalism/antiliberalism). The hypothesis thus helps us identify persistently liberal or antiliberal tendencies within a theology that otherwise promotes a postliberal agenda: if the theology proves to be supersessionist, to that degree it will also display tendencies that work against its postliberalism.

To test this hypothesis in varieties of American Protestant postliberalism, I have added a chapter on John Howard Yoder, of blessed memory. Without explicitly naming it as such, Yoder offers his theology as an equivalent of what I call Christian postliberalism, and he associates that postliberalism with nonsupersessionism. In practice, however, his arguments about Judaism include some clearly supersessionist claims. Is this an exception to our rule? I argue that it is not, since these supersessionist claims also lead us to elements of his theology that replay liberal and antiliberal tendencies. To test the hypothesis for varieties of British postliberalism, I have added a chapter on John Milbank. Milbank’s critique of modernist and liberal postmodernist thinkers puts him self-consciously in the postliberal camp, albeit in a much more general sense. He is often critical of the others in my collection of postliberals, however, *and* he is unapologetic about a degree of Christian supersessionism. How then shall I account for his postliberal tendencies? Shall I accept his criticisms and reevaluate my collection as burdened by a combination of persistent liberalism and fideism? Guided by the second hypothesis, I say no, it is more likely the other way around: Milbank’s supersessionist claims lead us to elements of his theology that replay liberal and antiliberal tendencies.

Subhypothesis 3 tests the relative power of postliberal versus liberal versus antiliberal Christian theologies to provide a working alternative to Christian super-

4. James Fodor, “Postliberal Theology,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, 3rd ed., ed. David Ford with Rachel Muers (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005).

sessionism. Its three claims are (a) that today's antiliberal Christian theologies bring with them a contemporary version of classical Christian supersessionism; (b) that, as typified by Ruether's analysis, liberal Christian theologies seek a form of nonsupersessionist Christianity but tend to give rise to unintended forms of supersessionism; (c) that postliberal Christian theologies provide the most reliable protection against formal or de facto supersessionism.

Hypothesis 3 cannot be thoroughly tested in this book, since I am commenting directly only on postliberal writings, without comparable text-work on liberal and antiliberal works. Within the limits of this book, I attempt only to show how the postliberal theologians endorse this hypothesis and how their detailed arguments against liberal and antiliberal theologies would enable us to test the hypothesis on another occasion.

What I mean by "postliberalism" will become apparent only through careful study of the works of the postliberal theologians, and there will of course be as many subvarieties of postliberalism as there are postliberal theologians. I am, however, also collecting these varieties from my own limited perspective, and it may help readers if I offer some introductory comments about the generalizations I tend to make about Christian postliberalism.

## The Epoch of Postliberal Theology: A Typological Approach

I believe we are now in a new epoch of Christian and Jewish theologies and a new epoch of relations between Christianity and Judaism. According to the typology that informs this book, this is the epoch, at once, of postliberal Christian theologies, postmodern Jewish philosophies, and both Jewish and Christian theologies after the Shoah. Thinking typologically more than historically, I would also label this the third of three major epochs, thus far, in Jewish-Christian relations.

In these terms, the first epoch was and is the Epoch of Formation. This is the time of Jewish and of Christian communal self-definition, when each community defined the other only *as* other—as an offense to its self-definition or a threat to its ideological and social boundaries. The second epoch was and is the Epoch of Assimilation. This is the period of attempts by Christians and Jews to overcome the nastier consequences of mutual exclusion by assimilating their different scriptural traditions to a single religion of reason: a religion of ethics and enlightenment for the new nation-states and market economies of Europe.

The third epoch is the one we have just entered—at least according to the worldview I will attribute to both Jewish and Christian postliberals. This is the epoch of a relationality that invites both critical reason *and* a reaffirmation of scriptural revelation and the traditions of belief and practice that interpret it. This is a relationality, furthermore, that invites Jews to be Jewish in

their way, Christians to be Christian in their way, and both to discover some complementary purpose in this relationality itself. The distinctiveness of the third epoch may be captured in this observation: that Immanuel Kant, along with the Neologians and other thoughtful contributors to the second epoch, also sought forms of relation that would enable at least some religious communities to affirm one another's existence. They sought to construct these relations, however, as products of human reason and will, while the relationality of the third epoch is seeded by God alone. As critical thinkers, theologians of this epoch—I will label them “postliberal theologians”—argue against the a-priority of any universal canon of human reason. They argue that the only reason we share as a species is God's reason, and God's reason is embedded in the orders of creation and the words of Scripture in a way that enables us to observe *that* it is there but not to articulate its universal character through any finite set of humanly constructed propositions. Despite their benevolent wishes, the Neologians and Kantians therefore constructed ideas of relation that tended to reproduce rather than replace the antinomies they sought to resolve.

Postliberal theologians do not, therefore, seek to construct any account of the overlapping purposes of Christianity and Judaism. Nor, however, do they presume that their respective religious pieties need be enacted in the fashion of first epoch “formations”: tightly defined by collections of theological propositions that identify the other religion as prototype of what is contrary to the purposes of one's own religion. They believe, instead, that they are called at this time in salvation history to reaffirm the faiths of their primordial communities (rabbinic and early church), to reform their contemporary communities in light of these faiths, *and* to expect that their reaffirmations need not entail denigrating the religious purposes of the other community.

Because it is the focus of this book, I have introduced the third epoch, or Epoch of Postliberalism, with respect to its implications for Jewish–Christian theological relations. This epoch is, however, *not* first and foremost about these relations. It is first and foremost a time when Christian theologians and Jewish theologians both began to observe that their respective communities were no longer burdened primarily by the deep questions that stimulated the second epoch and no longer strengthened by that epoch's answers. On the congregational level, postliberalism's primary question is how to relocate a pattern of religious belief and practice that is free from the regnant antinomy of liberal humanism versus reactionary orthodoxy. On the level of philosophical and theological reflection, its primary question is how to rearticulate the rationality that emerges from out of the scriptural traditions, in place of the regnant dialectic between antimodern skepticism and fideism on the one side and, on the other side, various efforts to reassert the “universality” of rationalist discourses and arguments. Surprisingly enough, this dialectic cuts across secular and religious philosophies.

## The Postliberal Critique: A Logical Approach

From a postliberal perspective, the hegemonic modern paradigms of reason (with all their attendant “isms”) unraveled because they had completed their time of civilizational utility, not because some new party of thinkers and ideologues foisted a postmodern or antimodern agenda on the West. This argument implies that, against some postmodernist claims, the modern paradigms had their sphere and time of usefulness. To say their time has passed therefore means *neither* that we can now “undo” the “modern error” and “get back to” various premodern orthodoxies, *nor* that we can now construct patterns of discourse and practice that will be free of the “pretensions” or “errors” of modern and premodern civilizations. *Postliberalism* refers to an activity of reformation directed at once to the church or synagogue and to the university (or, more broadly, the *seculum* as a public order). For postliberalism, “reformation” implies both reaffirmation and correction. Like other movements of reform or revitalization, it seeks to criticize certain institutions from within—from *deep* within, that is, which means according to norms embedded within the practices and histories of those institutions, but not necessarily visible to contemporary practitioners and leaders. Postliberals often attempt, therefore, to reclaim what they consider prototypical sources and norms of the church or synagogue and of the university (or *seculum*) and to offer their criticisms from out of these sources and norms. For this reason, they are not critics of modern or premodern civilization; these civilizations are constitutive of their own “flesh”—their assumptions, languages, and sources of belief. They are critical only of efforts to repair errant social and religious practices today by reapplying rules of reform that were shaped specifically to meet the needs and concerns of an earlier age, modern or premodern. Their surprising discovery is that such efforts tend to display the same logical form, whether they are placed in the service of a rationalist or antirationalist, or a religious or a secular, agenda.

This pervasive logical form is to define one’s position as the logical contradictory of a position one is criticizing: for example, defining one’s secular postmodernism as the logical contradictory of some religious dogmatism, or one’s rational neo-orthodoxy as the logical contradictory of some relativist postmodernism. Such efforts appear to trace steps like the following:

- collecting examples of an offending practice (a, b, c . . . n);
- suggesting that this collection displays a class character that can be defined according to a finite set of propositions, or, in other words, reduced to a relatively simple propositional function  $[P = (a, b, c . . . n), \text{ where } P = f(x)]$ ;
- promoting another practice (Q) as both the desirable alternative to the offending practice (P) and the desirable means of repairing P (or of repairing institutions that errantly pursue P);



- assuming that  $Q$  can also be defined according to a finite set of propositions (which therefore corresponds to another relatively simple propositional function [ $Q = (x, y, z \dots n)$ , where  $Q = g(x)$ ]);
- intentionally or unintentionally, therefore, presupposing that  $Q$  and  $P$  are logical contradictories—in other words, that both  $P$  and  $Q$  refer to a domain of possible practices ( $W$ ), such that the domain is served by either  $P$  or  $Q$  ( $W = P \cup Q$ ), where  $P \neq Q$ .

Applied to the critique of lived practices, the law of the excluded middle, with its attendant propositional calculus, generates what we might call a hermeneutics of war. This is a mode of reparative argument that generates comparable sets of antagonistic postures regardless of the goal of one's argument. It makes secularists, religionists, rationalists, and irrationalists all partners to exclusivist and dogmatic politics and positivist epistemologies. They are positivist because  $Q$  is knowable by way of sets of clear and distinct propositions; they are exclusivist because  $Q \neq P$ , which means we know that practices will be either  $Q$  or  $P$ , that  $Q$  is correct and that it excludes  $P$ .

Postliberals accordingly get themselves into trouble with either side of the modern dialectic of rationalists versus irrationalists, secularists (or liberals) versus religionists (or neo-orthodox). Since proponents of any one of these four persuasions employ the logic of propositions and excluded middles, they assume that if postliberals object to given  $Q$ , then they must be affirming  $P$ —if not neo-orthodox, then secular; if not rationalist, then irrationalist, and so on. “Mediators” (to adapt Hans Frei's term “mediating theologians”)—like Neologians, Kantians, or some liberal theologians today—also object to these four dogmatisms. They additionally object to postliberalism, however, tending to assimilate postliberalism to an antirationalist neo-orthodoxy. This tendency may be a sign that when push comes to shove, the mediators are more anxious about the ills of religious enthusiasm than about the ills of secular humanism, and more concerned, therefore, to protect the authority and autonomy of human reason than the authority and autonomy of the divine will. We should indeed expect that individual thinkers are most vigilant in protecting against the ills they themselves have suffered and witnessed. One suffered from (or observed those who suffered from) brutal religionists, another from brutal irrationalists, another from condescending rationalists, and so on. This is also to say, however, that there is just so much one can learn from individuals qua individuals. Insofar as an individual's ideology is defined by some reaction to real suffering, it demands attention as a symptom of this suffering, however much it will fail also to serve as a reliable guideline for how to repair this suffering.

To be consistent with their own logic, postliberals cannot be dismissive of those who practice the logics of excluded middles. These may be the logics of war, but they are also the logics of individual suffering. The moment of

suffering may even serve as *fons et origo* of the excluded middle. When, God forbid, one suffers, then there *are* only two possible predicates of the world one knows: *in* suffering or *out* of it, either this pain or its cessation. As defined by this suffering, there are only two values in the world: what maintains this suffering and what gets rid of it. As defined by those values, there are only two kinds of actions: those that do and those that do not help relieve this suffering. And there are only two kinds of agents or persons: those who do and those who do not help relieve this suffering. Tragically, therefore, the logic of suffering is also a logic that suffers—that teaches exclusion and consequently can lay the groundwork for more suffering. Otherwise put, the one who suffers, qua sufferer, is not a source of his or her or anyone else’s redemption. Postliberalism must take cognizance of this implication of its own logic: one must have nothing but compassion for the *one* who suffers, but one must not learn the logic of redemption—or repair or reform—from the logic of suffering.

In sum, postliberalism emerges as an effort to help repair the kinds of suffering that mark the unraveling of the last epoch of Christianity and of Judaism and that are no longer repaired by the reparative reasoning nurtured by that epoch. How then shall postliberalism turn away from modern logic as a source of instruction at the same time that it turns toward it as a focus of care? Postliberal theologians have answered this question by relocating the relationality that is missing in the dichotomous logics of modernity.

### The Postliberal Alternative: A Theo-logic

As noted earlier, the Kantians and the “mediating theologians” recognized the need for such relationality. Their error—according to the postliberals—is that they sought to construct the relationality themselves rather than find it, which means receiving it as gift from the only One who provides the relationality. In different terms, we could say that the “middle” is excluded from modern thinking because it is excluded by the human will and by concepts formulated according to the desires of that will. Kantian and other mediators desire an end to the logic of war but cannot help but reproduce it as a correlate of their very acts of desire. Put in yet another way, these are finite acts offered to take the place of an infinite activity: quite literally, they are sets of finite propositions (from the claim “God is love” to the categorical imperative) offered as substitute for the infinite Word that alone creates, reveals, and redeems.

Modern critics might label this postliberal turn to God “confessional” and therefore inappropriate to “academic” discourse. The postliberal response is that, as used in this way, the term *confessional* belongs to a contrast pair—confessional versus academic—that is meaningful only according to a modern logic of excluded middle. But for the logics that inform postliberalism, the contrast pair “confessional”/“academic” predicates the manner of attention

a human being may pay to God, or another point of reference, but it does not characterize the referent itself. To refer to a referent confessionally, for example, may be to refer in light of the referent's relation to me (or to refer "subjectively"), while referring academically may be to refer in light of the referent's relation to other objects of my attention (or to refer "objectively"). Put this way, "confessional"/"academic" and "subjective"/"objective" no longer refer to logical contradictories. On one count, they no longer "refer" at all. According to Friedrich Ludwig Gottlob Frege's very early postmodern distinction between sense and reference, the contrast pair concerns sense and not reference—the mode of attention rather than the object of attention. On a second count, the two elements of this pair are not mutually exclusive; I may consider a referent from the perspectives of its relations *both* to me (as knower) *and* to other objects of my knowing. Frege's distinction represents an emergent critique of modern logic, because it allows us to classify the referent as a *given*, with which we may come into *relation*, but which we cannot *constitute* or "capture" through our conceptualizations of it. It thus exceeds the dichotomizing influences of the human will. The distinction falls short of the later critique we call "postliberal," however, because it does not yet provide a term for relations between sense and reference, or between the referent and its senses. It still displays itself, in other words, in terms of a contrast pair (here, sense/reference), because it still adopts the point of view of the human knower.

Why should modern logic have such a persistent influence? I believe that postliberalism turns on the following hypothesis: that *the issue is not modernity or secularism, per se, but the dyadic<sup>5</sup> logics that inhabit both secularism and the antisecular religious movements that rise up to repel it*. If so, we still need to ask, why should these logics have such a persistent influence in modernity? The postliberal answer rests, I believe, on the following series of axioms through which the logic of postliberalism is received as theo-logic.

*Axiom 1.* As I have suggested, *the fundamental problem to which postliberalism responds is not modernity or modernism but a more general tendency to reduce the logic that guides our efforts at societal and ecclesial repair to a logic of dyads*. In these terms, a "logic of repair" refers to the underlying rules of reasoning that guide efforts to repair any form of suffering and any form of institutional or societal violence or dysfunction. At issue, in particular, are rules for repairing rules of repair. I will say a logic of repair is "reduced to a logic of dyads" when it portrays any problematic situation as the consequence of some faulty behavior X, which is the logical contradictory of some correct

5. When the lived situation calls for a dichotomous logic—as in the case of suffering—I label the logic *binary*. When binary logics are employed inappropriately, I label them *dyadic*. For a more detailed treatment of this distinction, see Peter Ochs, "Response: Reflections on Binarism," in special issue "Symposium: Pragmatism and Biblical Hermeneutics—The Work of Peter Ochs," *Modern Theology* 24, no. 3 (July 2008): 487–98, available at [www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/120085675/issue](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/120085675/issue).

behavior  $-X$  (where  $X$  and  $-X$  are treated as if they constituted the universe of all really possible solutions to the problem). To repeat what I wrote earlier, postliberalism is critical of dyadic logics of repair, in favor of what we will see is a relational logic of repair.

*Axiom 2. Any effort at repair begins with a perception of suffering* (or of a problematic situation, to make use of John Dewey's term), *and any such perception is, by definition, governed by a binary logic.* According to this logic, whatever stimulates a perception of suffering also stimulates a desire to perceive the absence of that suffering; the perception of suffering is therefore part of a contrast pair, suffering/nonsuffering, or  $-X/X$ .

*Axiom 3. For a conceivable set of persons whom we might label "passive ones," the perception of suffering stimulates a desire for nonsuffering but no means of contributing actively to that nonsuffering.* If nonsuffering comes, it is unpredictable. For passive ones, life therefore tends to acquire a tragic character, since life often stimulates the desire for nonsuffering but less often satisfies it. For another set of persons, whom we might label "active ones," the desire for nonsuffering stimulates a search for whatever might bring it about. For active ones, the perception of suffering thus stimulates end-directed behavior. The pragmatic philosopher Charles Peirce classified "modern, Cartesian philosophy" as what, in these terms, we might relabel "endless active searching." In Peirce's reading, Cartesian philosophers find no source of relief (either to suffering or the desire to see it relieved) because they trust only what they themselves can see. They see suffering, but they cannot see a way out of it, because, in Peirce's reading, the way out lies within what they cannot see: sources of repair that are embedded deep within the lives, institutions, societies, and traditions of those who suffer.<sup>6</sup> These sources cannot be seen, but they can be accessed in other ways.

The most general logical lesson to draw from axioms 1–3 is that the logic of suffering is not the logic of repair. The logic of suffering is appropriately binary because suffering is perceivable. Suffering is perceived as that which stimulates a desire for its absence; that desire is either present or not present, a sign that suffering is either present (to the perceiver) or not present. In these terms, "active ones" fail to become agents of repair, because they adopt the logic of suffering as if it were also the logic of repair: presuming that the source of repair is perceivable, they fail to locate this source; discounting the nonvisible, they therefore presume that this source cannot be found and that either they themselves must be agents of repair or there are none.

6. See the account of "Cartesian Anxiety" in Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 8–19. And see the claim that Peirce criticized Descartes for doubting too much and then believing too much, in Susan Haack, "Descartes, Peirce, and the Cognitive Community," in *The Relevance of Charles Peirce*, ed. Eugene Freeman (LaSalle, IL: The Hegeler Institute for The Monist Library of Philosophy, 1983), 238–63.

*Axiom 4.* To become an agent of repair, one must first be able to perceive suffering, which is, in part, to participate in the binary logic of suffering. To move, however, from perception to reparative action, one must also be able to give oneself to another, relational logic. Perhaps the most telling axiom of postliberalism is this: one's search for instruments of repair must, if it is to succeed, be guided by a relational (and thus nondyadic) logic of inquiry. Until they are freed from the dyadic logic that enabled them to perceive suffering in the first place, would-be repairers will remain unintentional agents of suffering, or at least agents of nonrepair. This means that efforts of repair require at least two moments of personal transformation: one must first be transformed into a perceiver of suffering (whose sole concern is to transform the  $-X$  of suffering into the  $X$  of nonsuffering) and then transformed into an agent of rescue (who is prepared to share in some process of repair that has not yet made itself known). But where is this process to be found? How, in other words, is one to leave one logic for another?

*Axiom 5.* One axiom of postliberal logic is that *one cannot transform oneself. Only the presence of one who suffers can transform a participant in everyday life into "one who perceives suffering"*: the sufferer draws this one out of the monologic of everyday quiet into the dyadic logic of suffering. And only the presence of "one who repairs suffering" can transform this perceiver-of-suffering into an actual agent of repair: the repairer draws this one into the relational logic of repair. In short, it is always some other who is the agent of one's transformation.

This axiom may be illustrated in more concrete terms. Drawing on Dewey's pragmatic analyses of institutions, we might conceive of social institutions as if they were progressively ordered to serve the relative ends of repairing suffering, then of repairing the repair of suffering, and so on. Say we start with the *Lebenswelt*, or the world of everyday practices that includes not only doing this or that but also repairing how one does this or that. A doorknob won't turn, so I oil it. Then I scratch myself, so I put on a Band-Aid. But say I still cannot open the door, or I cut myself badly. We might use the label *service institutions* for the first-order institutions of repair that include the door company I call because I cannot open it myself, and the hospital I run to because I cannot mend myself. But (to follow just one illustrative line of repair), say the doctors do not know how to mend cuts like mine. We might use the label *reparative sciences* for the second-order institutions—like medical schools and research facilities—that recommend ways of repairing the first-order ones. Many disciplines of the academy should serve as reparative sciences for various subgroups of service institutions. But say medical scientists fail to help doctors mend their ways of mending certain injuries. We might use the label *reparative philosophy* for the third-order institution of philosophic metascience that examines the dysfunctions of other academic disciplines and recommends ways of repairing them. Yet again, say the philosophers fail

to make such reparative use of their discipline. Pragmatism arose as a means of calling philosophers back to this task. Some pragmatists claimed that the source of this “call” is a rule of common sense—some light of nature, we might say, that most philosophers failed to perceive.

Charles Peirce argued that while many philosophic failings may be repaired by common sense, there are classes of failings that common sense cannot repair.<sup>7</sup> One is the large class of questions over which any generation of philosophers argues interminably, such as questions of the eternity versus contingency of the material world, or of ontological or epistemological realism versus nominalism, or of rationalism versus empiricism, or of the relative power of phenomenological versus analytic modes of philosophic inquiry. Pragmatists read such antinomies as marks of only one mode of reasoning, not of reasoning or of common sense itself. They say that, like suffering, such marks should stimulate philosophers to look elsewhere for help: to look by way of a different logic and different order of reasoning. A more self-evident class of failings is the class of societal and civilizational failings, when “things fall apart” and received systems of language and meaning are sources of more suffering than repair. Within the academic disciplines, these failings are analogous to the epistemological crises that stimulate what Thomas Kuhn labeled scientific “paradigm shifts.” Peirce argued that these classes of failings mark the limits of common sense, when philosophers themselves turn to other practices such as mathematics, art, and prophecy for new sources of repair and new insights for how to seek repair.

In his “Neglected Argument for the Reality of God,” Peirce recommended “musement” on each order of experience as a means of recognizing the reality of God and of renewing and reforming one’s logic of inquiry into the character of God’s creation. Elsewhere, he suggested that pragmatism is nothing other than a logical corollary to Jesus’s words “Ye shall know them by their fruit.” While they do not draw directly on Peirce’s work, the postliberal theologians follow an analogous line of reasoning: when philosophers fail to perceive suffering and to reason in response to it, then the Word of God, alone, can call them back to their reparative task.

*Axiom 6. Relational logic as theo-logic.* As suggested by Peirce’s approach, the relational logic of repair is ultimately a theo-logic, since God remains the ultimate source of the pragmatist’s calling and of the pragmatic rule for reorienting philosophy to its reparative service.

*Axiom 7. Scripture as instruction in reparative logic.* God is the source of pragmatic repair, by way of God’s Word. Peirce argued as if this meant

7. See Charles Peirce’s discussions of what he calls “Scotch Common-sense Realism,” for example, Charles Peirce, “Issues of Pragmaticism,” *Monist* 15 (1905): 481–99, rpt. in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1932), 5:438–63. Also, “Consequences of Critical Common-Sensism” (1905), in 5:502–37.

God's Word in creation as well as (and perhaps even more significantly than) God's Word in revelation or Scripture. I argue, however, that Peirce's logic of science requires grounding pragmatic repair ultimately in the revealed Word: Scripture read as instruction in the logic of repairing conditions of suffering. My account of the reparative order of social institutions identifies the limits of our society's capacity to hear the reparative logic inherent in the laws of creation. These are the laws to which service institutions appeal when they repair everyday problems, to which scientists appeal when they repair failed service institutions, and to which philosophers appeal when they repair failed sciences. But failed philosophies mark the limits of our society's capacities to correct its characterizations of the laws of creation. Pragmatists can repair failed philosophies only if they are graced with instructions that exceed these capacities. Based on Peirce's inadequately developed suggestions on the logic of his argument, and on the logic of its hermeneutical sources in Augustine's semiotics, I argue that these instructions are delivered only by readings of Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

Pragmatism's reparative reasoning is thus a species of scriptural reasoning, which operates by drawing the dyadic logic of any failed practice of philosophy into a transformative relation to the divine Word. This means that a failed philosophic practice provides the context for a reparative reading of Scripture, so that, with respect to this practice (*p*), a given text or set of texts (*S*)<sup>9</sup> discloses the reparative meaning  $p_r$  ( $pSp_r$ ). This latter is "the meaning of *S* as a set of instructions for repairing *p*." For a reparative scriptural reasoning, in other words, a text of Scripture acquires performative meaning as a set of instructions about how to repair the failed philosophic practice. To adduce such a meaning is, for the pragmatist, to repair philosophic practice through the grace and guidance of the divine Word. We may look to Exodus for a prototype of this kind of guidance. "Who shall I say You are?" asks Moses. *Ebyeh*, says God, then *ebyeh imach*, "I will be with you": translated into our vocabulary, "Wherever your understanding of creation fails and you can no longer heal your society's wounds, I will be with you—*ebyeh* will be with you, that Name itself" (see Exod. 3:13–14).

Through the chapters of this book, I will offer more specific illustrations of postliberal Christianity's efforts to repair modern philosophies and theologies through the Name and the Word disclosed in Scripture. These efforts are not displayed by way of the dyadic logic of propositions, as if one could reduce the reparative force of scriptural reasoning to discrete judgments (as if one could claim, "Because He said 'This is My servant, whom I uphold' [Isa. 42:1], we know that Israel should not fret about its suffering"). The efforts

8. See Peter Ochs, "Reparative Reasoning: From Peirce's Pragmatism to Augustine's Scriptural Semiotic," *Modern Theology* 25, no. 2 (2009): 187–215.

9. Or a chain of texts that embeds scriptural texts in a tradition of commentary.



are displayed instead by way of the relational logic that would, for example, bring the suffering of some single group of people to the attention of some particular community of Israel, and bring that community to some particular texts of Scripture, and those texts to the context of that suffering, and that communion of text, interpreters, and sufferers to some series of inquiries, actions, and testings that continues until the suffering is relieved.

*Corollary (7a). There is no relationality without God.* This is not to declare some sort of occasionalism (that each event of relation displays the consequence of a separate divine act), or some sort of scriptural positivism (that we enter into “true” relations only when we call on the Name revealed in Scripture). It is instead to draw out the theological corollary of postliberalism’s pragmatism (axioms 1–6) and its scriptural reasoning (axioms 7–9), or, overall, what we might label its “scriptural pragmatism.” It may be useful at this point to illustrate the implications of scriptural pragmatism on two different levels of analysis.

On a *very general level* of analysis, scriptural pragmatism implies that everyday life in this order of creation (*maaseh b’reshit*) includes conditions of suffering and conditions for the repair of suffering. *Suffering* refers, metaphysically, to an event of separation within the relational continuum that characterizes a given order of creation. It therefore characterizes not only the “sufferer,” whose separateness is a defining mark of this suffering, but also the continuum, which is actually and not merely nominally interrupted by this event. Epistemologically, *suffering* refers to events that are brought to our attention only by interruptions in our unselfconscious everyday conduct and our unselfconscious activities of cognition. Logically, *suffering* refers to events that we can identify in, and only in, the binary logic of propositions. Theologically, then—and theology shows how all our modes of reasoning are gathered and guided by the scriptural Word—suffering tears the fabric of some order of creation, and the sound of suffering goes up to God and gains God’s attention.

*Repair* refers, metaphysically, to activities that reintegrate the sufferer and a given order of creation. Strictly speaking, this is not the “same” order from which the sufferer was separated: in this context, “sameness” is not part of the elemental vocabulary of postliberal theology, because both the suffering and its repair are matters of relation, not distinct identities. There is no neutral, static perspective from which to imagine that the relationality or continuity of an order of creation was *X* and remains *X*. In the words of the rabbinic daily morning prayer service, “God daily renews the order of creation”—and not only daily but also whenever God appears in the Name of *ehyeh imach* to accompany the sufferer. Epistemologically, repair is recognized only “from the inside,” as an activity that engages the knower in the relational work of transforming conditions of suffering into conditions, again, of unselfconscious living within some order of creation. Logically, the activity of repair cannot



be identified by any discrete series of propositions formed by dyadic logics. It can be diagrammed only through narratives that imitate the activity, thereby providing both illustration and instruction in the practice of repair. Scripture is the prototype as well as the primary book of instruction in how to compose new diagrams of repair, which Peirce calls “existential graphs.” Peirce’s primary interest was in composing formal diagrams of this kind, including his “logic of relations.” Unlike textbooks of modern logic, Peirce’s logics are meant to perform, as well as represent, their subject matter. This means that the formal scribblings of a logic of relations remain existentially linked to the context of their composition: like Scripture, a formal logic of relations is not sent off into the world to be read in any way by anyone; instead, it calls its readers into finite sets of relations that bind author, context, and reader together in context-specific ways. In these terms, I believe we may also say that when Scripture diagrams reparative activity, then Scripture functions in turn like a logic of repair. If so, then I may also read the legal midrash (scriptural interpretations) of the Talmud as diagrams of reparative activity. To take another example, I may also read Augustine’s *Confessions* this way, and also his *De doctrina christiana* and *De Trinitate*.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, the logic of repair is already a theo-logic, *since we know of no adequate way of analyzing the process of repair without being guided by the reparative logic of Scripture*. All other logics—and thus the logics of all nonpragmatic philosophies—are either reducible to the dyadic logic of suffering or (as employed, for example, in relativity theory and quantum physics) abstracted from their reparative function.

On a *more technical level* of analysis, scriptural pragmatism draws a distinction between two dimensions of relationality. First, the words (and “relations”) of creation: scriptural pragmatism refers to the divine Word in the orders of creation as naming both the “relational continuity” we attribute to the worlds of everyday life and the source of reparative logic that is intrinsic to those worlds. Within the “reparative order of social institutions” I described earlier, the words of creation would therefore represent the sources of reparative logic as employed by service institutions, scientists, and philosophers. Second, there are the revealed words (and “relations”) of Scripture (axiom 5). Pragmatists are called to repair philosophic practices, however, because our society does not always have access to the reparative potential of the orders of creation. The revealed Word offers instruction in how to repair failed philosophies—including how to repair failed practices of pragmatism. Since pragmatism is a practice of scriptural reasoning, what we call “failed pragmatisms” would also include failed scriptural theologies. For postliberal Christianity, the term *theology* is applied only to practices of scriptural reasoning that are employed to repair failed philosophies.

10. See Ochs, “Reparative Reasoning.”

*Axiom 8. Modern logic as a falling out of grace or of scriptural instruction and thus out of the relational logic of God's reparative presence.* Why, finally, should modern logic have such a persistent influence in our society? To summarize: On the basis of something like these eight axioms, postliberal Christian theology argues that the issue is not modernity per se but the tendency of modern academics (scientists and philosophers) and modern theologians—both liberal and antiliberal—to adopt the dyadic logic of propositions as a reparative logic. The logical consequence of this move is to reiterate conditions of suffering rather than to remove them. The societal consequence is to leave failed philosophies and theologies unrepaired and thus to leave a legacy of unrepaired sciences and unrepaired service institutions. But in the face of such failure, what could account for the persistence of this modern tendency? There will be many situations in which—and context-specific reasons why—individual thinkers have sought to overgeneralize the function of dyadic logics in this way, thereby displacing relational and, ultimately, scriptural logics from their appropriate places in the academy, the churches, and the social order more generally. But any general account of these errors will have to refer as well to failures of will, and that means to sin. The issue of sin must arise because reparative logic is not just a method but any of an indefinitely large family of methods engendered by scriptural reasoning, which means engendered by attending to the direct presence of God as condition for reparative work. By saying “direct presence,” I do not invoke some extrarelatational account of religious experience or intuition, for the divine Word is itself God's direct presence in human lives. In Peirce's words, we directly perceive the relational being of God in our midst. Since this being is relational, our perception is irreducible to the form of discrete propositions and articulated only through the relational processes we have associated with reparative reasoning or with more concrete displays of reparative work.

What I call “modern logic” refers to the tendency of liberal and antiliberal philosophers and theologians to segregate realms of “human” and “divine” discourse, to categorize their reparative work as performed strictly within and concerning the human realm, and thereby to lay claim to rules of reparative reasoning that can be defined clearly and distinctly. The latter step is the most telling. Whatever the philosopher or theologian's confession—whether agnostic, atheist, or orthodox—this step defines the ultimate source of repair as within our human ken. The postliberal claim is that this step reduces reparative activity to the dyadic logics of modernity. Whatever these individual thinkers may believe or confess, the logics they practice exclude the elemental marks of pragmatic repair:

- a. context-specificity (that the repair addresses the conditions of suffering they are meant to repair);

- b. relationality (that the repair binds together sufferer, agent of repair, and source of repair);
- c. vagueness (that the rules of repair cannot be diagrammed independent of this specific activity of repair); and therefore
- d. recognition of the ultimate source of repair (God).

Secular and some liberal models of repair self-consciously exclude *d* but also tend to exclude *a–c* in the name of “objectivity.” Postmodern models tend to exclude *d* but to claim *a* and some form of *b*; they tend to confuse *c* with indeterminacy, overlooking the binding character of both vagueness and relationality. Antiliberal theologians (and, we may add, many contemporary “Christian philosophers”) tend to favor a theological positivism that claims *d* while excluding *a*, *b*, and especially *c*. Postliberal theologians argue that by eschewing vague logics in favor of what they consider “clear and distinct statements of their faith,” antiliberal theologians deny God a direct place in their professional work. As for those who claim that their discrete theological propositions display God’s direct presence, the postliberal theologians call them logically confused, since logical discreteness is a property only of humanly constructed artifacts, as guided by dyadic logics.

*Axiom 9.* How, then, does postliberal Christian theology propose to repair the tendency of liberal and antiliberal thinkers to reduce the logic of repair to the dyadic logics of modernity? The answer is *the project of postliberal Christian theology itself* and the subject of all the chapters of this book.

## But Why the Jews?

Postliberal Christianity does not first arise out of a concern for the Jews, or out of a direct response to the Shoah. It arises first as a response to the discomforts of, and divisions within, the church in the waning years of modernity—in these years that have displayed the unhappy societal consequences of modernity’s dyadic logics. Postliberal Christianity is thus first a movement to recover a voice for the church in the modern academy and in modern secular society; to recover the voice of Scripture within the church; to recover the place of communal discourse and interpretation within the church’s reception of Scripture; to recover the place of disciplined reason within the life of each interpreting community of the church; to recover reason’s parentage in the Word of God, or Logos; and to recover scriptural reasoning’s freedom from subservience to the *ratio* of any single human project (Athenian, French, or Syro-Aramaic, for that matter), including projects that define themselves by rejecting any such project (anti-Greek, antimodern, or antipatristic). Once engaged in this movement, postliberal theologians discover that these activities of recovery lead them, second, to a new relationship with the Old Testament, with Israel’s

ancient covenant with God, and with the Jews as a religious people during the time of Jesus and into the rabbinic period that continues today.

Having entered this new relationship to the people Israel, these theologians discover that their postliberalism excludes supersessionism. The reason for this is not simply self-evident, and there may be as many paths to reasoning about this as there are postliberal theologians. Before turning to those paths in the chapters to come, I may say this much about the general tendencies of the postliberals. Once having turned away from the conceptualist tendencies of modern theology, they tend not only to recenter their work in traditions of Gospel reading but also to transform the way they read the Gospel narratives. They tend to rediscover each Gospel *as itself* a rereading of the Old Testament narratives of the history of Israel.<sup>11</sup> Why, however, would they not then read the Gospels as an end and a fulfillment of Israel's history? The postliberals tend to observe that their critique of dyadic logics in modernity applies to dyadic logics operative in early Christian exegesis as well. As they see it, one effect of such logics is to reify difference as contradiction—both logical and theo-logical—so that if the Synoptic Gospels as well as Paul draw distinctions between non-Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles, then the one must be unredeemed if the other is redeemed, the one unloved by God as the other is loved. If the logic of postliberalism is to transform contradiction into mere difference, then Jews would remain different from Gentile Christians, but the character of their difference would not be apparent a priori. Some mystery would adhere to that difference (“vagueness” in logical terms), and the mystery would be clarified only through a prayerful and context-specific process of scriptural interpretation, or what I call “scriptural reasoning.” Nonsupersessionism would not be the logical contradiction of supersessionism but something else, the character of which would show itself only through the concrete details of postliberal inquiry in its specific historical contexts.<sup>12</sup> For the postliberal theologians described in this book, these contexts are shaped by their individual responses to more events than I can number here, but among them several appear prominent: the waning of modernity, the aftermath of the Shoah, the emergence of a Jewish state, new forms of union and disunion

11. It is misnomer to label postliberal theology “narrative theology,” since an interest in narrative textuality is not a source of the movement but only one of its consequences. One might say instead that postliberalism is non-nonnarrativist. Inhibiting modernity's lack of interest in narrative, postliberalism recovers Israel as story but also as history.

12. To be clear about this: If supersessionism is equivalent to the claim that “the church has replaced Israel as God's covenant partner,” then the contradictory claim would be that “Israel is God's (only) covenant partner.” My point here is that nonsupersessionism is *not* equivalent to the latter claim, although it does not exclude it. Nonsupersessionism is the less-defined claim that “the church has not replaced Israel as God's covenant partner,” leaving matters open until a given theologian further defines this claim according to a specific context of interpretation. One postliberal theologian might therefore claim that the church joins Israel, another might claim that there are two covenants, and so on.

within the church, and the new minority status of Christianity within the vast seculum of the West and of the United States of America.

## On Face-to-Face Theology

I focus this study on contemporary theologians with whom I have personal contact and can engage in sustained dialogue. I do this because I consider theology a dimension of immediate religious, social, and intellectual life. While theological inquiry must be informed by the long life of a tradition's commentary on revealed Scripture, its criteria for participating in that life belong to the time of a theologian's flesh-and-blood life on this earth, within the concrete movements and ruptures of lived salvation history. I assume that most of us live our lives under the influence of and in dialogue with circles of many others and that these influences and dialogues are manifested not only in articulable words but also through the less discrete ways that we act with one another and in the world. When possible, I therefore prefer to comment on the theologies of people I can talk with and observe over many years and in the context of various circles of fellowship—so that my words, too, are not only “my own.” John Howard Yoder, of blessed memory, is the only nonliving subject of a chapter in this book, and I never met him in person. I made an exception in this case because his work provides a rare and critical test for the book's thesis. I have worked closely, moreover, with two colleagues whose lives have been deeply shaped by interactions with him: Stanley Hauerwas (the subject of one of the book's chapters) and Michael Cartwright (with whom I recently coedited a posthumous volume of Yoder's work and in dialogue with whom I have honed many of the theses of this book). Hans Frei, of blessed memory, was another personal acquaintance and is another major influence on my approach in this book. Within the bounds of this book's specific thesis, I believe his approach would fully complement that of George Lindbeck, so I do not devote a separate chapter to him.

Face-to-face inquiry of this kind tends to lead, as well, to communal inquiry. Since some of those I study face-to-face also study others face-to-face, lines of face-to-face study tend to extend into circles and small communities of inquiry.

## Overlapping Communities of Christian and Jewish “Scriptural Reasoners”

The voice I speak in this book emerges from out of the discourses of several overlapping communities of Christian and Jewish scriptural reasoners (as well as of a community of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptural reasoning). The Society for Scriptural Reasoning is the largest self-conscious subcommunity of these, bred by many of the theologians examined in this book and many of their students and colleagues, along with complementary groups of post-

liberal/postmodern Jewish text scholars and philosophers and some emergent groups of postliberal/postmodern Muslim text scholars and philosophers.<sup>13</sup>

These communities are essential, for several reasons, to the thesis as well as the method of this book:

- My interest in postliberal Christianity emerges out of work for over fifteen years in the Society for Textual Reasoning.<sup>14</sup> This community of Jewish text scholars and philosophers is dedicated to postmodern/postliberal theological issues that parallel many of the concerns of postliberal Christianity. Postliberal Christianity therefore interests us, first, as a source of insight and encouragement to support our own Jewish correctives to modernity.
- Jewish “textual reasoners” (as we call ourselves) have discovered, second, that postliberal Christians often show interests that are complementary to our own approaches to modernity. Our mutual interests have therefore spawned dialogue as well as study-of-one-another.
- These dialogues have given rise to the emergent community of Jewish-and-Christian studies we named the Society for Scriptural Reasoning, or SSR (and more recently the SSR was joined, for similar reasons, by a group of Muslim “Qur’anic Reasoners”). Christian members of SSR tend to promote the kinds of postliberalism and nonsupersessionism that are examined in this book. In this sense, the book represents one way that a representative Jewish member of SSR may study the work of SSR’s Christian members.
- The book’s thesis has implications for more than Christian theology. The way that postliberals couple their high Christology with nonsupersessionism may exemplify a shared hope of Jewish and Christian postliberal theologians: that they may affirm the particularity of their scriptural and liturgical traditions without at the same time delegitimizing the other tradition of the One God; or, in the more precise terms of our approach, that, when he delivers his Word to the church and to the people Israel, God does not invoke the human logician’s law of excluded middle and declare, “If the church is my covenant partner, then this one that is not the church cannot also be,” nor “If Israel is my covenant partner, then this one that is not Israel cannot also be.” How we humans are to understand this is another matter.

13. See appendix to this chapter, and the book’s conclusion, for details about the society.

14. See appendix to this chapter for details about this society.

## Appendix: Sources of This Study

My first self-conscious engagement with postliberal theology came in 1987, when I was on leave at Yale to do postdoctoral work in philosophy. I met George Lindbeck and Hans Frei, of blessed memory, for the first time (my previous doctoral work at Yale was only in philosophy) and was immediately eager to work with them extensively. That year—(1987–88)—the Bible scholar Moshe Greenberg happened to be visiting Yale as well. The Yale rabbinics scholar Steve Fraade was also in residence all year. I was very fond of these two scholars of Judaism and felt there might be some unexpected overlap among the ways these two Jewish and two Christian scholars addressed scriptural interpretation. I was happily surprised when all four agreed to meet together a number of times to explore the relation between Greenberg’s “holistic” method of Bible interpretation and Frei’s “realistic” method.

In this series of meetings, the four spoke and I asked questions and took notes. The result was powerful and formative for me: a discovery of different uses of the term *plain sense* by the group’s Jewish and Christian members, but also of a surprising overlap among their strategies and hermeneutics of reading. I continued to examine the area of overlap through the next three years: what patterns of reading it included and excluded, what kinds of scholars shared and did not share in many of the included patterns. I published the results as *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation*.<sup>15</sup> This volume included an introduction in which I proposed a model of “postcritical” hermeneutics, with various Christian and Jewish submodels, and illustrative essays by scholars whose work I believed fit this model. The scholars of Christianity were Hans Frei (edited by Kathryn Tanner), George Lindbeck, David Burrell, John E. Smith (reading Jonathan Edwards), Paul Van Buren, and Stanley Hauerwas; the scholars of Judaism were David Weiss Halivni, Steven Fraade, Michael Fishbane, Moshe Greenberg, Jose (now Yosef) Faur, and Martin Buber (as interpreted by Steven Kepnes). I in no way presumed that the authors would accept being labeled (“postcritical” or otherwise), and many did not. But according to my own criteria, this group displayed to my satisfaction the overlaps I had suspected as well as various differences within the general frame.

I mention all this because the “postcritical” direction of this group anticipates what in the present volume I label *postliberalism*. I confess I do not like either label (my subjects of study tend to object in stronger terms, and indeed I wish the name of one’s God or scripture should suffice). But I feel that in the short run such labels are helpful analytical tools for identifying some of the significant interpretive options available to current students and scholars

15. *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation*, ed. Peter Ochs (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1993; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008).



of theology and of scriptural hermeneutics. The goal in drawing similarities is not to announce a “club” but to discern distinct patterns of reasoning (and of interpretation and belief) and then to examine and test some of the consequences of different patterns. The results should help students and scholars make more informed judgments.

### *Jewish and Christian postcritical scriptural interpretation*

To help readers of this book make more informed judgments, I shall narrate a little more about that initial group of postcritical scholars and then about the scholars who influenced my subsequent study of “postliberalism.”<sup>16</sup> Greenberg introduces his holistic method as an alternative to the “two opposed axioms [that] have served, historically, for the interpretation of the Bible: one theological, the other historical-analogical.”<sup>17</sup> He continues:

The theological [axiom] maintains that without insight gained from faith in the divine origin of Scripture, its message cannot be understood. . . . Historically, the product of this axiom has usually been an exegesis that puts into Scripture what ought to be believed rather than attending to what it says. . . . [The historical-analogical] reaction, which reached fullest articulation in Ch. *vii* of Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise* (first printing, 1670), insisted that nothing but what Scripture itself revealed of its sense might be used in interpreting it. The ordinary process of induction, so fruitful for arriving at an understanding of nature, was . . . indeed the only legitimate basis of . . . interpreting the Bible. . . . Having voted for scientific universality, the interpretation of Scripture became linked in the 19th century to the career of literary-historical interpretation at large.<sup>18</sup>

Greenberg’s alternative is

a holistic interpretation, “emphasizing the organic or functional relation between parts and wholes” (Webster). As the religious person approaches the text open to God’s call, so must the interpreter come “all ears” to hear what the text is saying. . . . For an axiom he [or she] has the working hypothesis that the text as he [or she] has it has been designed to convey a message. For if it does have design and meaning, they will be discovered only by effort expended to justify such an assumption.<sup>19</sup>

To guard against uncritical acceptance of established or ad hoc readings, holistic interpreters appropriate “something of the historical-analogical [axiom],

16. As presented in *Return to Scripture*.

17. Moshe Greenberg, “The Vision of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8–11: A Holistic Interpretation,” in *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God’s Control of Human Events, Presented to Lou H. Silberman*, ed. James L. Crenshaw and Samuel Sandmel (New York: KTAV, 1980), 143–63.

18. *Ibid.*, 143–44.

19. *Ibid.*, 145–46.



namely, the inference from the text itself of principles of its interpretation.”<sup>20</sup> The goal is to reconstitute the range of possible significations inherent in the text at the time “when it had reached its present disposition.”<sup>21</sup>

As presented in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, Frei’s critique of the tradition of “mediating interpretation”<sup>22</sup> parallels Greenberg’s critique of exclusive reliance on either the theological or the historical-analogical axiom. Frei argues that, emerging in the eighteenth century with John Locke and the latitudinarians in England and the Neologians in Germany, interpreters sought to mediate between the hermeneutical and theological extremes of an “orthodox dogmatism and [the naturalists’] radical skepticism about revelation.”<sup>23</sup> The mediators tended to insist that belief in the factual occurrences reported in the Bible, especially those connected with Jesus, was indispensable. At the same time they either said or hinted broadly that the religious meaning or truth communicated through these events must be understood by reference to a content of religion and morality broader than the Bible.<sup>24</sup>

Frei argues that the mediators’ mediation was illusory, because it retained the hermeneutical axiom that generated the dialectic of orthodoxy-versus-naturalism in the first place. This axiom is that the stories of Scripture point to their meanings referentially but that this reference is ideal, appearing in the text as a token of some universal truths of human experience. Mediators—like Greenberg’s modernist readers—locate the meaning of Scripture in a reference that sits “behind” the biblical text in historical events, in authorial intention, or in a conceptual order to which only certain disciplined readers—like the mediators—have access.

Like Greenberg’s, Frei’s alternative is to relocate meaning within the biblical text in its intratextual context. Following Erich Auerbach, he sought to recover the premodern practice of reading the biblical text as “realistic narrative”: a collection of stories that are “history-like,” not because they point outside themselves to some antecedent realm of events, but because they portray lives lived in a way that is paradigmatic of Scripture’s wisdom and that reshapes the beliefs and actions of biblical readers in accordance with that paradigm.

While similar, Frei’s and Greenberg’s responses to modernity are not identical. In our conversations at Yale, the subtle differences between them were played out in the two Christian and the two Jewish scholars’ subtly different accounts of the “plain sense” of Scripture. As I recall our discussion, Frei and to some extent Lindbeck treated the plain sense of the biblical text *as* its meaning for the authoritative community of interpreters. Greenberg, gener-

20. *Ibid.*, 146.

21. *Ibid.*, 148.

22. Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 60–65, 118–33, 222–24, 255–69.

23. *Ibid.*, 61, 62.

24. *Ibid.*, 118.

ally supported by Fraade, on the other hand, tended to draw a distinction between the plain sense, or *peshat*, and the *performative* meaning of the text for any finite community of believers. The plain sense displays how the text fits together in its intratextual context; it does not legislate any behavior, *per se*, but sets the conditions for all legitimate readings and interpretation.

These differences between our Christian and Jewish interlocutors in no way inhibited the flow of mutually illuminating dialogue among the four. I therefore sought to identify the shared assumptions that made such dialogue possible alongside the differing assumptions. My first hunch—and the one that led me to propose a “postcritical” approach among both Jews and Christians—was that they shared something analogous to the hermeneutic I had first encountered in the rabbinic studies of Max Kadushin, my teacher at the Jewish Theological Seminary in the early 1970s.

Through a series of six books, published between 1932 and 1987,<sup>25</sup> Kadushin sought to describe the complex conceptual structure of rabbinic Judaism. In his view, the rabbinic exegetes provided the Jewish people with a hermeneutical context for uncovering the performative meaning of Torah for each generation. This meaning, he wrote, was embodied in the practice of rabbinic exegesis itself, so that the patterns of rabbinic exegesis formed the conceptual order of rabbinic Judaism. His central argument was that to observe this order is not to lay claim to any finite system of propositions but (a) to reread each rabbinic interpretation of Scripture<sup>26</sup> as illustrating how some particular set of rabbinic virtues—in his terms, rabbinic “value concepts”—speak to some particular setting of belief, action, and decision making; (b) to behold the rational order of rabbinic Judaism as an “organic” complex of such virtues, in which each virtue had an independent identity but all were interrelated, tending to mix and weave with each other when guiding particular types of belief, action, and decision making; and (c) to learn about the order of rabbinic Judaism not by constructing any formal conceptual model, but by observing all these particular rabbinic interpretations and examining recurring patterns in the ways the virtues interrelated. Primary lessons may be gleaned from the classical rabbinic literatures of Talmud and midrash, secondary lessons from the tradition of rabbinic commentary and decision making that continues through the present day. Kadushin offered his work as an alternative to those who impose extraneous conceptual schemes on rabbinic Judaism *and* those who deny that Judaism displays any conceptual order.

As illustrated in chapter 2 of this book, Kadushin’s critique has striking parallels to Lindbeck’s critique of interpreters who focus exclusively on the “propositional” or the “expressive” dimensions of scriptural meaning;

25. Kadushin’s two most well-known works are *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York: Bloch, 1972) and *Worship and Ethics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

26. That is, each homiletic interpretation, or what Kadushin termed a “haggadic statement.”

Kadushin's analysis of the virtues or value-concepts bears analogies with what Lindbeck labels a "cultural-linguistic" approach to understanding scriptural interpretation.<sup>27</sup> Lindbeck acknowledged these analogies explicitly in an essay he later contributed to a volume I collected, *Understanding the Rabbinic Mind: Essays on the Hermeneutic of Max Kadushin*. The title of Lindbeck's essay, "Martin Luther and the Rabbinic Mind,"<sup>28</sup> intimated the surprising connections we began to examine among certain strains in rabbinic and Christian thought—strains that anticipated and guided our "postcritical" conversations.

After the Yale seminar, I collected more samples of recent Jewish and Christian scholarship that might also bear analogies with Kadushin's approach, and, without ignoring differences, I sought to identify any patterns of inquiry that appeared in most of the samples.<sup>29</sup> My postdoctoral work at Yale focused on Charles Peirce's logical and semiotic studies, and I drew on those studies as resources for disciplined investigations of such patterns of inquiry. My first report on these Jewish and Christian scholars—*The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity*—was therefore both sharpened and burdened by my work on Peirce (sharpened in logical precision and burdened with technical jargon). For example, I claimed that Frei's "mediating theologians" (as well as the interpreters criticized by Lindbeck, Kadushin, and Greenberg) all tended "to reduce biblical interpretation to a dyadic semiotic by assimilating the mediating or modern interpretant to its meaning or referent."<sup>30</sup> According to Peirce, we employ three different classes of sign in our efforts to represent three different types of relation in the world of experience: "monadic" signs represent simple or nonrelational qualities (such as the predicate "\_\_\_ is red"); "dyadic" signs represent either-or and reactive relations (such as dyadic propositions defined by the transitive verb "\_\_\_ hit \_\_\_," as in "Bob hit Bill"); and "triadic signs" represent genuinely interpretive and dialogic relations or relationships (such as accounts of how two subjects are interrelated by way of a third, as in "\_\_\_ gave \_\_\_ to \_\_\_," for example, "Bob gave a gift to Bill," or as in "\_\_\_ means \_\_\_ for \_\_\_," for example, "Isaac prefigured Christ in the New Testament"). In the last example, of "meaning," Peirce labeled one term the "sign or signifier per se" (Isaac), a second term the "object or meaning" (Christ), and a third term the "interpretant or context of meaning" (the

27. See chap. 2 in this volume.

28. George Lindbeck, "Martin Luther and the Rabbinic Mind," in *Understanding the Rabbinic Mind: Essays on the Hermeneutic of Max Kadushin*, ed. Peter Ochs (Atlanta: Scholars Press for South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism, 1990), 141–64.

29. Among the essays I wrote on Kadushin's method were "Max Kadushin as Rabbinic Pragmatist," in *Understanding the Rabbinic Mind*; "A Rabbinic Pragmatism," in *Theology and Dialogue*, ed. Bruce Marshall (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); and "Rabbinic Text-Process Theology," in *Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1991): 1–36.

30. Peter Ochs, "Introduction to Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation," in *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity*, 13.

New Testament). In these terms, my first claim about postcritical interpretation was that the mediating or modern interpreters treated biblical texts as if their meanings were directly “seen” rather than interpreted, as expressed by what I am labeling their “dyadic” claims that a given text A simply “is” (or means) B. For the postcritical interpreters, to interpret a biblical text is to be engaged in a three-part relation or performance, where a given text A means (or displays) B (a belief or action or behavioral instruction) for (or to) C (some “interpretant,” which means some condition of knowing or acting, some personal disposition, some tradition of belief, or some community of action). In other words, the mediating or modern interpreters treat the biblical text as if it had a referent independent of any particular interpretant.

My second claim was that postcritical interpreters examine the consequences of modernity’s dyadic interpretation of Scripture and find that dyadic interpreters tend to introduce into Western literature “a series of dichotomizations that lack warrant in the biblical text—between text and ostensive referent, between reference and performance, between the intrinsic meaning of the text and its meaning for the contemporary interpreter; and between literary and historical, subjective and objective, or scientific and religious methods of biblical interpretation.”<sup>31</sup> My third claim was that postcritical interpreters locate signs of a “triadic semiotic”—a pattern of interpretive performance and relation—within the biblical text, in particular “as it is read in the primordial communities of rabbinic or of Christian interpreters. This semiotic provides general rules of interpretation that, when defined specifically for the contexts of contemporary study, restore the truly mediational or relational activities that are missing from modern practices of interpretation. Postcritical scholars define and refine these rules in ways that address” and repair the specific cases of mediating or dyadic interpretation that concern them. “As a result, there is no single, postcritical model of scriptural interpretation, but a family of models each of which may be redescribed in terms of these three stages of postcritical inquiry.”<sup>32</sup>

### *“Yale” and “Cambridge” schools of postliberalism*

While I was working on this “postcritical” project, I joined with a few close colleagues in Jewish philosophy to form a practice of Talmudic and philosophic study we eventually labeled “textual reasoning.” The study partners were Robert Gibbs and Steven Kepnes and then also Laurie Zoloth and Yudit Greenberg, then Elliot Wolfson, Aryeh Cohen, Shaul Magid, Jacob Meskin, Nancy Levene, Susan Handelman, Eugene Borowitz, Michael Zank, and then an expanding circle. Talmudic literature and traditional practices of Talmudic study offered prototypes for the kind of study fellowship and dialogue we

31. Ibid. (with some edits added).

32. Ibid., 13–14 (with some edits added).

sought to introduce into our academic as well as denominational work and life. We addressed rabbinic legal argumentation as well as scriptural interpretation, and we sought to re-situate both within our interpretive and performative contexts. These contexts were shaped by a dialectic of postmodern and post-critical approaches to philosophy, textual hermeneutics, and religious social ethics. Our group was animated, in other words, by inner debates between what Paul Ricoeur termed a “hermeneutics of suspicion” and a “hermeneutics of retrieval.” Both sides were joined by a single practice of table fellowship and study, by a conviction that only the text on the table before us framed an arena for our inquiries and debates, but that as long as we guarded the material (and lexical) integrity of that arena, this was the appropriate place and time for us to open heart and mind to one another, whether to voice ethical witness, philosophic critique, intertextual discovery, or prayer.

At about the time I completed *The Return to Scripture*, I met Daniel Hardy, of blessed memory, and David Ford at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton (CTI). By the next summer, we began an extended three-way study of Scripture, philosophy, literature, and theology that after about three years generated a practice we called “scriptural reasoning.” I shall say a little more about that practice in this book’s epilogue. The topic for this section is what I learned about the British, or Anglican, side of postliberalism, which I first thought of as “the Cambridge school.” My first impression of the theology I heard from Hardy and Ford (and a few of their Anglican colleagues visiting CTI) was that this was another kind of postcritical interpretation but somehow noticeably different from that of Frei and Lindbeck. During the next year, when I shared my observations with an expanding circle of either the Cambridge group or what I now thought of as the Yale (vs. Cambridge) school, I would be met with protests: affirming the content (if not the label) of what I attributed to postcritical thought, members of either side would claim that *they* belonged to this approach but the other group did not. I began to observe a pattern. Yale seemed to criticize Cambridge for being too tolerant of “naturalism,” of extrascriptural “conceptualism,” and of assimilating church and state. Cambridge seemed to criticize Yale for being too intolerant, in other words, too bound to language use in general and, more particularly, to the theological discourses of some single denomination, too “sectarian,” and thus too inattentive to the church’s responsibilities in the broader world, such as attending to the social, political, and economic orders and to the influences and needs of science and technology. A few theologians, like Ford and Hauerwas, seemed less willing to entertain these divides. In Ford’s case, I thought this might have something to do with his training at Yale and with Frei and with his doctoral work on Karl Barth. Since many folks told me Hauerwas was “clearly sectarian,” it took more time to guess that a strong pneumatology might contribute to his apparent gentleness toward “Cambridge.” After learning more about Christian doctrines of the Spirit (perhaps by then I was already in conversation

with Eugene Rogers on this topic as well as with the Anglicans), I began to invent the following account, which I have not yet abandoned: call it *a Jewish account of Yale and Cambridge, or why a bird has two wings*.

On either side of the pond, I came to believe, English-speaking postcritical interpretation is self-consciously trinitarian in the manner in which it seeks to repair the ills of mediating or modern or dyadic trends in the church. Either side tends, however, to place greater emphasis on one person of the Trinity rather than the others, and the choice reflects either side's sense of which person is most neglected by the mediating or modernist trends in its neighborhood. The Yale side, I believed, judged that the person of Christ is most neglected by modern movements in the American church, because these movements appeared at the time to be liberal or universalizing, naturalist, overly politicized, and wary of the scriptural canon and doctrine. Yale therefore tended to name Christ as agent of repair, which, I believed, meant that Scripture and *ecclesium* were primary sources of repair: practices of scriptural reading in service to *sola scriptura* and as informed by the life of each finite church community. Cambridge, on the other hand, judged that the Holy Spirit is most neglected by modern movements in the Anglican Church, and the British churches more generally—since (when I learned how better to read such things) a few of those I assumed were Anglican turned out to be British Methodists or Catholics and so on. The Spirit appeared to be neglected by movements that appeared at the time to be overly conservative or neo-orthodox, overly text-centered (on texts of Scripture and of intraecclesial doctrine and *regulae*), and insulated from the political and natural worlds. The church was threatened, at the same, by movements that rejected it because it appeared to display these traits. Cambridge therefore tended to name the Spirit as agent of repair, which, I believed, meant that sources of repair would appear in less predictable places, bearing less recognizable names, except for those already associated with the Spirit in ecclesial history.

This remains my account of what I now call the American and British wings of Christian postliberalism (having at some point come to favor *postliberal* as less ugly and misleading than *postcritical*). I consider them wings, because this bird or angel of repair must at times lean more to one side or the other to do its work; it could not fly at all, however, if either wing were broken by overuse or immobilized by atrophy.

### *Jewish and Christian postliberalisms*

Soon after formulating our initial practice of scriptural reasoning, Hardy, Ford, and I invited a number of friends to join us in forming our first scriptural reasoning fellowship. The friends were Jewish and Christian scholars of Scripture, theology, and philosophy, and our fellowship was a study fellowship patterned somewhat after the study fellowships of Jewish textual reasoning.



Our practices were comparably shaped by Christian postliberal attentiveness to Scripture and community and to spiritual and theological reflection. The Jewish friends were all present or former participants in the textual reasoning circles, which fact encouraged my pursuing further ruminations on a broader movement (or tendency) of Jewish postliberalisms, with its persistent inner dialectic of postmodern suspicion and postcritical resourcement. The initial group of Jewish scriptural reasoners included the aforementioned Gibbs, Kepnes, Zoloth, Magid, and Cohen, along with more recent textual reasoners Randi Rashkover and Martin Kavka, and Cambridge colleague Diana Lipton. The Christian friends were all peers or students of the circle that emerged out of “Yale” and “Cambridge”: Nicholas Adams, Michael Higton, James Fodor, Oliver Davies, Susannah Ticciati, Gavin Flood, Ben Quash, Rachel Muers, Tom Greggs, William Young, Chad Pecknold, and more recently Jason Byassee, Jeff Bailey, and Ben Fulford. From the start, we planned for the new Society for Scriptural Reasoning to be a society of Abrahamic reasoning, including Muslim as well as Jewish and Christian Scriptures and scholars. By our third year, 1996, we gathered enough Muslim participants to inaugurate our full plan. I will describe the results in this book’s epilogue.

In the years since these early gatherings of scriptural reasoning, I have continued to engage in dialogue with ever-expanding circles of Christian postliberal theologians, testing and reshaping my images of the patterns of postliberal interpretation. Along the way, my primary interlocutors and guides have been the authors collected in this volume, along with their students. In addition to these authors, the most influential guide has been Kendall Soulen. I will conclude this appendix with an overview of what I learned from him. First, of many additional influences, I will name those who, along with the previously mentioned scriptural reasoners, have appeared more often in my footnotes on postliberal Christianity. They are Eugene Rogers, already mentioned as a source of my understanding of pneumatology and of Yale hermeneutics, a longtime colleague and coteacher in Christian and Jewish theology; Robert Wilken, a longtime colleague, a coteacher in classic Christian and Jewish commentary, and a major postliberal scholar in the classic patristic sources; David Burrell, a longtime interlocutor in postliberal approaches to philosophic theology and theo-politics; Scott Bader-Saye, whose significant work on the doctrine of Israel in the church continues Lindbeck’s and Soulen’s postliberal openings;<sup>33</sup> James Buckley; Gregory Jones; James Fodor;<sup>34</sup> William Placher, of blessed memory; Jay Carter; Douglas Harink, whose work will be cited often in the

33. See Scott Bader-Saye, *Church and Israel after Christendom: The Politics of Election* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999). I comment on Bader-Saye’s postliberal nonsupersessionism in Peter Ochs, “Judaism and Christian Theology,” in *The Modern Theologians*, 645–62 (at 652–53).

34. A major resource on postliberalism is James Fodor, “Postliberal Theology,” in *Modern Theologians*, ed. Ford and Muers, 229–48. In the epilogue, I draw at length on Fodor’s description of postliberalism.

following chapters; Bruce Marshall;<sup>35</sup> Michael Cartwright;<sup>36</sup> William Elkins; Kris Lindbeck; and more recently all the members of the Scriptural Reasoning Research group that met at the Center of Theological Inquiry from 2003 to 2006 (Stacey Johnson, Clifton Black, Rusty Reno, Ann Astell, Kevin Hughes).

In *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*,<sup>37</sup> Soulen introduced his argument for postliberal nonsupersessionism: the plain sense of the entire Scripture teaches that God's identity as the God of Israel is inconceivable apart from the election of the Jewish people (which Soulen identifies with "the people Israel"). Nevertheless, according to Soulen, Christian theology has traditionally assigned to God's interaction with Israel a propaedeutic function within the economy of sin and redemption, serving only to foreshadow God's redemptive work in Christ. This has a doubly unfortunate result. On the one hand, Christians have understood the distinction between Jew and Gentile as a means to the end of Christ's redemption, after which Jewish existence would lack any meaning in God's plan. On the other hand, Christians have tended to make the biblical theme of "creation and consummation" subservient to the biblical theme of "redemption from sin"—rendering Israel's story as one of incomplete redemption from sin. The cumulative result of this misreading is a semignostic distortion of Christian thought that "rejects gnosticism at the level of ontology but not at the level of covenant history."<sup>38</sup> Against this reading, Soulen recontextualizes the economy of sin and redemption within the larger economy of creation and consummation, described now in terms of the canon-spanning story of God's election of Israel as a blessing for the nations. The end and fulfillment of God's consummating work is not to annul the difference between Israel and the nations but to bring both into the "mutual relatedness" and interdependence that is called *shalom* (after Job 5:22–24; Ps. 29:11; 128).<sup>39</sup> Within this context, Soulen depicts Christ as the climactic recapitulation of God's earlier work of redemption on Israel's behalf, for the sake not only of Israel, but also of the mutual blessing between Jew and Gentile.<sup>40</sup>

35. See Bruce Marshall, "Do Christians Worship the God of Israel?" in *Knowing the Triune God*, ed. James Buckley and David Yeago (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), esp. 236. I comment on Marshall's postliberal nonsupersessionism in Peter Ochs, "Judaism and Christian Theology," in *Modern Theologians*, ed. Ford and Muers, 645–62 (at 649–51).

36. My work on John Howard Yoder (see chap. 4 in this volume) has been guided throughout by Cartwright. See John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). I comment on Cartwright's postliberal nonsupersessionism in Peter Ochs, "Judaism and Christian Theology," in *Modern Theologians*, ed. Ford and Muers, 645–62 (at 653–55).

37. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996).

38. *Ibid.*, 110.

39. *Ibid.*, 131.

40. This paragraph is reproduced from Ochs, "Judaism and Christian Theology," 650–51.



In more recent writings, Soulen extends his argument for the “economy of consummation” by exploring the consequences of a nonsupersessionist doctrine of the Trinity. Consistent with both Lindbeck’s and Jenson’s more recent work, Soulen suggests that the Tetragrammaton, YHVH, remains the name of the God to whom Jesus prays. He says that while Christians have always affirmed in some fashion that “YHVH is the Triune God,” they have interpreted the two parts of the affirmation according to the scheme of Old Testament/New Testament, with the result that God’s identity as YHVH is left in the past. In place of this, he proposes that Christians interpret the confession “YHVH is the Triune God” according to the logic of “Jesus is the Christ,” with the result that both parts of the affirmation speak to past, present, and future.<sup>41</sup>

41. This paragraph is reproduced from *ibid.*, 651.