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## Supersessionism, Zionism, and Reparative Theology

*Peter Ochs and John Howard Yoder*

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### I

OVER THE COURSE OF his career, Peter Ochs has been a leading voice in a team of scholars who have been instrumental in reconceptualizing the reading of scripture in the wake of creating a new paradigm for inter-religious conversation founded on a postliberal perspective.<sup>1</sup>

Ochs' own philosophical and theological contribution to the larger project includes creating a logic for adherence to scriptural authority without succumbing to fundamentalism, creating conditions for deep engagement with various scriptural traditions through close readings of scriptures by Jews, Christians, and Muslims and thinking about the conditions required for such a reading that is both anti-foundationalist and still modern (Ochs uses the term “postliberal”) that includes translating that professional theological enterprise into language that can be used by religious communities. Finally Ochs has developed a way of thinking through the structures of not *what* each tradition needs to sacrifice but *how* each tradition can do so without either succumbing to the foundationalist modern notion of questioning all tradition or questioning Reason itself as a catalyst

1. On postliberalism, see Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*.

for understanding tradition.<sup>2</sup> The third way Ochs calls postliberalism, a notion that seeks to simultaneously push aside modernity's foundationalism, counter post-modernism's relativizing all truth, and avoid fundamentalism's limiting truth to one particular tradition or revelatory experience. On Ochs' reading postmodernism makes inter-religious dialogue largely superfluous while fundamentalism makes it blasphemous.

Ochs' most definitive study that encompasses the above objectives is *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews*. In this volume Ochs takes a two-pronged approach to the argument as to why only post-liberalism can enable Christianity to truly integrate Judaism into its theological vision. In short the argument suggests that the main impediment for Christianity in its engagement with Jews and Judaism is the doctrine of supersessionism, that is, the Christian belief that Christianity comes to replace Judaism. The idea of supersessionism is arguably so deeply rooted in Christianity that it cannot easily be excised, if excised at all. In his discussion of the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder's work, Michael Cartwright puts it this way, "I do not believe that it is possible for Christian theologians to escape the problem of Christian supersessionism. I do believe, however, that we do not have to succumb to despair in this matter."<sup>3</sup> Writing on Yoder, Zionism, and supersessionism, Alain Epp Weaver writes, "If one can be non-supersessionist while affirming traditional theological claims, then the burden of proof will be on revisionist theological positions."<sup>4</sup> Ochs, Cartwright, and Weaver each understand the centrality of supersessionism and yet each equally recognizes that genuine Jewish-Christian dialogue cannot take place until the erasure of Judaism implicit in supersessionism is somehow mitigated.

Below I critically examine Ochs' reading of one of the postliberal figures he treats in his book, John Howard Yoder. Yoder serves as a centerpiece of Ochs' argument precisely because he is presented as the exception that proves the rule. While Yoder appears squarely inside the postliberal orbit he also exhibits certain traits that Ochs prefers to call "non-non-supersessionist" tendencies, specifically regarding Judaism and Jewish nationalism as an, or perhaps the, quintessence of modern Judaism. Ochs argues that this "non-non-supersessionism" is a consequence of certain non- or even

2. By foundationalist Ochs refers to an idea originating in Aristotle and taking on new meaning in Descartes and later in Wittgenstein whereby everything in the past is subject to more direct disclosures of knowledge. Ochs views this as "modern" and claims it undermines traditional/religious claims of truth. See Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 155, 156.

3. Cartwright, "Afterward," 231.

4. Weaver, "Constantinianism, Zionism, Diaspora," page 9 in online version.

anti-postliberal tendencies in Yoder's thought. Ochs' point, as I understand it, is that when Yoder deviates from a postliberal perspective, his supersessionism returns, perhaps by accident but more likely by design.

Below I examine Ochs' claim about Yoder in three ways: first by considering Yoder's own view on this question; second, critically examining Ochs' reading of him; and finally, by offering three Jewish models that share aspects of Yoder's critique of Jewish nationalism that may shed light on the ways in which Yoder can be a useful tool in Ochs' desire to create what he calls a theology of reparation between Jews and Christians. My aim is to question whether Yoder's notion of diasporism and anti-Constantinianism, notions Yoder believes are essential components of pacifist religion (and the genius of both Christianity and Judaism), are unhelpful for the promulgation of Ochs' theology of reparation.

## II

Ochs begins *Another Reformation* by setting the methodological agenda for his more detailed analysis in the body of the book. He notes at the outset that he does not offer a definitive definition of postliberalism because he believes its contours are fluid and expand and contract with each thinker he examines. But he does give us some rubrics.

Postliberalism refers to an activity of reformation directed at once to the church or synagogue and to the university (or, more broadly the speculum as a public order). For postliberalism, "reformation" implies both reaffirmation and correction. Like other movements of reform and 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 histories of those institutions. Postliberals often attempt, therefore, to reclaim what they consider prototypical sources and norms of the church or synagogue and of the university (or speculum) and to offer their criticisms from out of these sources and norms.<sup>5</sup>

For Ochs postliberalism is a reparative project, recognizing the suffering that premodern religion has wrought and also believing that the resources of the tradition itself contain the requisite elements to repair that damage if they are examined with the goal of relieving suffering.<sup>6</sup> Reason alone cannot serve that reparative purpose for Ochs because Reason alone would

5. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 6.

6. See Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 14, for further definition of "suffering" and "repair."

undermine the very scriptural authority that was the cause of the suffering that requires reparation. The relational model of postliberalism is presented to counter the dyadic model (“any problematic situation [is] the consequence of some faulty behavior X, which is the logical contradictory of some correct behavior  $-X$ ”).<sup>7</sup> The relational model rejects the dichotomy (Ochs prefers dyadism) that sets precepts as irreconcilable; thus relation is not one community to another but also a relation of a community with the divine Word and to another community with the divine Word. The two divine Words are also in relation and not in contradiction to one another such that they can be used to relieve the very suffering that they caused in the past, that is, when they were viewed only in dyadic fashion.

Scripture is a central part of Ochs’ postliberal conception of religion. In some way, it replaces Reason, which dominated the “Epoch of Assimilation” that sought a Religion of Reason as the solution to the problems revealed religions created. For Ochs, “Scripture is the prototype as well as the primary book of instruction in how to compose diagrams of repair, which [Charles] Peirce calls ‘existential graphs.’”<sup>8</sup> Scripture does not refer to one specific scripture but rather those books (if we can call them “books”) that put the reader in relation to the divine, not in the prophetic sense of “thus says God” but in a relational sense. Ochs suggests that “to study Torah is always to enter into a relationship with a living God, and it is only by way of that relation that Judaism has had the capacity to be resurrected and renewed after each of the Jewish people’s major catastrophes.”<sup>9</sup> This is not meant as a platitude; rather the reader of scripture “reasons” with it, talks to it as well as listens to and it thus also seeks reason from it, always in a reparative mode, always to alleviate suffering, always to bring Judaism back from the precipice each tragedy presents. The following is a succinct exemplar of this approach: “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>10</sup>

Ochs concludes that the deepest work Christians must do to enable their theologies to cohere with this new spirit of engagement in a post-Vatican II

7. For a slightly different use of the term “dyadic logic,” see Ochs, *Return to Scripture*, 13. There Ochs claims that “dyadic logic” is the assimilation of mediation “of a biblical text to its meaning or referent” (38).

8. Ochs, *Return to Scripture*, 15.

9. Cartwright and Ochs, “Editor’s Introduction,” 5.

10. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 23.

world concerns supersessionism since supersessionism has historically been the most common way Christianity rejected, repudiated, or ignored Judaism. And it is precisely here where postliberalism enters as Ochs' solution to this dilemma: how can Christians maintain fealty to their scriptural traditions and not succumb to supersessionism? If the rejection of supersessionism requires an undermining of scriptural authority by historicizing scripture such that it becomes a fully human and thus a fallible, even unredeemable, document (the modern foundationalist approach according to Ochs) it has betrayed not only Christian scripture (and Jewish scripture as well) but the Christian (and Jewish) community. Below I will examine a little more closely one case in Ochs' book, John Howard Yoder, perhaps the most vexing case precisely because Yoder seems to break the rules by opting out of a fully non-supersessionist theology while remaining wed to a postliberal approach.

### III

John Howard Yoder (1927–97) was a Mennonite theologian most celebrated for his theology of Christian pacifism. His Anabaptist approach that embodies a contemporary version of what is known as the Radical Reformation seeks to recover the apostolic Christianity of the Jesus movement. He is strongly anti-Constantinianism and opposes the politicization of religion writ large.<sup>11</sup> Yoder remarks, “There is no alternative but to painstakingly, feebly, repently, patiently, locally, disentangle Jesus from the Christ of Byzantium and of Torquemada.”<sup>12</sup> As a believer in scripture as the carrier of the divine Word Yoder fits nicely into Ochs' postliberal model. In Ochs' *Another Reformation* Yoder serves as the lynchpin to Ochs' thesis that postliberalism logically produces a non-supersessionist Christianity. Yoder plays this role because while some of his work indeed exhibits a non-supersessionist approach, especially regarding his belief in the shared roots of both apostolic Christianity and early Judaism and his claim that Jesus and Paul never rejected Judaism (they only rejected a certain *form* of Judaism), Yoder's anti-Constantinianism, his belief in religious practice as the foundation of faith communities and his unrelenting pacifism, yields an anti-Zionism that Ochs calls a “non-non-supersessionism” because it amounts to the erasure of the nationalistic dimension of Judaism as representing anything authentic and worth saving. For Yoder, Zionism is nothing less than a Jewish Constantinianism and does the same damage to Judaism that Constantinianism does to Christianity.

11. For an overview of Yoder's work see Cartwright, “Radical Catholicity.”

12. Yoder, “Disavowal of Constantine” in Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 255.

Before getting to Ochs' critique of Yoder I will briefly rehearse Yoder's basic position on these matters as stated most clearly in a series of essays published as *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, edited by Ochs and Michael Cartwright. In these essays Yoder sets out what he believes is the shared roots of Judaism and Christianity, albeit each one refracted through very particular lenses. Yoder's understanding of "Judaism" and "Christianity" is often quite idiosyncratic and those shared roots, as he understands them, are what brings him to a new kind of supersessionism Ochs calls non-non-supersessionism. Thus, for Yoder it is precisely what he thinks Judaism and Christianity share that results in his rejection of a dimension of Judaism that dominates our contemporary scene.

Yoder uses his discussion of the "Jewishness" of Jesus and the Jesus movement as a way of fortifying his vision of the "free church movement" as a "Jewish" vision.<sup>13</sup> His understanding of "Judaism" that he finds authentic is something that exists in a thin slice of history after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE and before the redaction of the Mishna in the second century. That is, a Judaism that was still arguably in a liquid state of formation (the question of Jewish normativity at this time will become relevant for Yoder later on). It was a de-politicized Judaism thinking its way through its newly realized de-territorialized fate. It was a Judaism trying to negotiate its oftentimes universalistic prophetic heritage as a minority culture. It is precisely here in this relatively narrow historical corridor after the loss of political power and before the abandonment of what Yoder considers Judaism's great missionizing project and the development of what he determines is the ethnic enclavism of Rabbinic Judaism, which Yoder posits, is largely a response to Christianity. It is here where Judaism and Jesus meet and where the truth of each most forcefully shines through.

In short, the ostensible schism happened for Yoder when Christianity lost its way and succumbed to the lure of political power (Constantine) and Judaism responded to powerlessness by turning in on itself (Mishnaic Judaism). Yoder considers Rabbinic Judaism (the Judaism of law) to be the first stage of Judaism's "Christianization." This intentionally provocative claim requires some scrutiny. Yoder is not arguing that *halakha* (Jewish normative law) is a product of "Christianization." *Halakha* was arguably the wedge, or one wedge, that separated Judaism from Christianity.<sup>14</sup> And yet that is precisely Yoder's

13. The Free Church Movement exists in the US and Europe and consists of churches of various Protestant denominations that are devoted to a complete separation from established churches and government. Yoder's Mennonite free church is part of that larger movement.

14. See, for example, Sanders, *Paul, the Law*; Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*; and Neusner, *Judaic Law*.

understanding of “Christianization.” He posits that the period of the Mishna (second century) marked a period of Judaism turning in on itself and opting to largely abandon the prophetic gesture toward the world. This, he argues, was in large part a response to an emerging Christianity. Yoder envisions Mishnaic Judaism as a turn away from Judaism’s original missionizing status (one can cull this from various prophetic passages). It is worth quoting Yoder at length here to capture the turns in his argument.

We noted before that the Judaism of Jeremiah, of Hillel, of Jesus, and of Johanan ben Zakkai was a missionary faith. It then represented an adaptation to Christianity when the rabbis by the time of the Mishna abandoned their missionary openness, leaving the function to the messianic Jews (i.e. the Christians). . . . Only now, after the schism could it make sense to spell out the argument that Gentiles do not need Torah because they can make it into the age to come by keeping the rules of Noah. . . . In any case, Judaism after the schism turns out to be an ethnic enclave, less missionary than before, if not committed to a near rejection of the accession of Gentiles to members in their community. Thus the abandonment of the missionary vision and action is a kind of backhanded adjustment, not to the Gentile world in general, but to Christianity. *Non-missionary Judaism is a product of Christian history* [italics in text]. For Jews to be non-missionary means that they have been “Christianized”: they have accepted a slot within a context where telling the Gentiles about the God of Abraham is a function that can be left to the Christians.<sup>15</sup>

It is not radical nor even contentious to notice that Mishnaic Judaism deviates in significant ways from at least some prophetic teachings while cohering to others (Yoder focuses particularly on Jer 29:4–7 and the message of exile as divine will).<sup>16</sup> The reason for such deviation remains open to scholarly speculation and the role Christianity played in rabbinic self-fashioning has become a contested issue among historians of ancient Israel.

Yoder moves in a different direction by claiming that formative Judaism, that is, Mishnaic Judaism and what it produces was formed in part as a response to Christianity not via Christianity as a Jewish heresy but through the notion that Christianity now fulfilled a missionary function that Jews, and Judaism, no longer needed to fulfill. While such a claim is likely not historical, it may indeed emerge in at least two instances later in Jewish history.

15. Yoder, “Jewishness of the Free Church Vision,” in Yoder, *Jewish Christian-Schism Revisited*, 106.

16. See, for example, Yoder’s essay on Stephen Zweig’s poem, “See How They Go with Their Face to the Sun,” in Yoder, *Jewish Christian-Schism Revisited*, esp. 183–87.

First, in Moses Maimonides' notion that perhaps Christianity and Islam (although both deviant from Judaism) exist in order to pave the way for the final Jewish redemption. Second, in Franz Rosenzweig's notion in his *Star of Redemption* that Christianity fulfills an outward function to expose the world to monotheism while Judaism necessarily exercises the inward function of protecting the Hebrew Bible's true monotheistic core.<sup>17</sup> Maimonides may be asking the question, "Why did God bring Christianity and Islam into existence in the first place if Judaism is the true religion?" while Rosenzweig, in early twentieth-century Germany, may be trying to posit how both Judaism and Christianity are necessary to one another and thus need to enable each other to continue to serve their divine purpose.

In any case, Yoder's understanding/conception of Rabbinic Judaism as a process of "Christianization" also, or precisely, implies that Rabbinic Judaism ("Judaism" as we know it) is younger than Christianity. In at least one place Yoder says this outright. "It will take some time and testing to get used to the awareness that Judaism as we now know it, i.e. Rabbinic Judaism, is younger than Christianity—and in part a reaction thereto—but this is an indispensable straightening out of our categories."<sup>18</sup>

But in the end Yoder is making a different claim than either Maimonides or Rosenzweig. He claims the Mishnaic move undermines Judaism's true greatness in its choice to promote an ethnic enclavism. We must remember that for Yoder, as an anti-Constantinian, "Christianizing" is a negative term in a very specific way: it does not mean *becoming* Christian but rather abandoning authentic Judaism as a *response* to Christianity. There are two further instantiations of Judaism's "Christianizing" in Yoder's thought. The first is modern progressive Judaism's "theological assimilation" to Christianity (a Christianity that he believes had already lost its way) or the acquiescence to pluralism as a religious identity. For brevity's sake let's call this Reform Judaism. In this sense Reform Judaism mistakenly became like a Christianity that wasn't truly Christian. Yet the

17. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Kings." The passage reads, "All these matters relating to Jesus of Nazareth and the Ishmaelite who came after him only served to clear the way for King Messiah, to prepare the whole world to worship one God with one accord. . . . Thus the messianic hope, the Torah, and the commandments have become familiar topics—topics of conversation [among the inhabitants] of the far isles and many people, uncircumcised of heart and flesh. They are discussing these matters and the commandments of the Torah." I used the translation of A. M. Hershman in *The Code of Maimonides*, xxiii–xxiv. Franz Rosenzweig makes a similar point as his main thesis in *The Star of Redemption*, albeit Rosenzweig gives far more credit to the theological merits of Christianity than Maimonides does.

18. Yoder "Judaism as a non-non-Christian Religion," in Yoder, *Jewish-Christian-Schism Revisited*, 154.

final form of Jewish “Christianization” for Yoder, and the one that is so problematic for Ochs, is Zionism or Jewish nationalism. The claim that Zionism is “Christianization” in some way strikes at the very core of the problem. In today’s world, to deny Jewish nationalism its role, even its central role, in Jewish identity, more forcefully to view Zionism as the *problem*, amounts to a kind of supersessionism. Judaism without Jewish nationalism, without a commitment to the land, is today almost erased, superseded, as it were, from the centrality of land and an autonomous Jewish polity. Thus non-nationalist Judaism, one closer to Yoder’s view, becomes the victim of another kind of inner-Jewish supersessionism.<sup>19</sup>

What exactly is Yoder’s problem with Zionism? It is not what you might think. Yoder believes that Zionism is a form of Jewish Constantinianism and therefore that Zionism undermines the separation between church and political and military power that he believes is central to Jesus’ (and thus the Jewish) contribution to the world. And he does believe that Zionism makes Jewish pacifism almost impossible.<sup>20</sup> But just as problematic for Yoder is the extent to which Zionism removes religion as a requirement of Jewish identity.

The State of Israel models itself on western thinking. It defines Jews in such a way that most of them may be unbelieving or unobservant. . . . The State of Israel is a state but no longer a believing community. Once the state was created, the separateness of Jewishness as an ethnic body is no longer needed as a base for religion or vice versa. . . . Committed Judaism, i.e. a discernable people ready thoroughly and sacrificially to order their lives around their convictions as to the substance of the Torah, is a minority sect in Israel just as is Christianity, and just as they both are today in Western Europe.<sup>21</sup>

There are many ways one can explicate this passage. One is that Zionism replaces religion with peoplehood and thus undermines Judaism’s central and most powerful message of fidelity to the one God. One illustrative example might be Golda Meir’s comment to Hannah Arendt. “I want you to understand, as a socialist I do not believe in God, I believe in the Jewish people.”<sup>22</sup>

19. On this see Magid, “Butler Trouble.”

20. This is not completely true as there were and are Zionists who are pacifists. See, for example, Cohen, “Foremost Amongst the Divine Attributes.”

21. Yoder, *Jewish Christian-Schism Revisited*, 107.

22. Hannah Arendt to Gershom Scholem, July 20, 1963, in *Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem: Correspondence*, 361. See, in the same volume, the letter of August 6, 1963.

The notion of belief in a “people” as a substitute for “belief in God” is not uncommon in certain secular Zionist circles. The politicization of religion and thus reification of peoplehood in some forms of Zionist thought and the extent to which “people” replaces God, for Yoder, significantly undermine the very contribution Judaism makes to human civilization and erase the very reason he views it as the backbone of his “free church movement.” One could surely contest this claim by citing the deeply religious nature of some streams of Zionism, especially in our contemporary world. But this too would bother Yoder as the very foundation of religious Zionism envisons God as party to the politicalization of Judaism, even, or in some cases, precisely, through military means.<sup>23</sup> Yoder thus has two basic problems with Zionism: first its notion of landedness, that is, that Judaism, or Jewishness, is fulfilled only, or primarily, by settling the land; and second the way that Jewish nationalism in complex ways inserts ethnic identity as a companion, at times a replacement, at other times, a fulfillment, for religion. Thus for Yoder Zionism is the final stage of the “Christianization” of Judaism in that the state, like Christendom, is no longer a “believing community” because its members are defined by fully secular means.

The final dimension of Yoder’s thoughts on Judaism that require brief mention before turning to Ochs’ critique is the notion of exile, or diaspora, as blessing rather than curse, something Yoder gleans from Jeremiah 29:4–7. This is tied to Yoder’s argument that Judaism is originally a missionizing religion and also his critique of Jewish nationalism in that in exile Jews can better disseminate the true message of God’s word it carries. The Talmudic dictum that “Israel was only exiled so that it could make converts”<sup>24</sup> is one way to articulate Yoder’s view, although for Yoder exile is not a temporary state but a permanent one, in fact, it is the state that embodies the very truth of Judaism and makes it a stellar exemplar of his “free church movement.” For him, Zionism undermined Judaism the way Constantinianism undermined Christianity.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup>. An example of this would be the work of R. Zvi Yehuda Kook. See Held, “What Zvi Yehuda Kook Wrought?” On Yoder and the messianism of religious Zionism see Yoder, “Jewishness of the Free Church,” in Yoder, *Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, 112.

<sup>24</sup>. B. Talmud Pesahim 87b.

<sup>25</sup>. See Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 151. On this see Weaver, “Further Footnotes,” 44.

## IV

Ochs' chapter "The Limits of Postliberalism," in *Another Reformation*, is on one reading a critical reading of Yoder's theological critique of Zionism as introducing a non-non-supersessionism to an otherwise postliberal Christian theology. We must remember that for Yoder, Zionism is not damaging as a political movement as much as a theological deviation from Judaism's "Jeremianic" trajectory that he cherishes as one of its great theological innovations of human history. What Ochs means by a non-non-supersessionism is that Yoder does not fit into any of the common categories of supersessions enough to call him a supersessionist. For heuristic purposes I suggest using Kendall Soulen's three types of supersessionism and adding a fourth suggested by George Lindbeck. Soulen distinguishes between economic supersessionism, punitive supersessionism, and structural supersessionism. The first refers to "the ultimate obsolescence of carnal Israel [as] an essential feature of God's one overarching economy of redemption of the world." The second suggests "God abrogates God's covenant with Israel on account of Israel's rejection of Christ." The third suggests the exclusion of Israel as inhabiting the "standard canonical narrative," of how scripture is read.<sup>26</sup> Lindbeck adds another dimension he calls the erasure of the Jews, not necessarily the rejection of the Jews in classical supersessionism, but simply not considering them as part of the Christian vision of the world. None of these categories would apply to Yoder. In fact, not only does Yoder not want to excise Jews or Judaism from his theological vision; he wants to use Judaism (perhaps an exilic pre-rabbinic Judaism) as the very basis of Christianity's true theological vision. So perhaps we can rename Yoder's non-non-supersessionism as unintended supersessionism.

Yoder bases his reparation of the schism between Judaism and Christianity on the notion that Jesus never really rejected Judaism because there was no normative Judaism in Jesus' time to reject. Rather, he rejected one form of Judaism in favor of another. Explaining Yoder's position Ochs writes, "Neither Jesus nor Paul, nor the apostolic communities rejected normative Judaism. . . . If there was no such thing as normative Judaism no one could have univocally rejected it or be rejected by it. . . . What Jesus himself proposed to his listeners was nothing other than what he claimed as the normative vision of a restored and clarified Judaism, namely, the proper interpretation of the Jewish scriptures and tradition for this present, in light of the New Age which he heralded."<sup>27</sup>

26. Soulen, *God of Israel*, 29, 30. Cf. Weaver, "Constantinianism," 8.

27. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 141.

Ochs lists four examples of Yoder's "modernist" and non-postliberal stance that he claims results in a non-non-supersessionist position: (1) Judaism is exilic; (2) Judaism is not a landed religion; (3) Judaism is non-violent; (4) and Judaism is missionizing. Ochs' main concern seems to be Yoder's claim that exclusive authentic Judaism is the Judaism of exile, and that exile is not merely a waystation for messiah, but the very completion of the messianic task. Both Ochs and Michael Cartwright claim Yoder overstates the case for exile made by Jeremiah as the *sine qua non* of Judaism and understates, even erases, the intrinsic tie rabbinic Judaism has to the land of Israel. Ochs, as opposed to Cartwright, focuses on the non-postliberalism these moves represent.<sup>28</sup>

On one level, it is hard to contest their criticisms. Historically, literarily, and theologically speaking Yoder's exclusionary vision is limiting. Ochs writes, "Yoder's exclusive choice for an exclusively exilic Judaism shares the same logic as the Maccabees' and Zealots' choice for an exclusively nonexilic Judaism of land and national power."<sup>29</sup> This is an interesting sentence for what it does *not* say. What it does *not* say is that the exclusively nonexilic Judaism is precisely what mainstream Zionism proffers (to say nothing of religious Zionism), illustrated by its foundational principle of "rejection of the diaspora."<sup>30</sup> In considering only ancient ideologies and not the ones that may have informed Yoder's theological critique Ochs has arguably concealed from his reader the very instantiation of Yoder's critical concern. I argue that this context is a crucial part of Yoder's assessment. In fact, in his list of postliberal criteria, Ochs writes that postliberalism must express and meet the needs and crises of a particular time and history.

Setting this aside for the moment Yoder is not blind to Ochs' critique. He writes,

We cannot *not* be selective; we can ask that the selectivity should contribute to reciprocal recognition, finding in the other what one needs, for the sake of one's own integrity, to esteem. . . . I make no apology for reading the vast melee of the Jewish experience in such a way that Yochanan is more representative than Menachem, Abraham Joshua Heschel than Ben Gurion, Arnold Wolf than Meir Kahane, Anne Frank than Golda Meir. What goes on here is not that I am co-opting Jews to enlist them in my cause. It is that I am finding a story, which

28. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 146.

29. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 152.

30. See Schweid, "Rejection of the Diaspora." More recently see Eisen, "Zionism."

is really there, coming all the way down from Abraham, that has the grace to adopt me.<sup>31</sup>

If I read him correctly here, Yoder argues that making a case, or claim, of a lost message, or jewel, buried in the mire of history is not necessarily to exclude the multivocality of a tradition but instead to choose particular lenses through which to see them. Yoder is not denying the existence of other narratives, for example the so-called Zionist narrative that stretches from Bar Kokhba to Bar Giora to Zev Jabotinsky. One could read him to suggest, however, that *that* story does not serve the reparative purposes he seeks, not between Jews and Christians and not internal to Judaism itself. In fact, I would assume he considers *that* story simply a continuation of the schism precisely the way militant Christian evangelicalism is a continuation of the schism. If we bind ourselves to a reparative theology that is part of the postliberal position, wouldn't that create the possibility that certain forms of Judaism or Christianity might need to take precedence in favor of others that would serve that reparative purpose?

Ochs seems attuned to this. Yet he claims that Yoder's anti-Zionism is dyadic, thus not reparative, and not consistent with postliberal sentiments.<sup>32</sup> His reasoning is four-fold (of which I will mention three elements). First, Yoder argues against any "normative" Judaism and then claims that rabbinic Judaism is a fall from what Judaism *ought* to be. Second, because Judaism indeed flourished in exile, it is exilic as a consequence of divine will and thus its un-exilic projection of Judaism through Zionism subverts its true nature. In Ochs' view this undermines the role of the land in exilic Jewish life and literature, viewing it as counter to Judaism's major contribution. Third, the move from "Judaism is nonviolent" to "Judaism is pacifist," and thus involving itself with land, statecraft, and military power is antithetical to Judaism's central mission.<sup>33</sup> This essentially makes Zionism impossible. Ochs considers this a kind of foundationalism in that "Jewish life in exile is a direct illustration of the meaning of Jesus' narrative. The problem is in the clarity and finality of this claim."<sup>34</sup> That is, Yoder ignores accepted traditions in favor of "intuitive" alternatives.

31. Yoder, "Jewishness of the Free Church Vision," in Yoder, *Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, 115.

32. For Ochs' definition of dyadic versus binary reasoning see Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 9, and Ochs, "Response."

33. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 161, 162

34. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 161. The fourth dyadic reasoning that speaks to Yoder's using scripture to get at "the essence of Judaism" is important but not germane to where I want to take Ochs' reading.

Rather than focusing on Yoder's ostensible silencing of these voices it would be more constructive to consider how Yoder's vision could contribute to our present climate regarding the limitations many of us experience when we dare to think outside the Zionist narrative that is now not only a part of the Jewish mosaic but arguably the very standard upon which it is defined.

What I mean to suggest is that today we are arguably not living in a postliberal Jewish world, but very much in a "dyadic" one that makes hegemonic claims of Jewish legitimacy. There is no doubt that the stories of the Davidic monarchy, and the scriptural books of Joshua, Ezra, and Nehemia tell a story quite different than Jeremiah 29. Yoder admits that as much as anyone. But it is legitimate to ask if these are the stories that need repeating today; are these the stories of reparation after the Holocaust? This is not to erase them as much as to "repair" them by rethinking categories of land-edness that need not result in a hegemonic regime that exercises political power as it simultaneously makes a claim of Jewish legitimacy. "Negation of the Diaspora," a cornerstone of classical Zionism, is also a kind of supersessionism. In fact, taken literally it excludes almost half of the Jewish people and many Jewish ideologies that have flourished since the advent of modernity. Yoder addresses this problem by decoupling Judaism from Zionism in a way that would enable both to exist but disable the political theology that emerges when they become fused (this may arguably result in a post- and not an anti-Zionist perspective).<sup>35</sup>

## V

As a way to offer a constructive critique of Ochs' reading of Yoder, I would like to briefly present three different positions that may help us understand how Yoder's theological critique of Zionism's political theology, even if we do not accept it, might help Jews come to terms with the challenges of political hegemony while recognizing Yoder's point about Jewish genius as he understands it. Even if Ochs is right that Yoder is not being postliberal in his critique of Zionism, we can still view him as contributing to a postliberal theology by creating a theology of reparation that seeks to relieve suffering. In the three cases below there is an attempt to decouple Zionism from Judaism which may be a way to salvage both while mitigating the negative dimensions each contributes to the other.

The first is the early to mid-twentieth century Canaanite movement led by Yonatan Ratosh; the second is Yoel Teitelbaum, the Hasidic grand rabbi of

<sup>35</sup>. See Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, 53; and Weaver, *States of Exile*, 61. On Boyarin, see Weaver, "Further Footnotes."

Satmar who is responsible for the contemporary ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionist position; and the third is contemporary Jewish philosopher Steven Schwarzschild (who was also an important interlocutor of Yoder's).<sup>36</sup> In many ways, these constitute three failed experiments and have largely been either erased (the Canaanites), discredited (Satmar), or ignored (Schwarzschild). Yet all three address Yoder's concerns about the extent to which Zionism, as nationalism and landedness, has sullied what Judaism has to offer. Each in different ways uncouples Judaism from Zionism, in one case, to create a new Hebraic civilization (Canaanites), in another case to invalidate Zionism as a form of heresy (Satmar), and in the third case to make us think more carefully about the ways in which Jewish nationalism and militarism challenges a crucial part of the covenant (Schwarzschild).

In the early twentieth century Yonatan Rotosh and the Canaanites made the case that Zionism's success required it to be severed totally from Judaism.<sup>37</sup> The extent to which the Canaanites are Zionist at all depends on how one understands the term. They are certainly not the only ones who sought to decouple Zionism from Judaism, but they are perhaps the most radical and uncompromising.<sup>38</sup>

Avidly secular, the Canaanites believed that Zionism offered the possibility of a new autochthonous Hebrew civilization that would accompany (on some readings, replace) the older diasporic "Jewish" one. It would avoid the Jew-Gentile schism by making all inhabitants of the land of Israel, Jew or Gentile, citizens of a new Hebrew civilization. In this vision, Israel would not be a "Jewish" state but a Hebrew one. For the Canaanites (not unlike Yoder) Judaism was a product of the diaspora and it should remain so. Judaism may be needed for Jews to survive in *galut*. That is its origin and that is its place. The Canaanites thought the New Hebrew civilization could replace the old diasporic "Jewish" one but only if radical separation between Judaism and Zionism occurred. Otherwise Israel would simply turn into an ethnic enclave and the non-Jewish inhabitants who had been living there for generations would be excluded.<sup>39</sup>

36. Michael Cartwright treats Yoder and Schwarzschild's relation in his afterword to Yoder, *Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, 205–40.

37. The definitive study of the Canaanites in English is Diamond, *Homeland or Holy Land*. On this point see 49–76.

38. Diamond, *Homeland or Holy Land*, 9–23.

39. It is interesting that after the establishment of the state, some Canaanites like Rotosh became quite right wing while others became quite left wing. As Ron Kuzar notes, "[The Canaanites] exhibited an interesting blend of militarism and power politics toward the Arabs as an organized community on the one hand and a welcoming acceptance of them as individuals to be redeemed from medieval darkness on the other." See Kuzar, *Hebrew and Zionism*, 13.

In many ways, the Satmar position is structurally similar to the Canaanites that reaches the opposite conclusion. Teitelbaum viewed Zionism as the anti-Christ of the generation preceding messiah.<sup>40</sup> It was the final divine test Jews needed to withstand to merit redemption. For Teitelbaum, Judaism and Zionism are diametrically opposed and from his perspective any form of secular Judaism was false by definition. His real adversaries were not the secularists, but the religious nationalists who viewed Zionism as the fulfillment of Judaism and the ultra-Orthodox who succumbed to the seduction of Zionism, even if only for pragmatic reasons. Teitelbaum would have agreed with Yoder's use of Jeremiah 29 as the template of Jewish religiosity albeit not for the same reasons. For Teitelbaum exile is a divine decree not to be undone by any form of human agency. Ignoring or contesting that decree endangers the Jews by severing the covenantal protection awarded to them through the covenant.

Exile is not the place for Jews to disseminate their wisdom to the world but rather to create enclaves whereby they can maintain their traditions and wait for redemption.<sup>41</sup> Teitelbaum advocates a premillennial Judaism that seeks to cultivate a remnant of "true Jews" who live by their covenantal responsibilities and will ultimately merit redemption. Like Yoder, Teitelbaum also has strong pacifist tendencies, at least in terms of "forcing the end." While Teitelbaum and Yoder strongly differ on fundamental issues of theology, one place where they overlap is on the notion of faith in God and in God's covenant with Israel as the central tenet of Jewish life.

Here a brief examination of Steven Schwarzschild becomes relevant because it is perhaps the best place to view the overlap between Yoder and Teitelbaum. Schwarzschild was a long-time friend of Yoder and their communication on these matters illuminates much about both Yoder and Schwarzschild's theological positions. Schwarzschild was also one of the few modern Jewish thinkers who creatively used Teitelbaum's anti-Zionism in his theological work although he was in no way a follower. This comes through most clearly in his essay "On the Theology of Jewish Survival."<sup>42</sup>

In that essay Schwarzschild makes a distinction between what he calls the "ethical covenant" and the "metaphysical covenant."

The ethical interpretation makes the religious, ethical, and historical honor of Israel the prerequisite of God's fulfillment of

40. See, for example, the Introduction to Teitelbaum, '*Al Ha-Geulah ve la Ha-Temurah*, 1–27. Cf. Ravitzky, "Forcing the End"; Kaplan, "Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum"; and Sorotzkin, "Building the Earthly."

41. See Magid, "America Is No Different."

42. See Schwarzschild, "On the Theology."

His part of the covenant; i.e. the preservation and advantage of the Jewish people: if they do not do their share He is relieved of His obligation and will let it lapse. The advantage of this view is obviously the responsibility which it places on the Jew and the ethical stimulus it thus constitutes. Its corollary disadvantage is equally obvious: it is entirely too anthropocentric. . . . The metaphysical view, then, represents the other part of the polarity. It speaks of the “eternal covenant”: it assures mankind that as long as the rainbow will be in the sky so long—which is to say eternally—will humanity persist, and it assures Israel that its survival is coeval with God’s existence.<sup>43</sup>

In some way, the very notion of Jewish nationalism (making the Jewish people, and not God the center of the covenantal axis) is a “secular” act in that it may remain wed to the “ethical covenant” (self-determination or the fulfillment of mitzvoth) but rejects the “metaphysical covenant” (God’s promise to insure Jewish survival). The self-assertion of Jewish “survival” is founded in some way on two opposite poles: the fear of physical annihilation (the Holocaust) and the fear of assimilation. Thus, taking one’s survival into one’s own hands is understandable enough, especially given historical exigencies, but Schwarzschild asks us to consider the covenantal price of such a move when that effaces the metaphysical dimension. Since the ethical and metaphysical dimensions of the covenant exist in tandem and stand in dialectical relation to one another what happens when one is affirmed and one is marginalized, if not unwittingly denied?<sup>44</sup>

Schwarzschild applies this template to the reception of the Holocaust and to militant Zionism. Why, he asks, do we venerate those who “fought back” (the Warsaw ghetto uprising) and those who survived, but do not view those who perished as heroes but rather as victims about whom it is said, “who went like sheep to the slaughter”? Schwarzschild argues that this too easily translates to the militarism, the survivalism, of Zionism. And also, I would add, to the undermining of the metaphysical covenant.

Schwarzschild summarizes his position as follows:

What we have been saying is that the survival of the Jewish people is guaranteed by God—that we need not really concern ourselves with it—that to preoccupy oneself with it is a form of sickness, as health-faddists are invariably sick people—that to attribute our survival to human instrumentalities . . . inevitably

43. Schwarzschild, “On the Theology,” 84, 85.

44. Here Meir Kahane’s thinking is a good counter-point to Teitelbaum. See Magid, “Anti-Semitism as Colonialism.”

leads to acts of *hubris*, *ga'avah*, which victimize other human beings and result in unending conflict and defeat—and that, on the contrary, the God who has brought us this far will also redeem His other promises to Israel. . . . In short, the Torah is our business, Israel's survival is God's.<sup>45</sup>

Schwarzchild certainly does not adopt Teitelbaum's political theology. But he is suggesting that Teitelbaum makes an important point for us to consider: how much of the covenant is erased through the adaptation of Zionism defined as the Jews being fully responsible for their own survival as the standard of Jewish legitimacy? Here I think Yoder makes a useful intervention, but to fully understand that one must see his work within its historical context.

I suggest that a robust Jewish theology emerges precisely when Schwarzchild's ethical and metaphysical covenantal postures act in relation, rather than opposition, to one another. Covenantal theology requires human action and divine promise. When human action functions without, or even against, divine promise, or when divine promise is defined by human action (God demands us to save ourselves) what easily results is a fetishization of power whereby human responsibility for the "other" is eclipsed by the obsession with the survival of the self. Yoder's understanding of the Jesus movement was that by uncoupling religion from the polis, religion (Christianity and Judaism) could assure that the polis would not succumb to theologizing its own muscularity, thus undermining precisely what it has to offer human civilization.

In any case, Ochs is certainly correct when he argues that "part of the postliberal critique of modern thought is that neither the things of the created world nor the messages of God's revealed Scripture are adequately 'captured,' represented, or defined in humanly constructed claims."<sup>46</sup> But this may be precisely Yoder's point viewed through the lens of Schwarzchild's ethical and metaphysical covenant. Jeremiah and Ezra live in dialectical tension, and they must, for the covenant to remain intact. Yoder is offering his vision "finding a story, which is really there, coming all the way down from Abraham . . ." Is it the only story? A postliberal would certainly say no. Whether Yoder would do not know. But it is a story that today may be the victim and not the perpetrator of supersessionism.

45. Schwarzchild, "On the Theology," 96–98.

46. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 159.

## VI

If postliberal Judaism really wants to be a reparative theology in the twenty-first century, a theology born from the Holocaust but moving beyond it, it must address the reality in which it lives. Thus to extend Ochs' thinking I want to suggest that the twenty-first century presents us with another form of reparation—one that, perhaps ironically, presents certain challenges to the reparation of the twentieth century. While Zionism, and the Christian West's acceptance of Zionism, is part of a larger postliberal project of reparation that is in part about the alleviation of Jewish suffering living under the dominion of others during their long history, Zionism also *produces* the suffering of another people.<sup>47</sup> After the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and after 1967 when the state of Israel moved from being a democracy of all its citizens (flawed like every other democracy) to being overlords of another population, the partners of reparation may have shifted from Christians and Jews, to Palestinians and Jews. The movement of Christianity *toward* Judaism so elegantly articulated by Ochs, must also consider that Jews may find themselves on the other end of that equation. To deny that possibility indeed essentializes victimhood which makes the gift of political power not only superfluous but also unjust. Ochs indeed knows all this but I think it merits bringing it to the attention of his readers when considering his assessment of Yoder.

The Holocaust still remains a hovering dark cloud over the entire discussion. Whether or not we want to suggest a theological connection between the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel, it is certainly legitimate to say that politically the Holocaust played a role in making Israel a reality.<sup>48</sup> And part of the reparation of the Holocaust, as Ochs notes, is the viability of Jewish sovereignty in the form of a Zionist nation-state.<sup>49</sup> But it is more complicated than that.

As we know, the land was never empty. The challenge of the new nation-state was the impact the founding of that state had on the Palestinian population who lived there, and the ways each side is now implicated in the narrative of the other. On this Edward Said wrote,

Neither Palestinian nor Israeli history at this point is a thing in itself, without the other. . . . In doing so [seeing them as separate]

47. Here I think of Said's chapter "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims," in Said, *Question of Palestine*, 56–114.

48. In terms of the Shoah and its theological implications, or lack thereof, in the state of Israel, see Novak, *Judaism and Zionism*, 225–49.

49. See Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 162.

we will necessarily come up against the basic irreconcilability between the Zionist claim and Palestinian dispossession.<sup>50</sup>

The Jews now face a challenge, in part not of their own making, and in part the result of precisely the reparation of a previous generation. That is, a nation-state founded on the principle of Jewish (i.e., biblical) history, one that, once enacted, has had a negative impact on another population, not only by consequence but arguably also by design. This impact is certainly not to the extent the Jews were victimized in the Holocaust, but it is a state of dispossession nonetheless. On this Atalia Omer notes,

The reading of the Tanakh (and the Holocaust), in socializing a particular historical Jewish Israeli consciousness, normalized and vindicated Jewish presence in Palestine. Therefore, it obscured the possibility of recognizing how the narratives of Palestinian displacement and uprootedness might challenge the perceptions of peace and justice as imagined within the Zionist vista.<sup>51</sup>

Yoder's anti-Constantinianism as the basis of his alleged anti-Zionism may offer yet another alternative by suggesting that when the polis takes possession of religion, even, or perhaps precisely in a secularized form, it will invariably corrupt the polis and that corruption will undermine religion's greatness. This is as true of Judaism as it is of Christianity, or Islam. Ochs may counter that because Yoder is an essentialist, his theory of non-nonsupersessionism cannot play a role in the new reparation paradigm. I am suggesting that viewing Yoder through Schwarzschild enables us to read Yoder in a more generous, and perhaps less essentialist, way. Perhaps if Zionism would become more openly uncoupled from Judaism,<sup>52</sup> if it wouldn't make its politics the standard of Jewish theology and identity, it would enable Judaism to remain closer to what Yoder thinks it originally was.

If we say that today's postliberal theology needs to respond to the reparation of another state of inequality, ironically in part born from a previous state of inequality, Yoder, along with others, may be useful tools for a contemporary Jewish postliberal theological thinking on this point. I will say in sum that Yoder's critique of Constantinianism, whether in Christianity (Christendom) or in Judaism (Zionism) is a voice that needs to be heard in a world where Constantine and Bar Kokhba's ghosts seem to

50. Said, "Method for Thinking," 193.

51. Omer, *When Peace Is Not Enough*, 41.

52. I do not mean the state should seek to erase religion. That may be one of liberal politics' greatest failures, as Michael Waltzer notes in his *Paradox of Liberalism*. For a sensitive analysis of Waltzer, see Mirsky, "Religious Fate."

be marching in step, perhaps preventing postliberal theology from more fully confronting the necessary healing in the twenty-first century. Ochs has shown us a path. The work continues.

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