DOMAINS, NORMATIVITY, AND NORMATIVITY ACROSS DOMAINS: ON PETER OCHS'S *RELIGION WITHOUT VIOLENCE*

SUSANNAH TICCIATI

How is it possible for members of different and conflicting religious traditions to engage amicably with one another without bracketing their deepest religious commitments? Ochs's account of the practice and philosophy of Scriptural Reasoning provides an answer to this question in terms of a logic of normative engagement across traditional borders distinct but not separate from the normative decision-making that takes place within particular traditions. Such normative engagement navigates between two extremes: unmediated conflict at one end, and a detached surveying of 'worldviews' at the other end. In the former scenario participants can only wield the normativity of their own traditions against others who do not share that normativity; they cannot reason with them. In the latter scenario, participants step back from the traditions they otherwise inhabit in order to view them alongside others as objects for description and comparison, bracketing their normative force. Ochs's inter-traditional normativity is unknown to either, and a source of repair for both.

  In this essay I read Ochs's *Religion Without Violence* as offering the more general theory of which his previous book, *Another Reformation*, is a particular case study. In doing so, I hope to show how the latter book clarifies and repairs the earlier one at a crucial point. This is to treat Ochs's oeuvre as a developing trajectory whose deep reasonings can be traced and extrapolated further. Specifically, following Ochs's own method of reparative reading (displayed most fully in his close study of the work of C.S. Peirce), I will identify two tendencies in his work that, while potentially complementary, come into conflict precisely when they are not sufficiently distinguished from one another.[1]

Susannah Ticciati
Department of Theology and Religious Studies, King's College London, Virginia Woolf Building, 22 Kingsway, London, WC2B 6NR, UK
Email: susannah.ticciati@kcl.ac.uk

  [1] For Ochs's method of reading to discover 'leading tendencies' and, in some instances, 'contradictions' between them, see Peter Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 27-32. For a less technically-framed illustration, see his reading of Milbank in Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), where he speaks of 'competing tendencies' in Milbank (224-26). I am using his terminology in a slightly altered way insofar as the 'tendencies' I pick out are not themselves in competition, but rather generate contradiction only when they are conflated.

Another Reformation, through its study of a series of postliberal Christian theologians, generates a model for nonsupersessionist Christian theology. In the light of *Religion Without Violence*, it can be seen as doing two distinct things. On the one hand, it displays a Christian accommodation of Jews *inside* their Christian vision (what I will call the 'accommodationist' tendency). On the other hand, it displays a Christian acknowledgment of the finitude of their vision, and concomitantly the potential rationality and integrity of Jewish thought and practice *beyond* that vision (what I will call the 'limiting' tendency). However, when viewed from the perspective of the later book, *Another Reformation* can be seen as running into problems insofar as it does not sufficiently distinguish between these tendencies.

By bringing into focus the question of normativity *across* and *between* traditions, *Religion Without Violence* emphasises the 'limiting' tendency, and invites a definition of nonsupersessionism primarily in those terms: in terms of the 'how' rather than the 'what' of the Christian vision. To be sure, such a definition is present in *Another Reformation*, but jostling ambiguously alongside a definition in terms of the 'accommodationist' tendency—which emphasises the content of the Christian vision rather than the manner in which that vision is held.

In my analysis I implement a conceptuality and terminology developed by Nicholas Adams in his reading of Peter Ochs.[2] Adams coins the phrase 'domains of limited validity' to denote the conditions under which truth claims are made, and (potentially to be distinguished from the former) the conditions under which they are affirmed or denied. Domains can be local and well-defined, such as the classificatory system in a supermarket, or broad and underdetermining, such as the deep rules and axioms of a whole religious tradition. Scriptural Reasoning, as a practice of engagement across traditions, can be conceived as engagement in which claims are made and received in multiple domains at once. A truth claim made within one domain may make very different, or even no, sense when received within another domain, and the assessment of its truth-value will vary accordingly. In the normal run of things, normativity belongs to domains. I judge what is true or appropriate with respect to domain-specific conditions.[3] Scriptural Reasoning, while in some ways operating with rules specific to the practice, and thus in a domain of its own, is at the same time a practice that deliberately brings into focus the relation between diverse domains. The normativity it engages is accordingly of a different kind. It is precisely part of the job of Ochs's book to uncover its logic. To anticipate, its normativity is less about the content of the claims made, and more about the manner in which they are made: the 'how' rather than the 'what'.

Using domains language, it is possible elegantly to distinguish between the alternative potential avenues for nonsupersessionist Christian theology outlined above. To accommodate Jews inside one's Christian vision is to change the claims one makes within one's Christian-specific domain. To acknowledge the potential rationality of Jewish thought and practice beyond the Christian vision entails acknowledging, on the one hand, the limitedness of the validity of the claims made with a Christian-specific domain, and on the other hand (and by the same token), the existence of other domains in which quite different claims are conceivably valid. As will become clear, 'validity' is not to be confused with 'truth'. For Ochs, the ultimate truth value of competing religious truth claims cannot be settled 'short of some end time'.[4]

I will begin by offering an account of Ochs's logic of Scriptural Reasoning, with reference to the ways in which truth and normativity are figured. I will then draw out the lines of continuity

---

[2] See Nicholas Adams, 'Domains of Limited Validity: Milbank's Supersessionism', unpublished essay (n.d.).

[3] The language of 'truth-conditions' is used in a comparable sense by Mark Randall James, 'Scriptural Reasoning as Communal Thinking', *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 16, no. 1 (June 2017).

[4] Peter Ochs, *Religion Without Violence: The Practice and Philosophy of Scriptural Reasoning* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 5.

between this logic and the logic of nonsupersessionism articulated in *Another Reformation*. In this light it will then be possible to trace and articulate the two tendencies present in *Another Reformation*, and to diagnose and repair their conflation. Finally, I will draw attention to the fact that the dominant tendency in the literature on Christian nonsupersessionism is the 'accommodationist'. Against that background, Ochs's emphasis on the 'limiting' tendency becomes all the more significant.

Ochs distinguishes between three different types of scenario according to the way in which they differently configure 'truth' (or, in other words, according to their different modes of normativity). The first type of scenario is a conventional setting in which the language (and other) conventions in operation are not in question. They are assumed by all participants and thus remain largely implicit and even unacknowledged. Ochs calls these 'constative claims' and gives, as an example of a common-sense claim of this kind: 'The salt shaker is on the small cabinet', said by someone at a dinner table in their home. The assumption is 'that everyone at the table knows exactly where to look'.[5] This would not be the time to exploit ambiguities in the language, for example by asking whether the speaker means the (very) small cabinet in the dolls' house upstairs. To get anything done, conversation partners must work with many assumptions that remain unarticulated and undisputed. In such a scenario (in which conventions remain undisputedly at work) constative claims are either true or false (they cannot be both true and false, nor can they be neither true nor false).

To get a better handle on this type of scenario, I will offer another, more complex, theological example. In the context of Christian catechetical instruction in which orthodox (Nicene) trinitarian theology is being taught, suppose the catechist asks the catechumens: 'When Jesus says to his disciples in the Farewell Discourses, "For the Father is greater than I", does that mean that the person of the Father is of higher divinity than the Son, and thus that the Son is subordinate to the Father?' In such a context, the answer 'yes' is false, while the answer 'no' is true. It is clear from this example that what is meant by 'true' is 'to be affirmed under the conditions of orthodox trinitarianism'. If the question were asked without regard to those conditions, such a (subordinationist) reading of the passage could by no means be ruled out. What Ochs calls 'the plain sense'[6] is vague or polyvalent,[7] its meaning only being determined according to the conventions that operate for particular communities of interpretation.

The second type of scenario is one in which '[r]*eparative or contested claims* are offered to change or repair specific conventions for formulating [constative] claims'.[8] To offer a reparative reading of a scriptural verse is another way to 'determine' the vagueness of its plain sense than according to a conventional reading. The difference is that the reading is offered not according to conventions that are already in place, but so as in some respects (but not in others) to propose new conventions. It is reparative only if it continues to work with many (or most) of the conventions of a community of readers, its new proposals being offered to repair rather than replace the full set. Such a reading, unlike a wholly conventional reading, does not abide by a two-valued logic (according to which it is either true or false). It may turn out to be true or false, but it may also be a third value (such as 'neither' or 'maybe')—in keeping with what Ochs names a three-valued logic.[9] The reason for this is that truth and falsity are judged according to conventions. If the conventions are in the process of being altered, the truth of the reparative claim is bound up with its success (or not) in establishing new conventions that repair the old ones. In the

---

[5] Ochs, *Religion Without Violence*, 66.
[6] Ibid., 25-26.
[7] Ibid., 36-37.
[8] Ibid., 66.
[9] Ibid., 112-14.

meantime, and as a recommendation for reparative change, it is neither true nor false but, rather, 'strong, weak, or probable'.[10]

As an example of a reparative reading, Ochs (elsewhere) gives a *derashah* (interpretive reading) from the Mishnah on Isaiah 60:21: '"All Israel have a portion in the world-to-come, as it is written, 'your people shall all be righteous, they shall possess the land forever . . .' (Isaiah 60:21)" [*Mishnah Sanhedrin X:1*]'.[11] Ochs hypothesises that this is being written in the context of the destroyed temple in Jerusalem in the early second century. In order to make sense of Israel's 'possession of the land forever' amidst this ruin, the Isaianic promise is referred to 'the world-to-come'. The rabbinic reading involves the proposal of a new convention—reference of biblical promises to the world-to-come—in repair of conventions operative within Second Temple Judaism that have failed in the wake of the destruction of the temple. Whether the new convention will succeed only time will tell. The emergence of Rabbinic Judaism, in the context of which this once innovative convention becomes established, is the proof of the *derashah*'s 'truth'—its ability to repair the plain sense for the emerging community of readers.

What sort of truth are we dealing with here? Ochs distinguishes, in rabbinic terms, between the 'will of the absolute' as displayed in the plain sense of scripture, but only indeterminately, and the determinate meanings that are arrived at by historically-specific communities of readers.[12] For finite creatures, only the latter have 'truth-values'. In *Another Reformation*, he clarifies: 'We may declare: we have heard directly from the One whose Word is true universally. Yes indeed. But we are not the ones to articulate the universality of this Word'.[13] In other words, truth-inquiry is context-bound, and while we may articulate universal truths, we cannot pretend to do so in an unconditioned manner, but only from our finite, context-bound vantage points.

Adams's domains-language can helpfully be drawn upon to illuminate the logic of these scenarios. Both conventional and reparative truth-claims are to be affirmed, denied or tested under certain conditions—they have domains of limited validity. Conventional claims are to be affirmed or denied under the conditions of assumed conventions; reparative claims are offered (for example) under the conditions of a problem in the plain sense of scripture for a historically-located community, and they invite testing by those who receive them. The problem Ochs is responding to is a (modern) tendency to utter and/or receive such claims as if they were domain-free—made or heard with no acknowledgment (and even a disguise) of the conditions under which they might be affirmed, denied or tested, and thus as if they can (and must) be received as either true or false by anyone anywhere. On Ochs's account, while it is possible to offer unlimited or unconditioned claims (such as 'the divinity of the Son is equal to that of the Father'), it is not possible to do so in an unlimited or unconditioned manner. As finite creatures, we can speak about the (infinite) truth, but we can only do so as finite.

To emphasise the conditioned character of all truth claims is not to give up on their truth in a relativist manner.[14] Communal conventions are constantly being tested with reference to the flourishing of the communities they serve in the wider world in which they live. As we have seen, a problem experienced by a community may signal a failure in that community's

---

[10] Ibid., 125n18.

[11] Peter Ochs, 'To Love Tanakh is Love Enough for the Jews: Reflection on *Dabru Emet*', in *Karl Barth, the Jews, and Judaism,* ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 75-102; 93.

[12] Ochs, *Religion Without Violence*, 37-38.

[13] Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 254.

[14] Cf. James, 'Scriptural Reasoning as Communal Thinking': 'The fact that the truth of a claim is relative to some context is consistent with believing that that very context should be normative and that one's construal of that context's truth.'

conventions, calling for reparative claims—and these are tested with respect to their ability to repair the problem. Thus a community's truth claims, while conditioned, are answerable to the one world the community shares with others, and they accordingly change shape over time.

The third type of scenario is exemplified by Scriptural Reasoning. It differs from the first two insofar as its focus is on 'claims . . . introduced across the borders of religious groups and their hearths'.[15] These claims are thus received in multiple domains simultaneously, domains marked by the different conventions operative in the different religious traditions. This is not to discount conventions and commitments specific to SR itself: with local variations and relative degrees of formality, it has well-developed codes of conduct, which tend to go together with (more or less implicit) conceptual commitments on the part of the participants, such as to the vagueness or polyvalence of the plain sense of the scriptures, or to the oneness of the world. Thus, while claims in the context of SR may *also* be subject to an SR-specific domain of limited validity, SR has its focus on what Ochs calls 'cross-border adventure[s]',[16] or what, with Adams, we might call 'dialogue in multiple domains'.[17]

Specifically, SR involves not just one but a plurality of scriptural canons, 'each of whose sets of words command equal authority around the SR table'.[18] If a scriptural canon is the ultimate source of the conventions of a religious community, then SR has no equivalent, single source of shared conventions. The plurality of canons remains plural, rather than forming a super-canon that generates a set of super-conventions. In other words, SR is not an alternative—or hybrid—religious community. What this means practically, and in terms of type 1 and type 2 scenarios, is that SR does not have its own conventional language according to which conventional or reparative readings of the verses being studied can be arrived at by the group. In other words, scriptural verses are not available to be read for 'their implications for decision, commitment, or action', or 'in order to serve the needs of this-worldly behavior . . . for a given spacetime context'.[19]

It is in this delimited sense that Ochs draws the conclusion that in SR there are 'no shared "truths"'.[20] On the one hand, there is no super-canon, and thus no harmonised source of normativity shared by all participants. On the other hand, and by the same token, there are no communally-agreed determinate truths. 'No shared truths' in this delimited sense does not, however, mean no truth (or indeed no truths). On the one hand, and as we have seen, an SR-specific domain may itself entail conceptual commitments that might also be named truth-claims (even if their content remains either vague or second-order). On the other hand, participants continue in an SR setting to 'articulat[e] and tes[t] their own truth-claims about individual words and verses of Scripture, [even while] they [do] not worry if others interpre[t] those texts differently'.[21]

It is within these parameters that the peculiar normativity of SR must be articulated. Ochs distinguishes between two species of truth:

> SR study is not about truth or falsity. For SR, truth or falsity is a characteristic only of determinate claims about the interpretive/performative meaning of Scripture, and such claims are available only within traditional circles of scriptural study . . . The Bible identifies a second species of 'truth' that *can* apply to SR study. This is truth as *emet*, a Hebrew term

---

[15] Ochs, *Religion Without Violence*, 22.

[16] Ibid., 23.

[17] Cf. Adams, 'Domains of Limited Validity'.

[18] Ochs, *Religion Without Violence*, 86.

[19] Ibid., 23.

[20] Ibid., 40.

[21] Ibid., 39.

derived from the root *amn*, connoting 'faithfulness'. SR is deeply concerned with this spe-cies of truth: the faithfulness that joins each SR reader to the plain sense of Scripture and that, we hope, joins each SR scholar to every other.[22]

It would be easy to mistake the appeal to truth as faithfulness as a low-level claim about the potential cordiality between those who have left their truth-commitments or normativity at the door. But this would be to divest SR of its normativity, and to reduce the practice to that kind of distanced comparative religion that Ochs is seeking to move beyond. I hypothesise, on the contrary, that to get at truth as *emet* is precisely to get at the distinctive normativity operative in SR.

Ochs continues by making the following distinction:

> [T]he rule of SR is to suspend one's customary search for the true meaning of the scriptural texts, whether those of one's own tradition or of another's. The rule of SR is, instead, to search after the really possible meanings of each text . . .[23]

Reading this as a clarification of the previous distinction, the truth as *emet* is filled out positively in terms of the 'really possible meanings' of the scriptures. I take the contrasting pole, the 'custom-ary search for the true meaning', to refer to a religious community's aim either to articulate a con-ventional meaning or to arrive at a reparative reading of a particular text. A 'true meaning' (in the singular) is one that is offered 'for a given spacetime context'.[24] Within a religious tradition, the authority of its scriptural canon is enacted in the generation of determinate meanings for specific contexts: this is the shape of the tradition's normativity. To suspend this traditional normativity in search, instead, of the *really possible* meanings of the scriptures is not to suspend the uniquely bind-ing authority of one's own canon, but to relate to that authority in a different way: on the level of the scriptures' polyvalence or indeterminacy, before it has been determined for specific worldly contexts.

This is to do two things. First, in Ochs's rabbinic idiom, it is to focus on the plain sense as that which '*displays the will of the Absolute . . . indeterminately*'.[25] Second, and by the same token, it is to acknowledge that this plain sense is open to being read by members of other traditions, whose alternative readings may at times (and at the very least) pose questions to the home tradi-tion's conventional readings.[26] Because a tradition's authority is located in the conventions it articulates (and repairs) for reading its scriptures in specific contexts, the plain sense transcends that authority. Members of the tradition do not have a monopoly on its meaning. As Ochs puts it:

> [O]n the one hand, the group honors the sacred bond between members of one tradition and their scriptural canon; on the other hand, no tradition is treated during the give-and-take of group study as if it had privileged access to the meanings of each verse within that canon. These meanings rest with their author, and they are equally pursued by all readers.[27]

---

[22] Ibid., 41.

[23] Ibid., 41.

[24] Ibid., 23.

[25] Ibid., 37.

[26] Cf. James, 'Scriptural Reasoning as Communal Thinking'. Having emphasised the tendency of SR 'to modalize claims', typically qualifying them as '*possible*' (italics original), James draws a similar conclusion: '[O]ne of the remark-able facts about SR is that it fosters a situation in which someone from one tradition may be dependent on someone from another tradition for insight into one's own text'.

[27] Ochs, *Religion Without Violence*, 23. Emphasis original.

Ironically, to acknowledge the ultimate authority of one's own scriptural canon for members of one's own tradition is to acknowledge the role that might be played by members of other traditions (for whom it is not authoritative) in disclosing its possible meanings.

If traditional normativity is suspended, what is the shape of the normativity generated by a focus on the scriptures in their plain, indeterminate sense in the company of readers from other traditions? To make headway with this question we must recall the presence also of other scriptural canons at the SR table. What does it mean to say that they 'command equal authority'?[28] On the one hand, it cannot mean that they equally command no authority. On the other hand, it cannot mean that they together command the authority of a super-canon. As we have seen, SR does not erase the uniquely binding authority of a tradition's 'own' scriptural canon for its members. However, because the focus is on its possible meanings, its authority cannot be pitted competitively against that of the other canons. Concretely, readings of verses from one canon cannot be used to trump readings of verses from another canon, nor invoked as their hermeneutical key. This would only be possible with determinate meanings that exclude one another (or are arranged in an agreed hierarchy). Possible meanings do not exclude but sit alongside one another in their difference: they are not asserted in the indicative but entertained, hypothesised, and experimented with. In short, the authority 'equally' commanded by the words of the different scriptural canons is not an authority that dictates 'decision, commitment, or action',[29] as would determinate readings, but the authority of something more like data that commands attention. In the hypothesising of possible meanings, no data (in the form of the words of the different canons) is in principle accorded privileged attention.

To read one's own scriptures alongside the scriptures of other traditions and in the company of members of those other traditions is potentially to expand the range of possibilities one finds in the plain sense of one's own scriptures. While such an expansion does not have the normative force of tradition-specific determinate readings, it does potentially change the set of possibilities available for determination in specific contexts. SR, in other words, operates with a normativity of possibility and imagination, which has significant implications for the traditional normativity of contextual decision and action. In this way, the scriptures of the other traditions, while not being lent an authority on a par with one's own scriptures, are nevertheless afforded a critical role in one's normative engagement with one's own scriptures.

What warrants this deferential attentiveness to the members of other traditions and their scriptures? I suggest that the warrant lies in the hypothesis of the oneness of the world. The tradition to which one belongs is the complex and changing but nevertheless finite context within which one makes sense of the world. It exists alongside and in relation with other such finite contexts within which the world is interpreted differently. To attend to these other contexts (and their associated domains of limited validity) as sources of potential insight into the world is to assume that they afford perspectives on the same world—in other words, that there is one world to which all domain-bound truths are ultimately answerable.

In short, the mandate to reread the scriptures anew in new contexts (thereby acknowledging their polyvalence) is accompanied by the mandate to attend to the new contexts and companies one finds oneself in (thereby acknowledging the oneness of the world). It is this dual mandate to which truth as *emet* corresponds. Ochs speaks specifically of 'the faithfulness that joins each SR reader to the plain sense of Scripture and that, we hope, joins each SR scholar to every other'.[30] Faithfulness to the plain sense is commitment to the polyvalence in which its divine authority is

---

[28] Ibid., 86.
[29] Ibid., 23.
[30] Ibid., 41.

located; the faithfulness of each SR scholar to every other (and, I infer, to their scriptures) is the shape taken by commitment to the one world in the SR context.

I pause here to highlight an ambiguity in the role of the scriptures as Ochs characterises them within the SR context. I will return to this ambiguity below in the context of my reparative reading of Ochs. On the one hand, the scriptural canon (of any particular tradition) in the vagueness of its plain sense transcends the conventional conditions under which that tradition's truth claims are valid. From this perspective, the plain sense 'corresponds' to the divine infinity, not in its own infinity, but as the condition for an 'indefinite series of meanings' realisable in any number of new contexts.[31] On the other hand, set alongside the scriptures of other traditions, the finitude of a particular scriptural canon comes to the fore. From this perspective a traditional claimant must recognise that her claims are limited not only as finite interpretations of the plain sense of her scriptures, but more fundamentally as conditioned by an acceptance of the authority of these (rather than those) scriptures. In other words, however vague her 'own' scriptures, there are truth claims, valid in quite different domains, that cannot be accommodated by them.

To sum up where we have got: SR suspends a normativity of decision and action in order to bring into focus a normativity of possibility and imagination (to be sure, the latter is already at play within individual traditions, but it is generally subordinated there to the former). While decision and action are domain-bound, the language of possibility sits more lightly to specific domains. First, it enables one to move more freely between domains (in hypothetical mode). Second, it enables a vaguer relationship with specific domains: to explore a possibility might precisely entail exploring under which conditions (in what domains) it could be affirmed. In this sense, SR is first and foremost a training in the 'how' of truth-claims, rather than instruction in the 'what'. SR participants are brought to self-consciousness about the limited domains of their truth claims. In dialogue with others who receive these claims in different domains, they are invited to shift from the posture of defending their claims before those others to a joint inquiry into possibilities whose domains are not yet determined. They are thereby returned to the polyvalence of their scriptures, whose authority lies in the imperative to look and see.[32] Insofar as the possibilities opened up may lead to an alteration in one's traditional readings, a transformed 'how' may lead to a transformed 'what'. But it need not.

As in *Religion Without Violence*, a key emphasis in *Another Reformation* is on the polyvalence or vagueness of the scriptures. This goes together with the recognition that a particular interpretation is only one of many possible interpretations, offered within and for a finite context, and thus of the potential appropriateness of other interpretations for other finite contexts. Such an insight is vital in the context of Jewish-Christian relations, since Jews and Christians offer alternative interpretations of scriptures that are partly shared. Following George Lindbeck (Ochs's first representative of 'American' postliberalism), Ochs' characterisation of supersessionism is hermeneutical: 'by devaluing the scriptural story of Israel, it directs the reader's attention away from the intrinsic theological value of the Old Testament text in its irreducible many layers of meaning'.[33] One important implication is that it leaves no room for other interpreters of that text who determine its meaning differently. A nonsupersessionist Christian theology, by contrast, characterises the gospel as 'a perennial event of returning to the plain sense of Israel's story and rediscovering every day what it now means in the light of the Gospel narrative of Jesus Christ'.[34] In doing so, it registers both the vagueness of the scriptures and the context-bound character of its own (christological) interpretations. But by the same token, it registers the fact that there may

---

[31] Ibid., 57.
[32] Cf. Ochs, *Religion Without Violence*, 21.
[33] Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 51.
[34] Ibid., 43.

be contexts in which a christological interpretation does not make sense or would not be appropriate.

In domains terms (not used by *Another Reformation* itself), a nonsupersessionist Christian acknowledges the limited validity of her interpretations as claims made in her Christian-specific domain (within which the scriptures she shares with Jews are the Old Testament of her New Testament). By the same token, she acknowledges the conceivable validity of non-Christian interpretations as claims made in non-Christian domains (within which the New Testament is not Scripture), and, in particular, the conceivable validity of Jewish interpretations as claims made within Jewish-specific domains. The Christian is then open, beyond this, to acknowledging and indeed investigating the potential rationality and integrity of Jewish interpretation as it occurs under the auspices of Jewish-specific domains.

However, this 'limiting' tendency of *Another Reformation*—according to which nonsupersessionism is characterised as an acknowledgment of the conceivable validity of Jewish interpretive claims outside Christian-specific domains, and thus the potential rationality and integrity of Jewish interpretation beyond the bounds of Christian interpretation—is accompanied by a second 'accommodationist' tendency, according to which nonsupersessionism is characterised as the accommodation of Jews *within* the Christian vision—precisely by way of an emphasis on the latter's vagueness. A nice, somewhat ambiguous, example of this tendency is the following (in which Ochs is still interpreting Lindbeck):

> Rediscovering the message of the Old Testament, the Christian reader also rediscovers the place of Israel in salvation history. This means that the place of Israel is not yet fully defined. While the Christian reader must say that 'Jesus Christ is the Messiah of Israel', no reader knows before the event of reading everything there is to say about the meaning of that sentence now, in the present moment of reading.[35]

While this might simply be taken as a instruction in the 'how' of the truth claim 'Jesus is the Messiah of Israel'—that it be understood vaguely and not as overdetermining the story of Israel—the wider context suggests that vagueness is being promoted here so as to accommodate (Jewish) Israel within the Christian vision. Much depends on the implicit understanding of Israel, as we will see. In any event, what Ochs does not say, but might have said here, is that the Christian truth claim, however vague, is already a determination of the scriptures that non-Christian Jewish readers of those scriptures would not accept. Its domain of limited validity is one in which the *Christian* canon is taken to be authoritative. According to Ochs's 'limiting' tendency, a nonsupersessionist way of claiming that Jesus is the Messiah is to do so in the acknowledgment of the claim's Christian-specific domain of limited validity, and thus the acknowledgment that the scriptures it interprets will be interpreted differently within a non-Christian domain. This is rather different from (although not incompatible with) acknowledging its vagueness.

While 'limiting' and 'accommodationist' tendencies sit inoffensively alongside one another in the above example, this ceases to be the case when Ochs brings American postliberalism into relation with the British postliberalism he explores in the second half of the book. Ochs describes American and British postliberalisms as two wings of a bird or angel.[36] This complementarity is basic to the structure of *Another Reformation*. American postliberalism is characterised as scripturally and christologically driven, finding 'the Jews' insofar as they rediscover the polyvalent story of Israel. British postliberalism is characterised as pneumatologically driven, discovering

---

[35] Ibid., 44.
[36] Ibid., 28.

Jews (and Muslims) in contingent encounters that lead to friendship.[37] 'Limiting' and 'accommodationist' tendencies are both present within Ochs's account of the American wing, as we have seen, although the latter is dominant. The former is dominant in the chapters on British postliberalism. Both varieties of postliberalism (arguably) have value.

The problem comes, however, in Ochs's mapping of one onto the other. Implicit in the mapping is the equation of (contemporary) Jews with (biblical) Israel. Making this equation explicit, Ochs's claims that—just as British postliberals discover Jews in their contingent encounters—'American postliberals "find" the Jews in Scripture'.[38] And he elaborates by suggesting that American postliberals 'lend the Jews a privileged place as if already almost inside the body of Christ'.[39] Such Christian interpretation of Jews raises several questions. First, Ochs's formulation 'finding the Jews in Scripture' smacks both of anachronism and essentialism. Who are 'the Jews' so discovered? Second, does such an inscription of Jews into the Christian narrative leave any room for Jews in their own self-understanding? I suggest that as an expression of the 'accommodationist' tendency on its own it could do: Christians have a cosmic vision that sees everything, including Jews, in the light of Christ; the question is whether they hold this vision in the acknowledgment of its finitude and fallibility as a creaturely vision, and thus in the acknowledgment that others who do not share it will see things differently.[40] Insofar as Ochs maps American onto British postliberalism, however, he implies an identification between 'the Jews' so inscribed into the Christian vision (on the American side) and the Jews contingently encountered by British postliberals: this is to identify Jews exhaustively as they figure within the Christian vision. Christian interpretation of Jews becomes Christian co-option of Jews in their own self-understanding.

I suggest that the anachronism and essentialism are symptoms of this co-option. It is quite possible, by contrast, to emphasise the polyvalence of Israel's story in such a way as to acknowledge that the Israel of a Christian reading whose fulfilment is in Christ cannot necessarily be identified with the Israel of a Jewish reading whose continuation is in the adherents of rabbinic Judaism.[41] Quite apart from avoiding anachronism and essentialism, such an acknowledgment enables Christians to read Israel's story christologically without either 'disinheriting' Jewish readers who read differently, or co-opting Jews in their own self-understanding by fitting them into a Christian framework. Instead, they can acknowledge their interpretation's domain of limited validity, and the existence of other (Jewish-specific) domains in which they do not expect their claims to be affirmed.

In summary, what Ochs has done in his mapping of American and British varieties of postliberalism onto one another, as two wings of a bird, is to conflate 'accommodationist' and 'limiting' tendencies: he has treated the activity of making space for Jews beyond the Christian vision as equivalent to the activity of making space for Jews inside it. This is to reduce the 'limiting' to the 'accommodationist' tendency, which is in turn to transform the latter from benign inscription into malign co-option. The problem is not in the co-existence of the tendencies (which are both present to differing degrees in both varieties of postliberalism), but in their conflation.

---

[37] Ibid., 168-69.

[38] Ibid., 173.

[39] Ibid., 169.

[40] Robert Jenson articulates just such a distinction at the opening of his essay, 'Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism', in *Jews and Christians: People of God,* ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 1-13.

[41] This is in fact what both Jenson and Lindbeck do. See Robert Jenson, 'Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism', and George Lindbeck, 'The Church as Israel: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism', in *Jews and Christians: People of God,* ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 78-94.

The 'limiting' tendency gains its clearest, non-conflationary articulation in Ochs's critique of John Milbank in the final chapter and appendix (as Nicholas Adams convincingly shows[42]). It becomes even clearer—precisely in its distinction from the 'accommodationist' tendency—in a retrospective reading of *Another Reformation* in the light of *Religion Without Violence*. I suggest that this has to do with the plurality of scriptural canons at stake in the context of SR. Because Jews and Christians share at least part of their scriptures, it is easy to conflate an emphasis on the vagueness of the plain sense as patient of multiple contextual readings with an emphasis on the domains of limited validity within which interpretive claims are made. Emphasis on vagueness can generate both 'limiting' and 'accommodationist' tendencies: it generates the latter when scripture's vagueness is exploited by Christians so as to accommodate Jews. Emphasis on domains invites (in a way that emphasis on vagueness does not) the acknowledgment that interpretive domains are also distinguished by the ascription of authority to different scriptural canons. This puts limits on the 'accommodationist' tendency: however vague one's scriptures are, they cannot accommodate others for whom they are not authoritative *in their own self-understanding*. Such an insight becomes palpably clear in the SR context.

Even in *Religion Without Violence*, however, there remains some ambiguity around the place of scripture's plain sense, as I indicated above. Insofar as Ochs emphasises its character as a display of the 'will of the absolute', he implies that it transcends finite domain-specificity.[43] Corresponding to creation,[44] scripture is there for all to interpret, irrespective of their different religious traditions. Its vagueness (it can be inferred) is as extensive as the vagueness of creation. Finite traditions are just domain-specific series of interpretations. On the other hand, Ochs offers this characterisation of scripture in the context of an account of tradition-specific Textual Reasoning, and further specifies his characterisation as rabbinic[45]—although he also suggests that there are analogous accounts in Christian and Muslim sources.[46] Thus, even his characterisation of scripture's plain sense is domain-limited. While a rabbinic Jew holds the plain sense to display God's will, and thus as having the capacity to speak to a Christian or Muslim in a way that the Jew cannot predict, this is so according to Jewish understanding, but not necessarily according to Christian or Muslim self-understanding. Specifically, the Jew may understand God to be speaking to a Christian or Muslim through Jewish scripture even when the Christian or Muslim would not affirm this.

I suggest that the significance of Ochs's two latest monographs lies primarily in a generalisation of what I have called *Another Reformation's* 'limiting' tendency. According to the 'limiting' tendency, nonsupersessionism is characterised as the acknowledgment on the part of Christians that Christian claims are made in domains of limited validity, that Jewish claims are conceivably valid in Jewish-specific domains, and (concomitantly) that Jewish thought and practice has potential rationality and integrity beyond the bounds of a Christian interpretive framework. This can be generalised, first, as an acknowledgment on the part of a member of one tradition that (even, and especially) her universal truth claims are made within domains of limited validity, and thus that these claims may not be valid within the domains in which they are received by members of other traditions, in which quite different claims are likely to be valid. Validity must not be confused here with truth. Whose universal truth claims are ultimately *true* is a question—as Ochs frames it—for an as-yet unspecified end time.[47] Second, acknowledging the conditioned-

---

42 Adams, 'Domains of Limited Validity'.
43 Ochs, *Religion Without Violence*, 37-38.
44 Cf. Ibid., 118-19.
45 Ibid., 37.
46 Ibid., 117-19.
47 Cf. Ochs, *Religion Without Violence*, 5 and 30.

ness of one's own universal claims permits an openness, not only to the conceivable validity of claims made in the context of other traditions, but to their contextual rationality and integrity. This, too, is distinct from entertaining their truth, since truth claims are only assigned truth values within domains of limited validity. But insofar as all traditions are answerable to the one world they coinhabit, the extent of a tradition's rationality and integrity is a test of its (ultimate) truth.

The importance of Ochs's discovery, so framed, comes into relief not least against the background of the various literatures that seek to move beyond Christian supersessionism. The dominant tendency in these literatures is the 'accommodationist'. This is the prevailing tendency of *Nostra Aetate* and the Roman Catholic literature generated by it,[48] with the declaration's emphasis on 'God's irrevocable covenant with the Jewish people' (alluding to Romans 11:28-29). I take this phrasing from the Statement of Purpose of the Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology,[49] a relatively recent society founded by theologians of a variety of persuasions (including Messianic Jewish). That such a diverse society can be gathered around this ('accommodationist') claim is further testimony to the widespread character of the tendency it represents. New Testament scholarship in the wake of 'the New Perspective on Paul',[50] including (more recently) the 'Paul within Judaism' movement,[51] exhibits the same tendency, again notwithstanding the variety of perspectives this scholarship houses. To offer a reconfigured account of Paul's relationship with contemporary Judaisms and Jews is to invite the reconfiguration of Christianity today in the light of a rereading of one of its founding sources. Finally, even Ochs's source for an alternative account of nonsupersessionism—postliberal Christian theology—also displays the 'accommodationist' tendency, as the postliberal presence within the Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology indicates.[52]

Without wanting to deny the potential value of the 'accommodationist' tendency, I hope this review has highlighted its dangers *if not accompanied by, and distinguished from*, the 'limiting' tendency. The latter is Ochs's gift not only in the Christian context but well beyond it.

---

[48] Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: *Nostra Aetate*, proclaimed by Pope Paul IV on October 28, 1965. See https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (accessed 14 July 2020). For a relatively recent collection of essays on its implications for Jewish-Christian dialogue see Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt, eds., *Never Revoked:* Nostra Aetate *as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010).

[49] https://www.spostst.org (accessed 23 June 2020).

[50] The phrase is the coinage of James D.G. Dunn. For an overview, see James D.G. Dunn, 'The New Perspective on Paul', in *The New Perspective on Paul: Collected Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 89-110.

[51] For a representative volume, see Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, eds., *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015).

[52] R. Kendall Soulen, Stanley Hauerwas and Douglas Harink are all founding members.