The Conrad Grebel Review

Cover art adapted from Spinoza sculpture imagery provided by Peter John Hartman.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Foreword

The main theme of this issue is "Spinoza as a Religious Philosopher: Between Radical Protestantism and Jewishness." We are including papers and responses from a conference on that theme that was organized by the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre (TMTC), co-sponsored by Emmanuel College, and held at Victoria University Chapel in October 2006.

In introducing these materials, Jonathan Seiling asks, "Why would Mennonites today host an event about Spinoza, a man widely considered the first secular Jew?" The answer "may be as intriguing for contemporary religion and philosophy as it is for historical research," he says, noting that it was largely Dutch Mennonites who supported Spinoza after his excommunication. "While the engagement of certain Dutch Mennonites with Spinoza says something about Spinoza's context," Seiling writes, "it also says quite a bit about this strand of Dutch Mennonites, about whom we know far too little."

A Reflection bearing on Jewish–Christian relations then follows, plus two full-length articles and an array of book reviews, several of which report on recent Spinoza studies.

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The Winter 2008 CGR will be a "Mennonite/s Writing" issue. As well as papers and presentations offered at a 2006 conference at Bluffton University, it will include "Confessions of a Reluctant Mennonite," the 2007 Bechtel Lectures delivered by Sandra Birdsell at Conrad Grebel University College. Guest editor is Hildi Froese Tiessen. For the Spring 2008 issue we are collecting professional responses and academic reactions to "The Gospel or a Glock? Mennonites and the Police?," an article in our Spring 2007 issue that has aroused widespread interest and comment.

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Please note that book reviews are regularly posted to the CGR website. And be sure to check out the back issues search tool there. Visit www.grebel. uwaterloo.ca/academic/cgreview.

C. Arnold Snyder, *Academic Editor*   Stephen A. Jones, *Managing Editor*

Spinoza as Religious Philosopher:
Between Radical Protestantism and Jewishness

Introduction

Jonathan R. Seiling

Interest in the nature and definition of the period of history known as the Enlightenment has grown recently as scholars have taken fresh approaches to old materials amid the shifting trends of contemporary methods and interests. One of the most illuminating scholars to present a compelling new perspective on the Enlightenment as a whole is Jonathan Israel, the intellectual historian whose lengthy works, *Radical Enlightenment*[1] and *Enlightenment Contested*,[2] offer a novel framework for understanding how and why the transition from the pre-modern era to modernity occurred. Israel's central thesis is that the Enlightenment was a two-level phenomenon, one of which was "radical" and virtually the product of one person, Benedict/Baruch Spinoza. This movement stood in critical relationship to another movement, the "moderate" Enlightenment, characterized by the thought of Locke, Voltaire, and Hume.

By presenting Spinoza's as the unifying strand of "radical" Enlightenment thought, which actually combated the advancement of the "moderate" Enlightenment, this conception of the shift toward modernity opens up a new range of meanings for key terms like "Enlightenment," "modernity," and even "radicalism." It also seeks to recapture some of the lost potential of certain marginalized aspects of the Enlightenment project. In addition, it provides a different historical framework that allows us to discard prior, inadequate, falsely conceived ideas of what the modern shift was about, thereby calling for a new awakening in current anti-Enlightenment ideologies. By taking a new, closer look at Spinoza's radical Enlightenment project, his context, and the concomitant movement, it is possible and perhaps even fruitful to reconceive the very problem of modernity.

Symposium on Spinoza as Religious Philosopher
The four articles in this section of CGR comprise proceedings from

a symposium, "Spinoza as Religious Philosopher: Between Radical Protestantism and Jewishness," held in Toronto on October 20, 2006, at the Victoria University Chapel. Attended by approximately fifty professors and graduate students from universities across southwestern Ontario, the symposium was organized by the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre (TMTC) and co-sponsored by Emmanuel College. Financial support for travel and publicity costs was provided by Conrad Grebel University College. Jeremy Bergen, Interim Director of TMTC, opened the event; Jonathan Seiling introduced the theme, and Peter Hartman introduced each speaker. The organization of the event and the book reviews on Spinoza-related literature appearing in this issue were undertaken by doctoral students affiliated with TMTC.

Organizers struggled to come up with the perfect title for the symposium, and while it falls somewhat short of perfection, the two poles it sets up – radical Protestantism and Jewishness – represent the key emphases of the two main speakers, Willi Goetschel and Graeme Hunter, both of whom have recently published monographs on different aspects of the religious nature of Spinoza's thought. Responses to these speakers followed, by David Novak from the perspective of Jewish Studies, and by Michael Driedger, stemming from his historical research into the related activities of Dutch Mennonites from that era, some of whom interacted with Spinoza and played an important role in the early Dutch Enlightenment.[3] The monographs by Goetschel and Hunter are reviewed in this issue. In addition to the four main papers, Brayton Polka provided reflection on the symposium theme from the perspective of his very recent scholarship appearing in a two-volume study on Spinoza, the Bible and modernity, also reviewed in this issue.[4]

The lead articles by Hunter and Goetschel that follow, based on their symposium presentations, make use of further study along lines of investigation they started in their recent monographs. Hunter reflects on the scholarly tradition concerning Spinoza and the reaction to his thesis on Spinoza's "radical Protestant Christianity."[5] Goetschel explores in greater depth the notion of modern Jewishness as a product of Spinoza's philosophy. In his response, "Spinoza and the Boundary Zones of Religious Interaction," Driedger provides further background on the later social-political and

religious context of Spinoza and the Mennonites with whom he interacted. Novak, in "Spinoza's Excommunication," explores key questions, largely in response to Goetschel, on the concept of Spinoza's Jewishness and how modern Judaism should consider Spinoza's status as an excommunicated Jew.

Historical and Religious Background

Baruch (or Bento) d'Espinosa, later named Benedictus Spinoza (1632-1677), was born into a community of Sephardic Jews in Amsterdam coming from a branch known as the Marranos. After the Inquisition when many Spanish Jews had fled to Portugal, most were forced to openly convert to Christianity, but they continued to practice Judaism in secret. When the Dutch Republic gained independence from Spanish imperial rule in 1581, the religious toleration available in the north provinces attracted these Jews and other religious dissidents. Many Jews arrived in Amsterdam, which became the largest place of Jewish settlement, and they quickly began re-establishing their social and religious identity and economic prosperity during the Golden Age of Dutch trade. Philosophy, science, and the arts flourished, and many freethinkers and radicals were drawn to the "buzz" around various cultural and intellectual centers in Holland.

Why would Mennonites today host an event about Spinoza, a man widely considered the first secular Jew? The answer may be as intriguing for contemporary religion and philosophy as it is for historical research. It is well documented that after his excommunication it was largely Dutch Mennonites who supported Spinoza by providing him with finances, defending him, interpreting his thought in light of their own religious tradition, and ultimately by editing, translating, and publishing his works.[6] They were part of a growing body of Mennonites involved in a quasi-church movement in seventeenth-century Holland called the Collegiants.[7] Although the Collegiants were making increasingly stronger ties with the Mennonite churches in certain areas, where some Mennonites led and hosted the Collegiant meetings, other conservative Mennonites sharply opposed this movement.[8]

Beyond the fact that Spinoza hung out with Mennonites and that Mennonites hung out with Spinoza, what does this explain about that era

of Dutch religious society and the interactions of different religious groups – Mennonites, Jews, Quakers, Socinians, Remonstrants, Collegiants, and other radicals – within the context of the broader Calvinist society? How did such events and conflicts in this era of confessionalization inform these traditions at a key point in their identity formation? While the engagement of certain Dutch Mennonites with Spinoza says something about Spinoza's context, it also says quite a bit about this strand of Dutch Mennonites, about whom we know far too little.[9]

Through a greater awareness of the context in which this radical strand of the early Enlightenment developed, we may come to recognize more fully the important but largely unsung role Dutch Mennonites played in a key early stage of that era. Michael Driedger's previous article on Mennonites in the Dutch Enlightenment in general is a helpful place to begin further discovery of the genesis of complexity underlying Dutch Mennonite modernity.[10] Many parts of this story remain to be told.[11]

Notes

[1] Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001).

[2] Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

[3] Michael D. Driedger, *Obedient Heretics: Mennonite Identities in Lutheran Hamburg and Altona During the Confessional Age* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002); reviewed by Werner Packull in *CGR* 21.2 (Spring 2003).

[4] Brayton Polka, *Between Philosophy and Religion: Spinoza, the Bible, and Modernity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006).

[5] Another recent study on Spinoza's view of Christ is Amalia Bettini, *Il Cristo di Spinoza* (Milan: Ghibli, 2005).

[6] Benedictus de Spinoza, *B.D.S. Opera posthuma*, ed. Jarig Jelles (Amsterdam: J. Rieuwertsz, 1677). The Dutch Mennonite Collegiant scholar Jarig Jelles wrote the preface to this collection in Dutch, which was then translated into Latin. A comparative analysis and description of the preface is found in F. Akkerman and H.G. Hubbeling, "The Preface to Spinoza's Posthumous Works 1677 and Its Author Jarig Jelles (c. 1619/20–1683)," *Lias* 6.1 (1979): 103-73. For a biographical article on Jelles, see W.G. van der Tak, "Jarich Jellesz' Origins, Jellesz' Life and Business," *Mededelingen vanwege het Spinozahuis* 59 (1989): 11-22. It is puzzling why Jonathan Israel believes the supporters were Socinians and implicitly not Mennonites. See Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 121-23.

[7] The most comprehensive study of this group of Dutch Mennonites and the Collegiants is still available only in Dutch: J.C. van Slee, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten: Geschiedkundig onderzoek* (Haarlem: Erven F. Bohn, 1895). Of equal value is a lengthy study from the following year, available in French: Koenraad Oege Meinsma, *Spinoza et son cercle: étude critique historique sur les hétérodoxes hollandais*, S. Roosenburg (Paris: J. Vrin, 1983), a translation of *Spinoza en zijn kring* (1896). More recent is a helpful study in English: Andrew C. Fix, *Prophecy and Reason: The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), plus shorter studies by Leszek Kolakowski, whose most recent article on this topic is "Dutch Seventeenth-Century Non-Denominationalism and Religio Rationalis: Mennonites, Collegiants and the Spinoza Connection," in *The Two Eyes of Spinoza and Other Essays on Philosophers,"* Zbigniew Janowski, ed. (South Bend, IN: St Augustine's Press, 2004).

[8] See Driedger's article below for a brief overview of this controversy called "the War of the Lambs."

[9] In 1662, Pieter Balling wrote a Spiritualist tract, *Het Licht op den Kandelaar* [The Light Upon the Candelstick], against William Ames, an itinerant British Quaker, that was translated into English in 1663 and appears as an appendix in William Sewel, *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress of the Christian People Called Quakers* (London: Darton and Harvey, 1811). Recently a French Spinoza specialist has argued that the tract should be considered an oral teaching of Spinoza. See Marc Bedjai, *La lumiere sur le candelabre (1662) de Pierre Balling: Fragment d'un enseignement spinoziste et inedita spinozana (texte, traduction et commentaire)* (N.p.: N.d., 1986). The tract was subsequently republished in Dutch as a companion to a confession by Spinoza's editor and close Mennonite friend, Jarig Jelles, who wrote it to demonstrate the compatibility of Spinoza's philosophy with biblical doctrine, the New Testament in particular. A parallel Dutch-Italian edition is available as Jarig Jelles, *Professione della fede universale e cristiana, contenuta in una lettera a N. N. / Belydenisse des algemeenen en christelyken Geloofs, vervattet in een Brief an N. N. (1684)*, Leen Spruit (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2004). A large collection of these and other related writings from this era is listed in J.G. Boekenoogen, ed., *Catalogus der werken over de Doopsgezinden en hunne Geschiedenis aanwezig in de bibliotheek der Vereenigde Doopsgezinde Gemeente te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: J.H. de Bussy, 1919).

[10] Michael Driedger, "An Article Missing from the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*: 'The Enlightenment in the Netherlands'," in *Commoners and Community: Essays in Honour of Werner O. Packull*, ed. C. Arnold Snyder (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2002), 101-20.

[11] Further research into the contributions of Dutch Mennonites to the scientific progress of that era is becoming available. See E.P. Hamm, "Mennonites, Science and Progress in the Dutch Enlightenment," in *The Global and the Local: The History of Science and the Cultural Integration of Europe*, Proceedings of the 2nd International Congress of the European Society for the History of Science, Cracow, Poland, September 6-9, 2006.

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Spinoza on Character and Community

Graeme Hunter

Introduction

Thomas Nagel devotes the final chapter of *The Last Word*, his defence of philosophical realism, to a fascinating phenomenon he calls "the fear of religion." He admits to knowing such fear from the inside. "It isn't just that I don't believe in God," he writes, "It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that."[1] Nagel conjectures that anti-religious sentiments like his own are quite common among living philosophers, though seldom subject to philosophical scrutiny or indeed even acknowledged. Moreover, he suspects subterraneous religious antipathies of having philosophical consequences, including being "responsible for much of the scientism and reductionism of our time."[2]

Of course Nagel is familiar with the genetic fallacy. He does not suppose that philosophical arguments are automatically disqualified if they turn out to have extra-philosophical motivations. He is only pointing out that anti-religious sentiments are part of the common currency of academic writing today. They are often shared by reader and writer, and can thereby escape scrutiny even in cases where it is warranted. A prudent reader who suspects writers of being motivated by anti-religious commitments is well advised to read with care any of their arguments on which religious opinion has a bearing.

I begin with this point of Nagel's because fear of religion comes in a historiographical as well as a philosophical flavor. I notice it frequently in Spinoza studies, particularly in connection with Christianity. Fear (or at least dislike) of Christianity is often palpable in the literature and is usually given an easy critical ride. Scholars hostile to Christianity regularly look for the same hostility in Spinoza and applaud him – and so, indirectly, themselves – for the courage and insight implied in holding such a position.

Some of these writers feel distaste for (or possibly, like Nagel, fear of) all religions. Others combine a rigid hostility toward Christianity with enthusiasm for an elusive form of mysticism they think is found in Spinoza.

I first articulated my suspicion that Spinoza might have had a positive attitude to radical Protestantism in a conference paper several years ago. I tried to account for his many favorable pronouncements about Christianity on the assumption that he intended to make them. The paper generated a high level of analytic discussion from the discerning audience to which it was presented. But it also gave rise to something no other paper I have given ever has: cordial but firm expressions of concern that what I was saying was somehow not clubbable, inconsistent with the *bon ton* of the academy. A number of my hearers took the opportunity to tell me privately that papers of this sort were a little unseemly, that they might stir up passions I would regret inflaming.[3] Bewildered at first, I eventually realized this was the twentieth century's version of *odium theologicum*, though in our enlightened age the odium is administered not to those wandering from the path of orthodoxy but to those straying into it.

The dark hints of my well-meaning critics of course produced a reaction equal but opposite to their intent. They made the possibility of Spinoza's Protestant leanings no less plausible to me but immensely more exciting. I began to explore the idea more systematically, and the result was the book that the present conference has graciously agreed to discuss. Today I would like to return to its central contention, but from a new point of view. I want to consider Spinoza's two major works, the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,* as a response to a central event in Spinoza's life: his excommunication.

However, before taking up this theme, I owe you some concrete examples of the misunderstanding of Spinoza's attitude toward Christianity that I say is so noticeable in the secondary literature.

Views of Spinoza's Attitude to Christianity
Spinoza was understood (or rather, misunderstood) in his own time to have rejected not just Judaism but all religion, including Christianity. This imputed anti-Christian stance made him tremendously unpopular, except with religious dissenters seeking guidance about what to believe. And so, as early as the mid-seventeenth century Spinoza became a magnet for dissent. In France, for example, he was a dominant figure amid "the disarray of the French libertines, who were desperate for a leader."[4]

Also in that same century Pierre Bayle, whose own faith has been called "impoverished, empty of religious substance, stretched to the breaking point,"[5] created the mystique of Spinoza's "virtuous atheism."[6] It was a new and challenging thought to suggest that atheism could be anything other than vicious. Bayle's encomium made Spinoza a guru to those who wanted to throw off the shackles of tradition and divine commandments while still retaining a good opinion of themselves.

Spinoza the virtuous atheist continued to exert his influence throughout the 18th century. Willi Goetschel, in *Spinoza's Modernity*, points to ways Lessing found this Spinoza congenial, as did the Jewish deist Mendelssohn and the unbeliever Heine.[7] Goetschel interestingly points out how these thinkers were simultaneously influenced by the residual Jewishness of Spinoza's thought.

Jonathan Israel paints on the broad canvas of Europe as a whole, showing how "Spinoza and Spinozism were in fact the backbone of the European Radical Enlightenment everywhere, not only in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy and Scandinavia, but also Britain and Ireland."[8] By "radical" Israel means to connote whatever is "incompatible with the fundamentals of traditional authority, thought and belief."[9] In a word, a radical is one who opposes the hierarchical order of Christendom.

Hegel says Minerva's owl flies by night, meaning that the appearance of histories of any subject is a sign the sun has already set upon it. But for the anti-Christian Spinoza, documented so thoroughly by historians of ideas like Goetschel and Israel, Hegel's maxim seems not to hold. For him it still appears to be high noon. Consider a few of his more recent appearances.

The outspoken atheist Bertrand Russell, in his *History of Western Philosophy* (1946), called Spinoza "the noblest and most lovable of the great philosophers."[10] He found in Spinoza's "principle of thinking about the whole" something like an alternative to traditional religion. There are times, Russell says,

> when it is comforting to reflect that human life, with all that it contains of evil and suffering, is an infinitesimal part of the life of the universe. Such reflections may not suffice to constitute a religion, but in a painful world they are a help towards sanity and an antidote to the paralysis of utter despair.[11]

Kenneth Blackwell has shown that Russell's quasi-religious attachment to Spinoza was not a passing enthusiasm but a major and enduring shaper of his ethical thinking. Russell's own "ethic of impersonal self-enlargement," as Blackwell calls it, arose from prolonged reflection on Spinoza's notion of the intellectual love of God.[12]

Not many years after the appearance of Russell's *History*, Stuart Hampshire presented a Spinoza who was blunter in his dismissal of Christianity. Spinoza, he tells us:

> ... has a direct interest in freeing others from the passive emotions and from the blind superstitions which lead to war and to the suppression of free thought.... The free man therefore will criticize Christian doctrine or orthodox Judaism or any other religious dogma, first, when it is represented as philosophical truth, secondly, on purely pragmatic grounds, if it in fact leads its votaries to be troublesome in their actual behaviour.…[13]

Hampshire rightly ascribes both points to Spinoza but leaves the impression that they summarize his attitude to Christianity. It is as if he had pointed out that the Vatican police normally do not interfere with Catholic pilgrims as long as they are not drunk or immolating themselves in St. Peter's Square. While strictly true, the statement nevertheless creates a false impression.

In her introduction to a 1954 French translation of Spinoza's *Short Treatise*, which appears as part of an edition of his works, Madeleine Francès is careful to assure readers that any apparent concessions to Christianity found in the *Short Treatise* are not to be taken at face value. They are merely intended to lead readers "step by step toward accepting notions that are less anthropomorphic."[14] Francès is perfectly at liberty to interpret Spinoza this way if she wishes. But why should readers accept without argument the implication that Christianity is an anthropomorphic religion?

In the 1970s E.E. Harris penned a manifesto for those who seek in Spinoza an ersatz religion and who, like Harris, would find solace in a kind of scientistic religiosity. "Today," he says,

> we turn to science for the solution of all our problems – not always wisely, but at least because we have come to believe,

as we should, that nothing is reliable which has not been demonstrated and reasoned out on strict scientific principles. Religion today has lost its hold on many because it cannot, or does not, establish its doctrine scientifically and cannot, so they think, be made consistent with what science has established. This modern scientific attitude is precisely Spinoza's; but where he excels is in combining it completely with what can only rightly be called a religious outlook and in developing by strictly rational argument a religious conclusion. So he addresses himself to both of our most urgent and most significant modern needs. He provides an answer (and no trivial one) to our moral and religious perplexities, and he does so in a way which satisfies our demand for scientific precision and reliability.[15]

"This modern scientific attitude is precisely Spinoza's," Harris says, illustrating how some contemporary scholars find it unsurprising when Spinoza's views coincide so nearly with their own while so much at odds with the thinking of his own generation.

Also in the 1970s was published the unusual, in fact bizarre, article by Robert Misrahi called "Spinoza and Christian Thought: A Challenge." Though Misrahi does not cite a single example of Christian interpretations of Spinoza, he nevertheless implies that they are ubiquitous and menacing, and that he intends to explode their slender foundations with his own devastating dialectical skills. "Our present study," Misrahi says,

aims to unmask [such] Christian interpretations of Spinoza's philosophy, our purpose being to restore, in the face of such distortions, the genuine features of Spinozism – that is indeed of a practical atheism and of an ethical and political doctrine which was at that time subversive.[16]

"Subversive" for Misrahi, as for some other admirers of Spinoza,[17] is a term of praise. Sometimes "heretic" is used in the same inverted sense. Yirmiyahu Yovel, in his 1989 book *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, coyly admits as much. "As for the word *heretic*, it should be taken with a grain of salt," he says. "I use it to designate thinkers who, when properly understood, must be deemed heretical in terms of their own orthodox tradition. Again,

no derogatory undertones are intended; if anything, a reader discerning a shade of ironic sympathy in the title will not be totally mistaken."[18]

The same oxymoronic transformation of the heretical into the heroic is evident in Matthew Stewart's highly readable but not very scholarly bestseller, *The Courtier and the Heretic* (2006), in which Leibniz is cast in the role of stuffy courtier while Spinoza plays the sprightly and lovable heretic.

An Impartial Reader's View of Spinoza

Except for Misrahi's peculiar article, all the works I have cited have merits, and I am not attempting to detract from them. But I am drawing attention to a fault they have in common that I believe is related to what Nagel calls "the fear of religion." All these authors project onto Spinoza a negativity toward Christianity that they give every appearance of sharing and do not think needs much defence. I am not denying the existence of evidence in favor of the view they attribute to Spinoza. There's quite a bit of it. The claim of my book, however, was that there is not enough evidence to sustain that view.

But I would like to ask a different question. How would an impartial reader view Spinoza? I mean a reader who approaches Spinoza's major works without projecting Enlightenment atheism or contemporary distaste for, or fear of, Christianity onto them. My answer is the reader would find Spinoza at once a more attractive philosopher and a more unsettling one. This Spinoza would no doubt be less trendy, but more profound and more challenging for readers today.

If we stopped looking in Spinoza's writings for encrypted anticipations of the thought of the French Enlightenment or the radical thought of still later periods, we could recover a philosopher rooted in his own time, though at crucial points also transcending it with reflections of enduring value. We could begin by allowing Spinoza to be the man he was: an excommunicated Jewish businessman in a socially precarious position in seventeenth-century Holland, but one who was at the same time a philosopher of unusual depth.

Spinoza's excommunication cut him off from the Jewish community that had first nurtured and educated him and later provided him with his livelihood. It shut the door forever on family, friends, the synagogue, and his former occupation, thrusting Spinoza with all possible ill will into the larger

Dutch society where, apart from business connections, he was a stranger.

Everyone faces the big moral question: *quod vitae sectabor iter*, what should I do in life? Philosophers know that the price of neglecting it is to lead an unexamined, and therefore worthless, life. But excommunication put that inescapable question to Spinoza with unusual brutality and urgency. As the door closed on his Jewish past, the question of what to do was immediate and existential. He also had before him the tragic example of Uriel Da Costa, illustrating the bleak consequences to which excommunication could lead.[19] No doubt that is partly why Spinoza exercised exceptional prudence in this phase of his life. He may not have anticipated many of the progressive ideas scholars pretend he did, but he certainly foresaw his own excommunication. He prepared the way for it and seems never to have regretted it.[20] Unlike poor Da Costa, Spinoza had somewhere else to go after his ordeal.

Spinoza had made friends in the wider Dutch community. They were the only kind of people who would have been interested in an excommunicated Jew in that period. Jewish friends were ruled out by the harsh conditions of the *herem* [Hebrew: ban, expulsion]. His new friends were the kind of Gentiles who rose above the common religious bigotry of their age. It was not that they were all remarkably broad-minded. They were themselves religious extremists, suspicious of the Calvinist mainstream, and previously acquainted with Spinoza through business channels. A number of this group of radical Protestants were Collegiants, whose Christian faith was expressed in *orthopraxy*, right conduct, rather than *orthodoxy*, doctrinal correctness. The Collegiant ideal involved living a life of holiness in a Christian community rather than adopting any particular creed.[21]

We have confirmation that virtue and community were also Spinoza's preoccupations after his excommunication. We can date our confirming text that early if we agree with Steven Nadler in supposing the *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* to go back at least as far as the late 1650s.[22] There Spinoza says that henceforward his twin aims will be to perfect his own character and to bring about the kind of society that will be most conducive to that end.[23] I take his major works, the *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (henceforward often *TTP*), to unfold his mature design for achieving those goals. The *Ethics* I view as his mature reflection on character, while the *TTP* deals with wider questions of religion, politics, and community.

The *Ethics* and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

The *Ethics* addresses the prudential and moral problems of individual salvation. It is a story of how salvation of a kind consistent with the orthopraxy of his radical Protestant friends can be achieved by someone who reflects carefully about God and the world. One must begin by recognizing God as the perfect, changeless subject of all change, and the immanent indweller of all that is. All particular things, including ourselves, we must see as finite (and therefore imperfect) expressions of the infinite and perfect reality of God. Our one chance of happiness (more precisely, beatitude) and self-fulfilment depends on acquiescence in the role that God has determined us to play. Attainment of this beatitude both increases and is increased by our identification with God through intellectual love of him.

However, there is one towering obstacle in everyman's path to the intellectual love of God. In order to achieve it he first must learn to recognize and manage his emotions, and so free himself from bondage to them. It is in the measure we become free that we can open ourselves to the intellectual love of God, whose only right and full expression is in the love of neighbor.[24] The reward for attaining this vision of God, expressed in charity, is beatitude in this life, and even a kind of immortality, though what the latter amounts to is a subject of considerable disagreement among scholars.[25]

Such was Spinoza's plan for the development of character. Not until he was well along in writing the *Ethics* did the scope of the political problem of salvation began to worry him. The "society" necessary to facilitate development of our character could not consist of just a few broadminded Collegiants, he realized. It would need to have the scope of at least a whole city and respect the complexities of city life. That meant a city with laws enshrining freedom of belief, something Spinoza thought he saw dimly prefigured in the Amsterdam of his own day.[26]

Respect for freedom of thought did exist in Spinoza's Amsterdam, but it had arisen for contingent and historical reasons, like some precarious biological mutation. Like such mutations it was likely to prove ephemeral unless it found a welcoming environment. In such a religiously militant and divided city, the survival of liberty of opinion was far from guaranteed.

Spinoza hoped to exploit the freedom contingently available in his day in order to work out, if only on paper, the means of institutionalizing it

in Dutch society. Sensing the urgency of this task, he put aside completing the *Ethics* to write and publish the *TTP*. His fine words in defence of liberty deserve a place beside the better-known ones of John Stuart Mill. "Liberty of thought," Spinoza says in *TTP*'s subtitle, "can not only be permitted without injury to piety and to the peace of the republic, but it is impossible to suppress it without likewise suppressing the peace of the republic and piety itself."

If the *Ethics* addresses the personal question of what we ought to do, the *TTP* covers the still more general matter of what ought to be done. Now the big thing that needs doing, according to Spinoza, is to fortify, not to weaken, the religious character of Amsterdam. But the means he sees for doing this is not the establishment of some sect to the exclusion of others. Nor does he favor complete disestablishment of religion and the consequent secularization of the state.

Spinoza's solution to the political problem of religion is so radical it has never yet been tried. He advocates imposing a doctrinally minimal Christianity, admitting of innumerable sectarian expressions. As I attempted to show in my book, this state religion would be based on seven broadly Christian principles and would accord equal rights to any sect that agreed with them, as few Christian sects could fail to do.[27] Christian sects would be free to add to these dogmas any further ones consistent with the seven. However, they would not be free to use coercive measures to proselytize. The state would also tolerate religions that were not Christian even in the minimal sense of embracing the seven dogmas, though such religions would be tolerated only as long as they remained without political power.[28]

What Spinoza is advocating is not the abolition of Christianity but a second reformation of it. He seriously (though unrealistically) hoped that Amsterdam would enshrine in law the kind of reformed religion he envisioned. If it did, he contended, it would perpetuate the very liberty the Netherlands was beginning to enjoy, and anchor it securely in the practice of true justice and charity. In the *TTP* Spinoza presented a plan for stabilizing the political order of the republic while undergirding in law the practice of genuine piety.

Spinoza was not seeking separation of Church and State. He was seeking reformation of the Church within the State. He advocated building

the State on some kind of Christian foundation, albeit a very liberal one.[29] Like most other philosophers of his generation, he believed, as *TTP*'s subtitle implies, that the state should be used to buttress, not undermine, religious expression.

If you begin with Spinoza as a Jewish-Dutch businessman of great philosophical ability thrown into an existential crisis by excommunication, you will arrive, I suggest, at some such evaluation of his major works. His *Ethics* is significant because it shows how to find beatitude in life, even if you must start without the props of security, community, and prosperity. His *TTP* is also enduringly significant because it brings into focus one of the chief concerns of every society: how to reconcile the necessary security of the state with people's legitimate demands for freedom of thought and religious expression.

To treat Spinoza as responding in the first instance to his own contingent and singular position does not preclude finding in his response a level of universality that is the touchstone of great philosophy. Dressing Spinoza up in fashions of later (and usually less religious) periods seems to me to have the opposite effect. It makes less of him than he made of himself.

The same is true of those who read him in the light of exotic religions or trendy ideologies. When, for example, Antonio Negri writes: "Spinoza's innovation is actually a philosophy of communism, and Spinoza's ontology is nothing other than a genealogy of communism,"[30] I cringe. Even if there were anything admirable or believable in Negri's favorite ideology, I do not think Spinoza would require its adventitious gilding in order to be important. Spinoza's modest, sober philosophy is sufficient in itself and already has the distinction of having outlived communism.

I am similarly underwhelmed by the claim of Jon Wetlesen that Spinoza's philosophy is a species of Mahayana Buddhism,[31] or that of the eccentric Norwegian ecologist Arne Ness, who says "[n]o great philosopher has so much to offer in the way of clarification and articulation of basic ecological attitudes as Baruch Spinoza."[32] I am also disappointed with scholars who flatter Spinoza by claiming he anticipates the likes of Einstein, Darwin, Freud, or William James.[33] Doesn't the apparent compliment really assign Spinoza to a second philosophical tier? Why does he have to

anticipate such people in order to merit our attention, when they are only required to be themselves?

　　The book in which Antonio Damasio raises Spinoza to these anticipatory heights is called *Looking for Spinoza*. The title itself suggests what is wrong with a certain kind of Spinoza studies. To look for Spinoza in times and places and issues that are not his own is to preclude ever finding him. If he still deserves reading today, it is not because we find him in exotic places but because he articulated enduring answers to enduring questions of ethics, politics, and religion.

Notes

[1] Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford/New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 130.

[2] Ibid., 131.

[3] A reader interested in verifying whether this was so can consult the published version: "Spinoza: A Radical Protestant?" in *The Problem of Evil in Modern Philosophy*, ed. Elmar J. Kremer and Michael J. Latzer (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2001).

[4] Paul Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française avant la révolution*, vol. 1, *XVIIe SIÈCLE* (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1954), 15.

[5] So described by Jean-Pierre Jossua, quoted in Thomas M. Lennon, *Reading Bayle* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1999), 18.

[6] Pierre Bayle, *Pensées diverses sur la comète*, Tome 2, §181 (Paris: Droz, 1939), 134f.

[7] Willi Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

[8] Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), vi.

[9] Ibid., 4.

[10] Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, third ed. (London: Unwin, 1948), 592.

[11] Ibid., 603.

[12] Kenneth Blackwell, *The Spinozistic Ethics of Bertrand Russell* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 168.

[13] Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza* (London: Penguin, 1951), 202.

[14] Spinoza, *Oeuvres complètes*, trans. Roland Caillois, Madeleine Francès, Robert Misrahi (Paris: Gallimard/La Pléiade: 1954), 7f.

[15] E.E. Harris, *Salvation from Despair* (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1973), 11.

[16] Robert Misrahi, "Spinoza and Christian Thought: A Challenge," in *Speculum Spinozanum*, ed. Siegfried Hessing (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 367.

[17] For example, Antonio Negri, *Subversive Spinoza*, trans. T.S. Murphy et al. (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2004).

[18] Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), xi.

[19] See Graeme Hunter, *Radical Protestantism in Spinoza's Thought* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 24ff.

[20] Ibid., 34ff.

[21] The best study of the Collegiants is that of Andrew Fix, *Prophecy and Reason: The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991).

[22] Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 171, 175.

[23] *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* [Emendation of the Intellect] in Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. C. Gebhart, vol. 2 (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925), 8f.

[24] *Ethics* V, Prop. 36, corollary and scholium, in Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. C. Gebhart, vol. 2 (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925), 303: *clare intelligimus, qua in re nostra salus, seu beatitudo, seu Liebertas consistit, nempe in constanti, & aeterno erga Deum Amore, sive in Amore Dei erga homines.*

[25] For a good introduction to the issues see the essays by David Savan, James Morrison, and Leslie Armour in *Spinoza: The Enduring Questions*, ed. Graeme Hunter (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1994).

[26] *TTP*, 20, in Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. C. Gebhart, vol. 3 (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925), 245f: *urbs Amstelodamum exemplo fit, quae tanto cum suo incremento, & omnium nationum admiratione hujus libertatis fructus experitur.*

[27] Hunter, *Radical Protestantism*, 130ff.

[28] Ibid.,132.

[29] *TTP* 4: 60: *quomodo [ex lege divina] optimae reipublicae fundamenta sequantur ... ad universalem ethicam pertinet.*

[30] Antonio Negri: *Subversive Spinoza*, 100.

[31] Jon Wetlesen, *The Sage and the Way* (Assen: Gorcum, 1979).

[32] Arne Ness, "Spinoza and Ecology" in *Speculum Spinozanum*, 418-25 at 423.

[33] Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando: Harcourt/Harvest, 2003), 260f, 280f.

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Spinoza and the Boundary Zones of Religious Interaction

Michael Driedger

Mennonites in Amsterdam during Spinoza's Career

Graeme Hunter has emphasized Spinoza's associations and affinity with the Collegiants. To defend his thesis he draws partly upon a rich and well-established historiographical literature about Spinoza's religious world. What is striking for me is that many of Spinoza's closest associates were not simply Collegiants; they were also Mennonites who were active in Collegiant circles. These included Pieter Balling, Jan Hendrik Glazemaker, Jarig Jelles, Jacob Ostens, Jan Rieuwertsz, Sr., and Simon Joosten de Vries.[1] These men made sure Spinoza's work was translated and published, and they also provided him with friendship and encouragement after (and maybe even before) his excommunication from Amsterdam's Jewish community.

Because of the close connection between these Mennonite Collegiants and Spinoza, I'll say a little more about Dutch Mennonites in the 1650s and 1660s. Most historians agree that the Anabaptists of the early sixteenth century are usefully described as representatives of the so-called "Radical Reformation," but Mennonites and other groups of Anabaptists did not remain fixed for long in a "radical" mode. By the middle of the sixteenth century they, like many of their Christian neighbors, had begun to establish new confessional and institutional traditions.

One of the most famous products of conservative Mennonite culture is *The Martyrs Mirror*, which includes three confessions of faith in the introduction, all modeled on mainstream Christian confessions of faith and all emphasizing the Mennonites' creedal orthodoxy and obedience to secular authorities. The conservative leader Thieleman Jansz van Braght published the martyrology in the Netherlands in 1660, and since then it has gone through dozens of printings in multiple languages. What is often forgotten is that *The Martyrs' Mirror* was intended largely as an only slightly veiled polemic against a group of ethically- rather than confessionally-oriented

Mennonites who gathered in Amsterdam in the congregation of preacher Galenus Abrahamsz.[2] This is the same congregation with which Spinoza's Mennonite friends were affiliated.

Abrahamsz, like Spinoza's Mennonite friends, was an active Collegiant, as well as a doctor, alchemist, and associate of many of Amsterdam's intellectual elite. However, unlike some of his Mennonite Collegiant colleagues, he seems to have had little contact with Spinoza. A brief summary of some of Abrahamsz's beliefs can help us understand a few of the differences that may have separated him from Spinoza.[3]

Historian Andrew Fix has proposed a useful ideal-typical distinction between "spiritualizing" versus "rationalizing" views among Collegiants.[4] While the distinction was not so marked in the early years of the Collegiants' history, it became clearer in the course of the 1660s. In the 1650s the spiritualistic Abrahamsz believed that the church had fallen soon after the life of Christ and that human efforts to achieve perfection in this world were doomed. Therefore, he put little faith in confessions of faith or church hierarchies. Instead, the Word of God in the Bible and the example of the life of Christ were crucial measures for him. Attitudes toward Jesus separated Abrahamsz from Spinoza. While Spinoza did write regularly and approvingly of Jesus in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (hereafter *TTP*), for him Jesus was only a man, albeit one who had a special relationship with God. This was a position not only counter to the Nicean Creed but also illegal after civil authorities across the Netherlands outlawed Socinianism in the 1650s. Because Abrahamsz (like the Socinians) did not hold to the Satisfaction doctrine, his Mennonite opponents had him charged in 1663 with the crime of Socinianism, but he was acquitted for he held largely conventional Trinitarian views.

Baptism (adult baptism, to be specific) was also more important for Abrahamsz than it was for Spinoza. Spinoza's lack of concern for baptism is especially noteworthy, since one of the few rituals Collegiants did practice regularly was adult baptism by immersion.[5] Furthermore, Spinoza probably had little interest in either the alchemical projects Abrahamsz spent great energy on or the millenarian hopes he harbored. Unlike Abrahamsz who held largely spiritualizing views, Spinoza's closer Mennonite contacts tended toward more strongly rationalizing views, influenced by the works of Spinoza and René Descartes.

Despite these differences, there was a key similarity: both Galenus Abrahamsz and Spinoza advocated a doctrinally minimalistic, ethical form of religion. Abrahamsz's Amsterdam congregation, composed as it was of a significant number of Collegiants and led by a self-styled reformer, was a testing ground for a version of what we might consider (following Hunter) a Spinozist-style of religious reform, the purpose of which was to establish the basis for religious peace. The irony, however, was that the anti-confessional ideals of Abrahamsz and his fellow Collegiants resulted in a major Mennonite schism.

Disputes starting around 1655 between orthodox confessionalists and Collegiants in Abrahamsz's Amsterdam congregation resulted in what became popularly known as the "War of the Lambs." The title is partly a play on the name of the Mennonites' meeting house (the church *bij het Lam*, so-called because it was marked with a sign of a lamb), and partly a reference to a conflict in a supposedly peaceful flock of Christ. The church also served as an occasional Collegiant meeting house. By 1664 Galenus's Lamists had succeeded in forcing out van Braght's Zonists (the confessional faction named after their new meeting house marked with the sign of the sun). The schism lasted for well over a century. The Jewish community was not the only one plagued by dissension.

Reservations about the Hunter Thesis

Because there were strong affinities between some Mennonite Collegiant beliefs (especially those of Pieter Balling and Jarig Jelles) and Spinoza's philosophy, and also because of the close association Spinoza had with freethinking Mennonites, I'm inclined to see a great deal of value in Hunter's thesis. My suspicion is that it may be most surprising to philosophers unfamiliar with the historical context. Having said this, however, I do have a reservation about it. Hunter wants to do more than develop the historically well-founded view that Spinoza's Collegiant associations were a key aspect of his philosophical and religious development; he wants to frame Spinoza in a Protestant tradition of reform. In Hunter's own words Spinoza was "a child of the Reformation" who, like other Protestant reformers before him, wished "to recover [Christianity's] original shape."[6]

To explain why I think this is an overstated position, I will begin with a critique of the heuristic concept of the *nadere reformatie* (Dutch for

further or second reformation). It is a concept created by European Protestant historians to write about the revivalistic spirit that inspired some Protestants from the late sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries to grow tired of mere (and, in their view, failed) institutional reform and to prefer instead a fundamental reform of morals. From what I read in the *TTP*, this aspiration resonates well with Spinoza's thought. This is also why Hunter argues that "What Spinoza is advocating is not the abolition of Christianity, but a second reformation of it." My concern is that the aspiration for a reform of religious life in Spinoza's mid-seventeenth century milieu was not uniquely Protestant or even Christian. Labeling Spinoza a Protestant runs the risk of over-defining him.

My position is influenced by historical research organized around another heuristic concept: "confessionalization." Historians use it to discuss the processes of collective identity formation and institutionalization among believers in the early modern period. Originally historians applied the concept to mainstream Christian churches – Lutheran, Calvinist, Catholic – as an analytical alternative to the older Reformation / Counter-Reformation dichotomy. In my view, the concept of confessionalization applied in this narrow sense fails to realize its full heuristic utility, because it ignores similar processes of institutionalization that took place in other religious communities, both nonconforming and non-Christian.

A very good contribution to scholarship on this subject is a 2003 essay by the Göttingen German studies professor Gerhard Lauer.[7] On the basis of a careful study of early modern Jewish history and devotional literature, Lauer redefines confessionalization as a process in which believers rejected established forms of religious life because these forms did not satisfy deeply felt spiritual needs. Actions typical of these believers included writing biblical commentaries, condemning false believers, adopting ascetic practices, or participating in messianic fervor. The consequence was a differentiation of Jewish religious expression: sometimes the devotional impulse led to a newly intensified, institutionalized orthodoxy; and occasionally it led to radical, heterodox, extra-institutional forms, some of which survived while others vanished into obscurity after a brief existence. To cast Lauer's thesis in terms that Hunter uses, it was not fear of religion but fear of insufficient devotion that drove a process of ongoing change in Jewish communities.

One advantage of Lauer's position is that he does not want merely to make sense of the dynamics of early modern Jewish life alone but rather to use Jewish examples to illustrate patterns of change common in Jewish and Christian circles. The case of the War of the Lambs provides examples of intensified religious concerns from both the Collegiant and conservative Mennonite sides. From a viewpoint like Lauer's emphasizing the ongoing dynamics of religious differentiation, to speak of a "first" versus a "second" Reformation (or Radical versus Magisterial Reformation) is not especially useful for advanced research, because the reforming impulse in Judaism and Christianity does not easily fit into such neatly dichotomous categories. It is better to think about concrete reformers and reform movements: some large, some small; some successful in establishing themselves in a stable and lasting form, some without staying power; many overlapping and competing. Amsterdam of the mid-seventeenth century was full of reform-minded individuals and reform movements of many descriptions. Certainly not all were Protestant. Revivalist excitement there extended well beyond Protestant communities.

The Boundary Zones of Religious Interaction

Commenting on the reasons for Spinoza's break with and excommunication from the Jewish community, Steven Nadler writes: "if one must search for the 'corruptor' of Spinoza, then, in a sense the real culprit is Amsterdam itself."[8] In his career Spinoza would have heard about, interacted with, and undoubtedly learned in varying degrees from Jewish nonconformists, ex-Jesuit freethinkers, rationalist philosophers, Christian millenarian preachers, Quaker missionaries, and Collegiants. In a place like Amsterdam confessionalization, understood in Lauer's terms as the differentiation of religious life driven by the impulse to revive religious faith and practice, created a climate providing many opportunities for interaction across established dogmatic boundaries. I offer three examples.

In the middle of the seventeenth century a small group of Mennonites, presumably from Galenus Abrahamsz's congregation, had paid Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel to publish a vocalized edition of the Mishna. Rabbi Judah Leon had done the linguistic work, while Adam Boreel, a key Collegiant leader, wrote a commentary on the text.[9] Both men had shared

living quarters and visited a local synagogue together for several years without apparently causing controversy in the Jewish community. The text was not successful in reaching a broad audience. Nonetheless, the episode is one example of the not infrequent contacts between Jews and Christian nonconformists. These contacts usually did not result in excommunication of the Jews involved.

Another dramatic example of such contacts is the visit of Jerusalem Rabbi Nathan Shapira to Amsterdam in 1657. The visit caused a stir among Protestant millenarians, since Shapira held a positive view of Jesus as a manifestation of the spirit of the messiah and thought highly of the Sermon on the Mount. Richard Popkin has made a link between Shapira's and Spinoza's attitudes toward Jesus.[10] An implication of his argument is that a philo-Christian attitude, while the unpopular view of a minority, did not on its own exclude one automatically from the Jewish community. A positive attitude toward some aspects of Christian belief did, however, help promote contacts between Christians and Jews. The purpose of Shapira's trip to Amsterdam was to raise funds for his community in the Levant, and he found a receptive audience in Christians like Peter Serrarius, Henry Jessey, and John Dury.

My final example of irenical contacts on the boundaries of religious affiliation is the work of Mennonite Collegiant printer Jan Rieuwertsz, Sr. He published much of Spinoza's corpus, as well as the work by Spinoza's close Mennonite Collegiant associates Pieter Balling and Jarig Jelles. Among his other publishing projects were:[11]

> • philosophical treatises by such seventeenth-century authors as Antoine Arnauld, René Descartes, Hugo Grotius, and Petrus Ramus;

> • political treatises, including a translation of a work by Oliver Cromwell;

> • theological treatises by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors as diverse as Desiderius Erasmus, Johann Heinrich Bullinger, Dirck Rafaelsz Camphuysen, and Hermann Montanus;

- publications by Mennonite authors such as Galenus Abrahamsz, Thieleman Jansz van Braght, Antonius van Dale, Cornelis Moorman, Joachim Oudaen, David Spruyt, and Reynier Wybrantsz;

- volumes of mystical theology, especially the work of Antoinette Bourignon;

- anthologies of contemporary poetry;

- works by ancient Greek and Roman authors such as Homer, Epictetus, and Pliny the Elder;

- translations of the Quran and other Islamic works;

- accounts of travel to Brazil, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.

Jan Hendrik Glazemaker was the translator of many of these projects. Rieuwertsz's print shop encouraged a community of readers whose curiosity was so "catholic" that it extended beyond the conventionally Christian.

Spinoza's ideas, like Rieuwartsz's publishing, transcend conventional confessional categorization. While we could try to fit Spinoza into a distinctly Protestant reforming tradition, this seems an unnecessary and confessionally partisan treatment of an anti-confessional thinker. I would argue, rather, that what is important for understanding Spinoza is the boundary zones between Christian and Jewish orthodoxies where the unconventionally devout (and sometimes even their orthodox counterparts) met to exchange texts and ideas.

Notes

[1] See Wiep van Bunge, ed., *The Dictionary of Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2003), for articles with bibliographies of Pieter Balling (45-47), Jan Hendrik Glazemaker (331-34), Jarig Jelles (492-94), Jacob Ostens (761-64), and Jan Rieuwertsz, Sr. (841-45).

[2] For further background on *The Martyrs Mirror*, as well as on the War of the Lambs (discussed later in this essay), see Michael Driedger, *Obedient Heretics: Mennonite Identities*

in Lutheran Hamburg and Altona during the Confessional Age (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), ch. 3.

[3] Literature on Abrahamsz's life and thought, as well as on the War of the Lambs, includes: Ruud Lambour, "De alchemistische wereld van Galenus Abrahamsz (1622-1706)," *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen*, new series 31 (2005): 93-168; Andrew Fix, "Mennonites and Collegiants in Holland, 1630-1700," *MQR* 64:2 (1990), 160-77; Andrew Fix, "Mennonites and Rationalism in the Seventeenth Century" in *From Martyr to Muppy (Mennonite Urban Professionals): A Historical Introduction to Cultural Assimilation Processes of a Religious Minority in the Netherlands: The Mennonites*, eds. Alastair Hamilton, Sjouke Voolstra, and Piet Visser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, 1994), 159-74); Leszek Kolakowski, "Dutch Seventeenth-Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion: The Mennonite, Collegiant and Spinozan Connections," trans. and intro. by James Satterwhite, *MQR* 64:3 (1990): 259-97 and 64:4 (1990): 385-416; H.W. Meihuizen, *Galenus Abrahamsz 1622-1706: Strijder voor een onbeperkte verdraagzaamheid en verdediger van het Doperse Spiritualisme* (Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon N.V., 1954).

[4] Andrew Fix, *Prophecy and Reason: The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991).

[5] See the illustration in ibid., 136.

[6] Graeme Hunter, *Radical Protestantism in Spinoza's Thought* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 76.

[7] Gerhard Lauer, "Die Konfessionalisierung des Judentums: Zum Prozeß der religiösen Ausdifferenzierung im Judentum am Übergang zur Neuzeit," in Kaspar von Greyerz, Manfred Jakubowski-Tiessen, Thomas Kaufmann, and Hartmut Lehmann, eds.: *Interkonfessionalität - Transkonfessionalität - binnenkonfessionelle Pluralität. Neue Forschungen zur Konfessionalisierungsthese.* Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte, Nr. 201.(Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003), 250-83.

[8] Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 147.

[9] Lambour, 110-11, especially n. 37. For more background on the translation project, see Richard H. Popkin, *Spinoza* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004), 63; and Ernestine van der Wall, "The Dutch Hebraist Adam Boreel and the Mishnah Project: Six Unpublished Letters," *Lias* 16 (1989): 239-63.

[10] Richard H. Popkin, "Rabbi Nathan Shapira's Visit to Amsterdam in 1657," *Dutch Jewish History* (Jerusalem: Tel-Aviv University, 1984), 185-205.

[11] The list is compiled based on a search of the on-line catalogue of the University of Amsterdam Library: www.uba.uva.nl.

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Spinoza's Jewishness

Willi Goetschel

To discuss Spinoza's Jewishness does not mean laying claim to Spinoza or making Judaism his denominational affiliation. It simply means acknowledging his critical significance for the formation of modern Jewish identity, whose distinctive character rests on a permanent negotiation of religious, cultural, and intellectual traditions.[1] Spinoza's stance represents a philosophical approach that plays a central, arguably even constitutive, role in the formation of modern Jewishness.

Detailed comparative studies seeking to link Spinoza's thought to medieval Jewish philosophy have led to framing Spinoza as a student on an unequal footing with his predecessors. Harry Wolfsohn's verdict has become notorious: there is nothing new and original in Spinoza.[2] Such a view pre-empted serious examination of the philosophical importance of Spinoza's Jewish reception; Spinoza was the renegade outcast standing in the shade as a dark reminder that Jewish philosophy has come to its end – or so Wolfsohn's argument went. However, despite and against Wolfsohn there has been a sense for some time now that Spinoza played a central role in the development of modern Jewish thought and can even be considered as a transition to it, if not the beginning of it. This is a trajectory that the conventional historiography of philosophy has largely ignored, even eclipsed.

Jewishness and Jewish Modernity

Jewishness is not to be misunderstood as a body of properties or a catalogue of doctrines, whether religious, cultural, or secular. "Jewishness" is rather the sign for recognizing a living, continuing tradition whose distinctive character resists and opposes reduction to the mainstream school of philosophy from Plato to Descartes. Spinoza is the only Jewish philosopher who has been accepted into the canon of Western philosophy. At the same time his incorporation into the canon has produced readings whose universalist focus stamps his Jewishness as a biographical blemish; the shadow cast, as it

were, by the shining brilliance of his radical rationalism. But for those wary of the project of modern universalism, Jewishness would mean more than just the blind spot of philosophy. It would signal the urgency of addressing a systematic problem at the heart of philosophy's standard conception of universalism.

Spinoza's Jewishness thus represents the problematic of modern Jewishness or, more precisely, the problematic of how the dominant forms of philosophy and culture respond to a philosopher, whether religious or secularized, who grounds his thought in a non-Christian or not exclusively Christian framework. In philosophical shorthand, Jewishness marks the challenge that the "universal" is no longer understood to subordinate the "particular" in a seamless fashion, as in the metaphysical tradition that views the relationship between God and creation in either "top-down" or "bottom-up" terms. Jewishness signals instead an alternative approach that cannot be contained in what is sloppily called the Judeo-Christian tradition but is more accurately called the Greco-Christian tradition.

Spinoza has had a curious destiny. It is a commonplace that he was Jewish, that he was banned from the Jewish community of Amsterdam, and that he was forced therefore to leave that community. Nevertheless, for the rest of the world he remained, as Leibniz calls him, "the Jew of Amsterdam." Spinoza's reputation undergoes a similar effect to that of Heinrich Heine, who will later say from his own experience that his baptism would only highlight his Jewishness the more he sought to wash it off. Heine's point was that baptism produced the opposite effect of what was desired; it would highlight *der nicht abzuwaschende* Jude, the Jew whose Jewishness could and would not be washed away.[3] Baptism branded Heine even more relentlessly with the Jewishness he sought to shed. As a consequence, baptism seemed only to fixate and expose more openly a Jewishness that would not be allowed to assimilate.

Historically, Spinoza has been subject to a similarly qualified reception. The more Spinoza is read through a universalist lens, the more the need arises to tag him as a Jew. Jewishness, in other words, is the blind spot that places Spinoza in the contingency of history, of life, of experience, and the empirical. Or so it seems. His Jewishness resists dissolution into the universal, and is therefore conjured in spectral forms by a universalism self-

deprived of a particularity of its own. This explains the often curious shapes and forms in which his Jewishness figures into both the historiography and, even more tellingly, the systematic accounts and interpretations of his thought.

The Scandal of Jewishness

This phenomenon is what I call the scandal of Spinoza's Jewishness. I call it this because it demonstrates the haunting issue of how to situate – that is, address and think through – Spinoza as a universal philosopher with a distinctly particular background, but also how to comprehend the intellectual trajectory pointing from him to a self-consciously Jewish line of readings. The scandal of Spinoza's Jewishness is really the scandal of philosophy itself: philosophy finds itself deadlocked if urged to think the universal and the particular outside a hierarchy long recognized as questionable if not misguided.[4]

I see Spinoza's modernity now precisely in what exceeds conventional answers to what it means to be Jewish. Spinoza's Jewishness cannot be dissolved into elements of historic forms and elements of Judaism. His philosophical trajectory offers instead a different way to imagine Jewishness, one that boldly leads to modernity.

If we follow the thread of modern Jewish philosophers who have felt a family resemblance to Spinoza, we can trace the theme of addressing Spinoza's Jewishness as a distinct note – a continuo, as it were – in the pattern of modern Jewish self-clarification. In modern Judaism, Spinoza has become a shibboleth: the litmus test of one's or another's Judaism. From Moses Mendelssohn to Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, a continual debate unites and separates the positions on Spinoza; positions whose own respective Jewishness very often seems determined by the stand they take on Spinoza.[5]

If we assemble modern Jewish thought along the line of Spinoza reception, interesting patterns emerge. Warren Montag, editor of *The New Spinoza*, suggests a helpful way of grasping Spinoza's impact when he speaks of understanding Spinoza's profound effect on the French group around Louis Althusser, by referring to the "immanent cause" Spinoza has been for them.[6] His point is that we can understand Spinoza's thought only

if we understand Althusser's thought, too, where an "immanent cause" manifests its substance only in its effects. Just as we understand Spinoza's critical significance better if we look at Althusser, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Etienne Balibar and others, so we get a better grasp of the full potential of Spinoza's critical thought if we consider the trajectory of the Jewish reception as it has expressed impulses and concerns of his thought.

There is an initial and inspiring tradition of resonance with Spinoza from Moses Mendelssohn and Heinrich Heine onwards, up to Leo Baeck and the young Martin Buber. In fact Spinoza became so much the symbol of liberal and even assimilationist Jewry – Georg Simmel is a representative – that this attracted strong opposition by critics of the liberal agenda of German Jewry. Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig are the most outspoken examples of Jewish philosophers, but Gershom Scholem, Leo Strauss, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno all unite in denouncing Spinoza who, for them, had become the symbol of what they rejected: German-Jewish liberal – and all-too-liberal – assimilation. Strauss and Carl Schmitt united in lamenting Spinoza's Jewishness, and Adorno and Horkheimer joined them in rejecting the fatally wrong-headed rationalist direction Spinoza's thought had presumably taken.

For Jewish critics who viewed German liberal Jewry's assimilation as betrayal, Spinoza became the symbol of the false direction German Jewry was heading. While liberal Jews were busy declaring Spinoza a philosopher fully compatible with the grand tradition of German idealism, a source of inspiration, and a co-equal to exponents of German philosophy like Hegel, the critics diagnosed such rhetoric as reckless underwriting of a bad rationalism they detected in German Jewish liberalism and that they saw genealogically linked to Spinoza. The battle over Spinoza has ever since been a proxy battle about what Judaism is to be.

Spinoza's Jewishness has been so contested because Spinoza unambiguously posed the challenge of self-definition from within. There is still a debate on the actual reasons that led to his exclusion. If the act of the *herem* or ban that pronounced him excluded from the Jewish community of Amsterdam was primarily an act of the community's self-assertion (a line of argument running through the whole debate on Spinoza's Jewishness), it has become impossible to separate discussion of Spinoza's Jewishness from

more general discussion of what Jewishness means in modernity.

We can fairly say that Spinoza has become an inspirational source, if not for Mendelssohn, Heine, Baeck, and others to say what Jewishness *is*, then for those like Cohen, Rosenzweig, Leo Strauss, and Emmanuel Levinas to say what Judaism *is not*. Ironically, it is the latter line of thinkers who propose reading Spinoza in accord with the traditional historians of philosophy who cast him as straightforward rationalist reaffirming rather than challenging the doctrines of rationalism. Against such a supposedly historical but questionably anachronistic reading, Mendelssohn and Heine initiated a different one in which Jewishness assumes its own respectable place in modern thought. Responding to what they see as Spinoza's imperative to rethink the task and approach of philosophy, they propose an approach that liberates Spinoza from appropriation to a canon he challenges in the first place.

We are All Culturally Protestants

Spinoza lived, worked, and wrote at a time shaped by Protestant concerns and sensibilities. It is thus understandable that he often relied on the language, thought, and ideas of Protestantism to express his views, not least because there were also many points that they shared. The question of priority seems a bit chicken-and-egg: Who was first, Spinoza or radical Protestantism? The question highlights the problem at hand. Spinoza develops his approach to Bible criticism, religion, and what he calls "the theological-political complex" in a constellation defined by an over-determined predicament where both Christian and Jewish theology call for critical examination of their claims and titles.

In this constellation Spinoza offers a view of religion that is resolutely non-denominational. His sociological perspective allows him to move to a comparative approach that no longer focuses on doctrinal and theological niceties but considers the functional aspect of religion in the social, political, and affective economy. The sociological insight of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (hereafter *TTP*) is not simply that Christianity has replaced Judaism, which as a consequence would then only be obsolete. Rather, the *TTP* highlights the *functional* equivalence of the two religions. Historical and hierarchical indices are replaced with the criterion of functionality.

One religion functions just like the other; it fulfills the same needs, only differently. Spinoza relegates the question of truth to philosophy, as he emancipates religion from the false burden of the philosophical problem of truth and frees it for its genuine task, namely piety and obedience, i.e., religiosity as spirituality and religious experience on the one hand, and guidance for moral action on the other.

　　As a consequence, Spinoza's conception of religion as a social practice whose true theology is its actions allows for a new way to theorize religions. No longer are they competitors in the religious war for truth but different, equally justified forms of religious life. Jewishness emerges then as a post-religious concept that remains constitutive for the individual's construction of difference. That Spinoza can so easily move in different Protestant circles, and that he can see himself as productively contributing to their religious life and learn from them without anxieties about losing his own identity, highlights the role Jewishness plays for him. Jewishness is the particularity allowing him to ground the universalism of his philosophical thought.

　　We can now grasp the deeper meaning of Hermann Cohen's stunningly provocative statement that all German Jews were culturally Protestants.[7] As a resolutely self-conscious Jew, Cohen did not see anything demeaning or disadvantageous in considering himself culturally a Protestant. Rather, his assertion suggests we view modernity as an interconfessional project where Jews would often serve as creative forces to develop a culture that, for lack of alternatives, would appear to be Protestant. If you were to take a stand against any form of orthodoxy, then the most widely recognized language and culture available to argue your claim was the Protestant one. And if you were to inscribe Jewish difference in that project, what else could it look like than a more radicalized Protestantism? However, this does not imply that Jewishness would be forsaken; on the contrary, it signals the resilience of modern Jewishness as creative force.

　　If we apply this idea to Spinoza, a man Cohen little concealed to dislike, we can say that it's precisely his Jewishness that makes him look Protestant, because his most inner concerns could culturally only appear to be Protestant when they were most Jewish. From a Protestant viewpoint, it would just be the last step of formalization that would distinguish Spinoza

or any other modern Jew from an open pledge to the Protestant creed.[8] From another viewpoint, however – let's call it the viewpoint of modern Jewishness – not taking this last step would not mean falling short of a normative expectation. On the contrary, it would be the consequence of consistently asserting one's own difference as alterity. That this alterity would be construed systematically as difference that is almost Protestant, or no longer traditionally Jewish, is not only a question of the problematic use of terminology. It is more significantly a reminder of the conflicting interests that deny what Spinoza, and others following him, have demonstrated as a viable alternative to institutionalized forms of religion: post-religious Jewishness as the model of an identity pointing beyond the conventional notion of religions as the standard model, with metaphysical options available.

A nineteenth-century historian of philosophy, Francis Bowen, provides a striking assessment of Spinoza's stand on, and between, different traditions that articulates the peculiar consequence this position has had for Spinoza's reception:

> He was a Jew by birth, but soon ceased to be a Jew by religion, though without thereby becoming a Christian. Hence he was wittily compared to the blank leaf, which, in most editions of the Bible, separates the Old from the New Testament.[9]

For many, Spinoza certainly has been a blank screen onto which moving images of his reception could be projected. But, as Bowen suggests, the blank leaf is not just a screen for the universal potential of particular meaning but for what connects the old and the new; that is, two traditions that differ only inasmuch as they also share distinctly constitutive aspects. The blank leaf is then an image for Spinoza's significance as a philosopher and thinker of both identity and difference, aware of the fundamental insight that alterity is possible only where both aspects of the leaf are considered. The particular can only be inscribed on the universal, and the universal becomes legible only as the other side of the particular.

Postscript: Spinoza and Mennonites

The symposium convened by Mennonites to discuss Spinoza's significance for Jewish and Protestant traditions has helped me better understand Spinoza

beyond the mere academic context. Asked to reflect on his Jewishness by the event organizers, I attended to this issue in a different, more consequential way than I had before.

The particular synergy created by the symposium called for appreciating Spinoza's friendships in a new light. Intellectually rewarding for both Spinoza and his friends, their friendship was built on more than simply their shared concerns and, I would argue, it was particularly inspired by the differences leading them to rethink those very differences in positive terms, as productive and liberating, not in negative terms. For one thing, this suggested to Spinoza the rediscovery in the Jewish tradition of progressive, forward-pointing aspects that would also be attractive to Mennonites and others reconnecting with the progressive impulse of their own traditions. But it also challenged him to attend to the specificity of Jewish tradition in more universal terms, as a legacy that had already become a shared and "catholic" enterprise, no longer exclusionist as the various institutionalized forms of religion would claim.

This "Jewish" challenge is what made Spinoza an attractive interlocutor for those Protestants who shared his concern, just as he became an important source for them to reflect their own traditions with more consequence. We can grasp Spinoza's particular relevance in the same way we grasp the significance his Mennonite friends had for him: we must understand the inspiring moment of difference as the core of the modern concept of friendship informing their interaction and collaboration. This concept viewed friendship not as the result of social, cultural, or political identity but as the fruit of the dialogic dynamics in their relationship, making them see the other's identity and difference as a crucial element for the conception of their own self-understanding.[10] For this reason, I am indebted to this symposium's conveners, who have given me the opportunity to revisit the question of the significance of Spinoza's engagement with his Mennonite friends.

Notes

[1] For a discussion of the differential character of traditions in general, see Willi Goetschel, "The Differential Character of Traditions," *Telos* 95 vol. 26 (1993): 161-70.

[2] Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza. Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning* [1934] (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983); and Wolfson, *From Philo to Spinoza: Two Studies in Religious Philosophy* (New York: Behrman, 1977).

[3] See Heine's letter to Moses Moser, 14 October 1826, in Heinrich Heine, *Werke, Briefwechsel, Lebenszeugnisse: Säkularausgabe* (Berlin: Akademie; Paris: CNRS), vol. 20, 265.

[4] See the introduction "The Scandal of Spinoza's Jewishness" in my *Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine* (Madison and London: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

[5] For the role Spinoza plays in modern Jewish self-understanding, see the discussion of the exemplary case of Hermann Levin Goldschmidt in Willi Goetschel, "Spinozas Modernität: Kritische Aspekte seiner politischen Theorie," in Marcel Senn, ed., *Ethik, Recht und Politik bei Spinoza* (Zürich: Schulthess, 2001), 209-24.

[6] See Montag's introduction to Warren Montag and Ted Stolze, eds., *The New Spinoza* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[7] See Hermann Cohen's early essay, "Ein Bekenntnis in der Judenfrage" (1880), published in the context of the Berlin anti-semitism controversy, and his World War I essay, "Deutschtum und Judentum" (1915), both in Hermann Cohen, *Jüdische Schriften* (Berlin: C.A. Schwetschke & Sohn, 1924), vol. 2, 73-94 and 237-301, particularly 77, 94, 242f.

[8] The dramatic increase of conversions to Protestantism of Jews in Berlin at the turn of the 19th century and in the first decades following, besides being the result of social pressure, displayed at times a genuinely religious and spiritual motivation based on alienation from forms of Jewish traditions that no longer seemed to be in step with the times. This is a telling example of open conversions significantly different from the situation in the 17th century.

[9] Francis Bowen, *Modern Philosophy from Descartes to Schopenhauer and Hartmann* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1877), 60.

[10] For another often trivialized and profoundly misunderstood friendship based on the same modern premise of alterity rather than equality as its foundation, see Willi Goetschel, "Lessing, Mendelssohn, Nathan: German Jewish Myth Building as an Act of Emancipation" in John McCarthy, Richard Schade, and Herbert Rowland, eds., *Lessing International: Lessing Reception Abroad*, *Lessing Yearbook* 32 (2000): 341-60.

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Spinoza's Excommunication

David Novak

In 1954, on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the excommunication of Baruch Spinoza, David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of the state of Israel, wrote a letter to Rodrigues Pereira, the *hakham* (chief rabbi) of the Portuguese-Israelite community in Amsterdam – the same community from which Spinoza was excommunicated – indicating the time had come to lift the *herem,* the ban of excommunication. It was, Ben-Gurion wrote, a source of profound embarrassment to the Jewish people that they had done to Spinoza something quite close to what the Athenian people had done to Socrates; it was time now, especially since Jews had an independent state of their own, which Spinoza to a certain extent had intimated in *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* [*TTP*], for the ban to be lifted.

In his response to Ben-Gurion's letter, Pereira made two major points. His first point was a traditional rabbinic one: a later court could not possibly repeal the decision of an earlier court unless it considered itself to be "greater in numbers and in wisdom than their predecessors." Pereira observes with traditional humility that the Talmud says, "if our ancestors were angels, we are but men, and if our ancestors were men, we are but asses." The point about numbers referred to the contemporary Portuguese Jewish community, which had been decimated by the Holocaust.

The second point Pereira made was that as a student at the University of Amsterdam he had taken a course in Spinoza. After studying Spinoza's writings, he said to the prime minister, "When I became chief rabbi, I accepted the rulings of my predecessors. No rabbinate has the right to review a decision of previous rabbinates unless it is greater in number and wiser. I don't consider myself wiser than those who came before me.**"** That brought at least the formal proceedings for lifting the ban on Spinoza to a screeching halt.

The reason I mention this is that beginning in the 19th century there was an attempt to reintegrate Spinoza into the Jewish tradition. It was

conducted on two fronts: one was an effort by Reform Jews – Reform Judaism having come into its own during the mid-19th century – to argue that Spinoza had been excommunicated by an exceptionally narrow-minded Orthodox rabbinate in Amsterdam. According to the reformers, this rabbinate was keen on remaking the *Marranos*, the secret Jews of Portugal from whom Spinoza was descended, into properly practicing and properly believing ("orthodox") members of the normative Jewish community. The *Marranos* emigrated to the Netherlands, seeking to live as Jews again, but they still had the mindset of Christians.

The rabbis were thus more occupied with issues of heresy than were most other traditional Jewish communities at that time. So, the reformers opined, if there had been a different kind of rabbinate, a different kind of Judaism, in Amsterdam at that time, Spinoza would never have been excommunicated. The reformers also recognized that this ban was very much *post factum*; that is, Spinoza had left the community before the excommunication was issued. He was issued a summons to appear before the *beit din*, and when he failed to appear, the rabbis became quite disturbed and issued the *herem.* (The excommunication document can still be seen in the library archives of the Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam.)

Why the ban against Spinoza was more severe than those pronounced against others at the time is ably addressed by Steven Nadler in his 1999 biography, *Spinoza: A Life*. But the point is quite obvious: Spinoza had left the community. In a letter to Willem van Blijenburgh, one of his gentile interlocutors, Spinoza clearly indicates that his leaving the Jewish community was something he had to do. He felt they were better off without him, and he was better off without them. He was quite sanguine, actually quite unperturbed, that the ban had been placed against him. He was not bitter, and he did not consider himself to be the victim of any injustice (interestingly enough, like Socrates, who also did not complain about his rejection by Athens).

It is very important to understand that the ban is very similar to excommunication in the more liturgical or eucharistic forms of Christianity. That is, nobody can be ejected from Judaism by any human authorities if that person either was born into the Jewish community or has been properly converted to Judaism. Jewish birth and conversion to Judaism are both

indelible. Already by Spinoza's time, the Talmudic principle that was given doctrinal force by the 11th-century exegete Rashi, namely that no matter what a Jew does, even affiliating with another religion (which Spinoza did not do, at least in a formal sense), s/he is still a member of the Jewish people. That principle was fully in force. At most, a heretic or even an apostate could be denied certain rights or privileges of being a member of the Jewish people in good standing by communal authorities acting with due process of law.

Excommunication (*herem*) in Judaism is the same as it is in certain forms of what we might call "High" Christianity. For example, in the Christian tradition one is denied the sacraments until s/he repents. So too it is with the *herem*: one under the ban of excommunication is not, for instance, to be counted as part of a *minyan*, a quorum, or to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. But, of course, there is always the possibility of repentance, and when that occurs the community is supposed to fully reinstate the former sinner to his or her normative status as a bona fide Jew. So this is the point of Spinoza's excommunication, which, as far as we know, he never resented. The problem is that Spinoza, unlike Jews prior to him, did not formally convert to another religion; he did not become a *meshumad* (apostate). Yet, unlike heretics (*apikorsim*), who usually insisted that they were still members of the Jewish community, Spinoza never insisted on any such thing. Thus, his "Jewishness" has been argued for and against by both Jews and gentiles until this very day.

The question then is: Can Spinoza be posthumously reconciled with Judaism by modern Jewish thinkers? Can he once again be taken to be a *Jewish* thinker to whom Jews can go for Jewish guidance as they do to earlier thinkers such as Maimonides or Hermann Cohen? Or did Spinoza really take himself outside the pale of Jewish discussion? Even if that is the case, this does not mean Jews cannot consider him as seriously as they would consider Aquinas or Calvin, or any other non-Jewish thinker who might have insights pertinent to Jewish thought. I accept the latter notion, and I think Christian thinkers can accept it as well – that is, if they see the aspect that was Spinoza's most radical departure from Jewish theology to be an equally radical departure from Christian theology.

This radical departure was Spinoza's great inversion of a classical Jewish dogma, the divine election of Israel. Spinoza inverted the doctrine:

Israel elected God rather than God elected Israel. Now, if God elected Israel, it is questionable whether God could ever un-elect Israel – which was a Jewish argument against Christian supersessionism. God's election is indelible. (For Calvin, the theologian *par excellence* for the Dutch Protestants for whom Spinoza seemed to be writing whether in Latin or in Dutch, God's covenant with the Jewish people was irrevocable. Thus Christianity had not superseded Judaism as much as it had gone beyond Judaism, but without eliminating the Jewish people from God's covenantal plan. That might explain why Jews did better politically in the Calvinist Netherlands than in Catholic Spain or Portugal.)

The question Spinoza presented was that, if the Jews had elected God, could they not un-elect him as their sovereign? Spinoza marshaled a number of biblical texts to argue that Israel's election and subsequent un-election of God as their sovereign is not just his own original idea. Not many people understand God's election of Israel as being perhaps the most basic Jewish dogma. As such, Spinoza's inversion of it to mean Israel's election of God is most radical, "denying a root" as the ancient rabbis might have put it.

If one is to follow the notion of election in Christian theology, it is important to reflect on Karl Barth's view. His discussion in *Church Dogmatics* is that the election of Israel is a prototype of God's election of the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, to be the unique incarnation of Christ, the only-begotten Son of God. Therefore, the difference between Jewish and Christian notions of election is not that Jews affirm divine election and Christians deny it. The difference is over what the *terminus ad quem* of divine election is. For Jews that *terminus* is the election of Israel – now only the Jewish people – by God at the events of Exodus-Sinai. For Christians it is the election of Jesus as the manifestation of the second person of the Trinity.

Now, if one sees the doctrine of election as the major connection between Judaism and Christianity, then one can also see that Spinoza is as problematic for Jewish theology as he is for Christian theology. In dealing with questions of, for example, the particular and the universal, Enlightenment notions tended to pick up on Spinoza that one moves from the particular into the universal. Hence the question would be whether the particular is *aufgehoben* (overcome), whether it is simply broken down and dissolves into the universal and disappears, or whether it remains intact

within the universal – and then transcends it. Yet the move is still from the particular to the universal.

When one analyzes very carefully the doctrine of election and its development in rabbinic and Christian thought, it seems that the universal moves into the particular and not the other way around. Therefore, the task is to bring the world into the elected community of Israel, into the *ecclesia*, if you will, not for the *ecclesia* or *Knesset Israel* to diffuse itself into some kind of universal pact. I don't think one need go as far as Hermann Cohen and refer to Spinoza as "the great enemy." I don't count him an enemy of Judaism or of the Jewish people. I look upon him as someone who left at least Judaism, if not Jewishness, which is a wholly different way of defining the Jewish presence in the world. So Spinoza is for me, and I think for some other Jewish thinkers, paying a role very similar to the role certain former Christians have played for Christians. That is, people who have left the tradition or the traditional community in some way, but by their leaving have provided a tremendously enlightening perspective for those who have not left.

I would give one modern philosophical analogy. To a certain extent one could look at Martin Heidegger as being a former Christian in the way Spinoza was a former Jew. If one looks at what I consider Heidegger's single most important essay, "On the Essence of Truth" (*Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*), where he brilliantly shows that the correspondence theory of truth is rooted in a creationist theology, one sees the former Christian believer casting light on the epistemological and ontological significance of the biblical doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, a doctrine Christianity readily accepted from Judaism. There we find Heidegger, the former Christian, seeing something in the biblical teaching that he has rejected, yet clarifying that teaching for those Christians (and Jews) who remained in the tradition in a way that they perhaps could not do themselves. *Mutatis mutandis*, I think Spinoza, in his treatment of relation, law, and election by inverting the tradition, gave a perspective that could only be that of a former believer, a former member of the community, for those who have chosen to remain part of the traditional community and continue its ongoing trajectory.

In that sense, Spinoza did set the agenda for Jewish modernity. Indeed, all of us live in the wake of his startling insights, even if we have chosen

to invert the path that he inverted by retrieving the ancient tradition and its founding revelation anew.

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The Jewish–Christian Schism Revisited

Mitchell Brown

After a conference several years ago on John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas called for a broader examination of Yoder's theological legacy, noting that such an examination would be difficult because many of Yoder's ideas are quite radical, perhaps too radical for the mainstream Christian (*Mennonite Weekly Review*, March 18, 2002). Just how radical is evident in Yoder's essays collected in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited,*[1] the main focus of this Reflection. As Hauerwas notes later in the same interview, Yoder's radicalism is a direct result of his focus upon scripture.

On its face, this may seem to be a contradiction, since all Christian theology sees itself as biblical. But there is biblical and then there is biblical, with most systematic theology being less interested in the biblical foundation than in the ensuing theological development. The Radical Reformation was partly a call to be more biblical and less theological, but the precise mixture of Bible and theology has been a problem for the Church ever since. In *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* Yoder comes down decisively on the Bible side of this great divide. Its true radicalism lies in showing what a consistent biblical theology can do.

The first thing to notice is that such a biblical theology doesn't sound very theological. The essays in this book do their theology by talking about the schism between two communities, a schism that Yoder believes should not have happened and that has left both communities damaged. This is the book's first radical moment: Christianity is not somehow better than Judaism, but both communities are less than they should be because they have split apart. Speaking of the traditional account of this schism, Yoder notes:

> According to this account, then, "Christianity" broke away from "Judaism" (intellectual, social, ritual). Christians interpret this a supersession, whereby the Jews were left behind, no longer

> bearers of God's story. Jews on the other hand interpret that same separation as apostasy, rebellion. Yet both parties agree on what happened and why. My claim is that they are wrong not where they differ but where they agree. (31)

In overcoming this traditional picture Yoder contends there was nothing approaching a normative Judaism until the end of the second century. Thus there was no "Judaism" for "Christianity" to supersede. Indeed, there was no Christianity either. The common story of Paul "creating" a new religion (the Acts story) is explicitly denied by Yoder:

> What Saul or "Paul" did was not to found another religion but to define one more stream within Jewry. More narrowly; he created one more stream within *pharisaic* Jewry. (32)

Here we begin to sense the radical thrust of Yoder's narrative. It is the historical Paul who is important, not the "canonical" Paul of Acts. This historical Paul is a not a creation of scripture but has been recovered by modern biblical criticism. Yoder here privileges history in a way common in Biblical Studies departments but deeply unsettling to the faith community. Yet this is precisely the genius of the book. Yoder does not ignore this conflict; rather he fully embraces the historical Paul. Even more important, he understands that this *historical* Paul has *theological* importance.

For Yoder, the church has nothing to fear from history; indeed, the Bible is primarily the memory of an historical community. Yoder gives us first a theology of community, of a people of God, a theology that begins in history. That Paul was a Jew and never denied that fact is essential to the vision Yoder is creating. Paul is the linchpin of this new theology. It is Paul we must look to, in order to see one who predates the schism that "did not have to be" (43).

Yoder is thus offering a program for a new way of doing theology. Beginning with the "did not have to be," he is looking back before the schism that has defined the subsequent traditions. Why? What purpose is served by this seemingly quixotic quest for an ideal past? For what is more accepted than that there are Jews and Christians, and that Christians must convert Jews? But what if this entire picture is wrong from the start? If the schism was a mistake, what does this say to a theological tradition that accepts it as foundational and whose every definition is colored by it?

The beginning of the end of what Yoder calls the period of "tense but tolerable overlapping" (54) comes with Justin Martyr:

> Justin is thus engaged, a century after Pentecost, in driving a wedge between two kinds of Christians: those who, following the counsel and theology of Paul, invest in keeping the border between them and Jewry open, and those like himself, whom we have since come to call "Apologetes", who turn their back on the Jews in the interest of making more sense to the Gentiles. (54)

Justin would be the start of the orthodox position, one that would "rationalize" Christianity. It is important that Yoder calls attention to this break between community and philosophy. For incipient here is the difference between the position of the Radical Reformation and the mainstream. For Yoder as an Anabaptist, the fact of community will be more important that any rationalistic apologetics to "prove" one's faith. The community will be defined not by orthodoxy but by orthopraxis. However, to speak of such orthopraxis is essentially to speak of a more "Jewish" Christianity. The fall of Christianity thus comes not with Constantine but with Justin, when reason replaced community.

Yoder devotes an entire chapter to spelling out the Jewish quality of the Radical Reformation. Entitled "The Restitution of the Church: An Alternative Perspective on History," it covers the givenness of the particularity of Jesus, the indispensable *halakah* [laws and their interpretation; "the ways things are done"], and the Jewishness of Jesus' *halakah.*

> When under the rubric of "restitution" we place historical progress under the judgment and promise of the Jewish Jesus, his humanness, his style, his vulnerability to historiography, we are not asking history to stand still or turn back, but we are confessing which way is forward, in the only way Christians can if we really choose to stand with those first Jews who trusted that one day every tongue would confess as Lord the one whose servanthood has brought him to the cross. (141)

This statement outlines the direction of the book. Yoder's privileging of history is Anabaptist to the core. Community takes the place of dogma. But Yoder does not seek just any community; he is drawn to the time before the fall into dogma. One could argue that this is what Anabaptist theology should

always have been but has not had the courage to be. Anabaptist theology called into question traditional dogmatism, but never wholeheartedly. Yes, the community and its behavior came first, but this radical critique was never taken to the end, the point where it would finally deny importance to Christianity's traditional dogmas. Yet this, I believe, is what Yoder is doing throughout the book. He is not so much denying the dogmatic tradition as relegating it to secondary status. Dogmas will develop when needed to help form a community, but that is all. They are not primary. Describing the final movement from the period of tense overlapping to orthodoxy, Yoder says:

> One can suspect that the division was not final until Christians in the fourth century came into political power, and thereby changed not only the resources at their disposal for dealing with adversaries, but also the social meaning of their own faith. Groups called "ebionite" or "Jewish Christian" by their critics survived for centuries more, despite the attacks of the "orthodox" bishops who had the support of the Roman authorities. The notion of their "disappearance" means only that historical memory had no use for them, not that they were no longer around. It was the hellenizing apologetes who produced more literature, and who later become recognized as the "orthodox fathers," at least partly for nonspiritual reasons. (57)

Thus Yoder deconstructs the orthodox position. His sympathies are clearly with those marginalized Christians deemed heretic by the powers that be. The last Jewish Christians suggest the role that Anabaptists will play a thousand years later. Yoder is not arguing for the theology of the "heretics" as being better than the theology of the "orthodox": theological truth is secondary, and it should not intrude upon what is primary, namely the people of God. Schisms should not happen, particularly for reasons of dogma that so often mask those of political power.

The strong resemblance between Jews and Anabaptists is clearly outlined in the next chapter, "Jesus the Jewish Pacifist":

> The readiness to be atypical, to be nonconformed, of which I have just been writing, is strengthened by one further turn of the argument in which Jewish thought had already taken the path which Jesus followed further, and which the rabbis took

still further. This is the preference for the concrete case….The
concrete shape of the culture of faithfulness is more crucial to
a people's commonality of commitment than is the piety, with
which it is filled out, kept alive, personalized and explained to
outsiders. (74)

Again theology and its attendant dogmatic piety are made secondary.
Yoder argues there are really two traditions: the orthodox who put piety and
apology first, and the others:

Jesus, Jewry, and the minority churches do it the other way. They
first name representative acts that are imperative or excluded.
This is *Halakah*. Then *Haggadah*, spirituality, considers why
such judgments make good sense. (75)

Here Yoder recalls a distinction made a generation ago by the historian
of Anabaptism, Robert Friedmann:

Apparently, then, Anabaptism represents a new type of
Christianity, different from the traditional patterns of
Protestantism in general. It is certainly not a creedal (i.e.,
theological) church in which the fruits of salvation may be
enjoyed. Thus the question is not without meaning whether
Anabaptism may still be considered as part of the great Protestant
family (aside from the merely negative form of separation from
Rome).[2]

Thus we see again the importance of the schism. At the schism
Christianity lost its relationship with Judaism and thus lost its *halakah*. To
recover, to radically recover, this Christianity will take a rethinking of the
schism. It wasn't just Constantine; he was just a symptom of a deeper and
older disease.

Ironically, as Yoder presents this devastating critique of orthodox
Christianity, the thinker closest to him, and one must say *halakically* with
him, is seeking to defend a theology of radical orthodoxy. In his 2001 Gifford
lectures, *With the Grain of the Universe*,[3] Stanley Hauerwas takes his title
from an essay of Yoder's, but the content of the two works could not be more
different. Where Yoder deconstructs the orthodox tradition by keeping with
the community, Hauerwas seeks to build his vision of community through

the dogmatic tradition. Like Yoder, he mistrusts any argument for God, but unlike Yoder he believes the way to theology is not through community but through dogma that forms the community:

> The Trinity is not a further specification of a more determinative reality called God, because there is no more determinative reality than the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From the perspective of those that think we must first "prove" the existence of God before we can say anything about that God, the claim by Christians that God is trinity cannot help but appear a "confessional" assertion that is unintelligible for anyone who is not a Christian. (1)

Hauerwas begins from the opposite pole of theology than Yoder. However, I believe they will end up in very much the same place (the "politics" of Jesus) though their methods could not be more different. Hauerwas is a "vertical" theologian, going to the depths of the orthodox tradition and radically redefining it. But he is unrelentingly orthodox. Yoder is a "horizontal" theologian, staying on the historical surface and tracing the development of the community of God's people. He finally has very little need for the orthodox language so important to Hauerwas.

Perhaps this is as it should be: the radically orthodox Hauerwas and the pragmatic biblicist Yoder. Two very different traditions: one profoundly "Catholic," the other profoundly Anabaptist. The other, "heretical" paradigm is given an apposite description by Rowan Williams in discussing Cardinal Newman's view of Arianism:

> Newman's version of the fourth-century crisis … rests upon a characterization of Arianism as radically 'other' in several respects.…What unifies these diverse distortions of catholic truth is their common rejection of mystical and symbolic readings of the world in general and Scripture in particular; they are all doomed to remain at the level of surface reality. And it is this 'Judaizing' tendency that provoked the early Church's worst crisis; let the modern reader take heed.[4]

Recalling Wittgenstein, Yoder can say with him: "We want to walk: so we need *friction.* Back to the rough ground!" (*Philosophical Investigations*, paragraph 107). This is where Yoder wants us: a theology of the ground/

surface, a theology of history, a theology of the historical Paul and the historical Jesus.

Yoder is not afraid to take on the most difficult question facing any dialogue between Judaism and Christianity: Jesus. After all, when the discussion is over, the situation remains the same: Christians believe Jesus is the Messiah, while Jews do not. Case closed, end of discussion. Not for Yoder. In the most radical section of this most radical book he addresses the question by restating the "accepted" formulation:

> Many who call themselves "Christians" do not believe any more in Jesus as the Messiah, any more than the Jews do. For many Christians the statement "Jesus is Messiah" is not meaningful, or is not verifiable, or is not relevant. Some would not say it is not true but would be at a loss to say how it would make any difference. "Christ" is for them simply Jesus' middle name. (111)

Yoder's pragmatism invades even the most sacred space of Christology. To say Jesus is Messiah means nothing if we do not act in a way proclaiming that lordship. Once again the Jewish-Christian *halakah* takes precedence over the more orthodox affirmation. And this opens the door for conversation with those who, though they don't confess Jesus as Messiah, act as if they do:

> Within the new Jewish interest in Jesus … some Jewish thinkers have overcome their historically justified resentments and historically conditioned definitions of what Jesus had so long meant to them, as a symbol of their being persecuted. Some of them have done this so redemptively and so creatively as to suggest that no Jew can be sure that, when genuinely the age to come will have come – however that be imagined – that fulfillment then will be different from the Kingdom which Jesus announced prematurely. Then what Christians (those who do) look forward to as "second coming" may not have to be any different in substance from what Jews (those who do) look forward to as the first. (112)

Thus Yoder offers us a profoundly historical theology, one based not

on dogmas and concepts but on the communities that witness to the reality of God's kingdom, communities of Jews and Christians, each of which is in need of the other.

This book needs to be read by the church and not just the "usual suspects," the university teachers who are so appreciative of Yoder. Yes, Yoder is difficult: when our church studied portions of the book, there was a collective groan. While Yoder is no stylist, neither is he a user of the arcane language of academic theology. He is simply thinking hard about difficult matters, and his language is remarkably untechnical. The book must be read throughout the Mennonite church. Indeed, it makes no sense outside that context. For Yoder is not dispensing theological truth; rather, he is looking to the history of God's people and calling for repentance. We have gone astray, both Jews and Christians. The way is there, as it has always been, the way of Jesus.

Yoder's book is a call to recover that way. The journey will be deeply disturbing to some long-held beliefs, but it is a journey the Mennonite church must take**.** The schism that has rent the Kingdom of God for nearly two thousand years must be healed, and Yoder's radical book offers the outline of a theology capable of such work.

Notes

[1] Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs, eds., *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

[2] Robert Friedmann, *Hutterite Studies* (Goshen: Mennonite Historical Society, 1961), 34.

[3] Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2002).

[4] Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 5.

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Augustinian Existentialism and Yoder's Messianic Politics: "Revolutionary" Implications of Augustine's Understanding of Right Worship

Justin D. Klassen

Introduction: Faith and Politics

In *The Politics of Jesus*, John Howard Yoder seeks to articulate a revolutionary Christian social ethic based on his reading of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as messianic king. On Yoder's account, Jesus' biography outlines an original, decidedly political engagement with the established ruling authorities, an engagement by which followers of Christ, and indeed all who want to live "a genuinely human existence,"[1] are called to have their own lives determined. Yoder argues that this reading of the Gospels as a unified call to an inherently political discipleship is borne out in the letters of Paul (or "pseudo-Paul" in Colossians and Ephesians), where Christ's death and resurrection are construed as a decisive victory over the "Powers."[2] These Powers are the created structures God establishes to "order" the world, but in their fallenness they seek to absolutize their authority, to become masters of the creatures they ought to serve in obedience to God, the true absolute.

Salvation from such Powers thus demands a way of living in which true order is restored, or through which the audacious lordship of these Powers, if not creation itself, is revealed as "broken."[3] Such is the accomplishment or paradoxical victory of the cross. The ruling authorities sought with their empty charges to provoke Jesus into defending himself, which would have put ownership of his "self" up for grabs; but Jesus lived as if he belonged to none but God, not even to himself. When the authorities tested this "revolutionary subordination" to the point of murder, it was to their own undoing. For with this death it is revealed that the Powers demand not only subordination, which Jesus did not withhold for the sake of any dubious self-defense, but also the possession of their subordinates as slaves, which Jesus' unreserved obedience to the Father precluded.

Founded upon Jesus as exemplar in virtue of his messianic authority, Yoder's politicizing of the New Testament therefore cannot entertain liberalism's revolutionary advocacy of all emancipatory social causes as we moderns might expect or hope. The only thing revolutionary about messianic politics is the truly self-abasing subordination it requires. A more conventionally triumphant revolutionary political agenda cannot but pretend to "'get a hold on' the course of history and move it in the right direction,"[4] which hinges on the self-absolutizing power that Jesus refused to use. To follow the Messiah is therefore "hopeless," for to hope in resurrection is to give up the (false) hope of owning and helping yourself.

Thus when Yoder says that "the cross of Christ is the model of Christian social efficacy,"[5] he means both that Christian social efficacy is not efficacious in the usual sense and that Christians must nevertheless comport themselves according to a model of a different, and not only individual, efficacy. This model prescribes a sociality marked by its continual, patient witness to the excessively masterful postures of the Powers, a way of living whose vitality is not self-possessed but always mysterious and spiritual.

In order to make the point that the NT enjoins upon Christians a certain way of being social, a "communing" that submits to political power but does not obey it as power in itself, Yoder believes he must combat an alternative reading of Paul and the Gospels, one that he sometimes calls "existentialist." For him, existential Christianity is a child of Luther's interpretation of Paul[6] which, through its view of justification, divides the Christian subject between soul and body, and divides "existential" from "social" reality. The Lutheran account of justification suggests that one's particularly Christian existence has significance only before God, and that one's righteousness is "radically disconnected from any objective or empirical achievement of goodness"[7] and especially from any "social" behavior.

Yoder believes any such faith that prioritizes the individual's experience of "becoming a self before God"[8] (as Kierkegaard puts it) is apt to ignore the messianic social injunctions of the gospel. He suggests that a broadening of faith to include an empirically or objectively evident sociality is thus intended to undermine the possibility of a Christian political conservatism of the kind expressed in Luther's reading of Romans 13:4 ("Those in power do not bear the sword in vain. For power is the handmaiden of God, his avenger for your good against him that does evil"). Luther writes: "If government and the

Sword serve God, as has been shown . . . then everything that government needs in order to bear the Sword, is equally a service to God."[9]

For Yoder the problem is Luther's apparent indifference to the objective character of the government in question and to the meaning of "service." Such indifference is the opposite of revolutionary subordination, which Yoder would argue is warranted by Paul's claim that the Powers are mere handmaidens of the true sovereign. What Luther says may be true as a description of what God intends for the Powers, but this is precisely why the Christian faith enjoins believers to be subordinate in a revolutionary way that obeys earthly authorities only in the name of true service to God. This puts the emphasis on the (social) activity of Christian service, not on the authority-in-itself of any government. "Classic Protestantism" cannot make such a revolutionary move, Yoder contends, because its claim that righteousness is accomplished subjectively implies that there is, in addition to faith, no particular way of living or particular sociality that can be said to be salvific. In response to existential disinterest in the "objective achievement" of a particular social comportment such as revolutionary subordination, Yoder's reading of the NT stresses "Jesus as teacher and example, not only as sacrifice; God as the shaker of the foundations, not only as guarantor of the orders of creation; faith as discipleship, not only as subjectivity."[10]

Despite the influence upon contemporary Christian ethics of this "broadening" of faith, I contend that Yoder's additions to the existential are not necessary for deriving a revolutionary, messianic social ethic from the NT.

I suggest that *only* an exclusively "existentialist" Christianity can engender a social ethic which never presumes to have a hold on history, because it refuses to turn sociality into an "objective achievement." I intend to remain faithful to Yoder's view that "revolutionary subordination" is what marks any genuinely Christian ethic, but I suggest at the same time that only a relentlessly "existential" Christian faith can address the human inclination to self-possession in a way that makes revolutionary obedience possible at every moment. On my reading, existential faith – or, as Yoder puts it, faith "as subjectivity" – does not name a gnostic division of the religious from the social but entails the subject's active, inward striving for a selfhood that cannot be owned but only *lived* – in relation to itself, others, and God.

To suggest that faith-as-subjectivity needs the addition of an objectively achieved discipleship only courts the sinful desire for self-ownership.

To make my argument, I offer a reading of Book X of Augustine's *City of God,* according to which faith as the existential concern of the human subject engenders not political conservatism but a revolutionary "sociality *ex nihilo*," as I call it. I admit that Augustine seems in his more explicitly political Book XIX to separate the religious from the political in a way that would preclude him from having an adequately messianic ethic. There he claims that the city of God rightly "preserves and follows" all the laws of the earthly city, "provided only that they do not impede the religion by which we are taught that the one supreme and true God is to be worshipped,"[11] as if this "religious" concern were relatively indifferent to our "political" lives.

Nonetheless, I hope to show that the more existentially concerned Book X implores us to read Augustine's "indifference" to the political as revolutionary rather than complacent, even while this revolution must remain indifferent to itself as an objective achievement. We will come to see (1) that Augustine's description of faith as the inward turn from demonic to Christian worship simultaneously characterizes a revolutionary shift between a conciliatory and a messianic subordination to the fallen Powers; and (2) that faith as the existential concern of the human subject is indeed indifferent to its objective results but also that faith, in this very indifference, is inextricable from a revolutionary sociality. Only a rigorous existentialism can save Christian politics from a fascination with externalized ends (objective achievements included) that would preclude its participation in a truly "messianic" causality.

Worship as Existential Movement in *City Of God* Book X

Book X is the culmination of the first half of *City of God*, which offers a quite comprehensive critique of pagan political philosophy and theology. In Book X, the critique resolves into one crucial question, that of worship. To show that politics is ultimately about worship, Augustine begins with the universally accepted claim that "all [human beings] wish to be blessed [happy]" (X.1). If everyone wishes for blessedness, and if politics is about securing human ends, then political differences must stem from divergent answers to the question of how we rightly attain this goal and rightly order

our desires. While some (notably Roman) philosophers claim blessedness finds its source in many different gods, the Platonists for Augustine are "the noblest of all the philosophers, because they . . . assert that that which all [human beings] desire—that is, a happy life—cannot be achieved by anyone who does not cling with the purity of a chaste love to that one Supreme Good which is the immutable God" (X.1; cf. VIII.9).

However, the Platonists have nevertheless "supposed, or have allowed others to suppose, that many gods are to be worshipped" (X.1). This is because they somewhat reasonably conclude that since "no god has dealings with [human beings]" (VIII.20),[12] therefore some "good demons" are to be worshiped in return for "purifying" their worshipers for the end of blessedness.

Augustine thus makes it his chief task to "discuss the immortal and blessed beings who have their seats in heaven as Dominations, Principalities and Powers." His fundamental question is whether such Powers "wish us to offer worship and sacrifice, and to consecrate some part of our possessions or ourselves, to them, or to their God, who is also ours" (X.1). Here we can anticipate resonance with Yoder's discussion of the Powers, in that both Yoder and Augustine are asking whether to credit created powers with mastery by offering ourselves to them as possessions. However, for Augustine this remains a question of existential comportment – of worship – not of objective achievement. Yet, just because of its indifference to objectivity, his question actually attains to the revolutionary penetration that Yoder only intends. Why is this so?

Augustine's most obvious complaint against worship that cooperates with demons or lesser gods is that demons are not "pure" enough to serve as intermediaries between humans and a pure God (X.10; cf. VIII.15). Here we must grasp the exact nature of the demons' impurity, and we can begin, as Augustine does, with the desire for eternal happiness. He claims that only when the desire of a human being (and immortal beings endowed with rational and intellectual souls) for blessedness finds its true end in God, can that being also love his neighbor as himself, for only then is his "self" truly secured. When such a person, "who already knows what it is to love himself is commanded to love his neighbor as himself, what else is being commanded than that he should do all he can to encourage his neighbor to love God?" (X.3). Thus, one loves oneself properly by turning oneself over

in worship to God, the source of all being, and one loves one's neighbor by encouraging this same turn in her.

Augustine can only conclude from this that any created being demanding worship for itself has turned away from God and has consequently become incapable of seeking the other's best interest. Rejecting the subjective activity of worshiping and so belonging to God, the source of all true vitality, such creatures must pursue another way of securing themselves – by being self-possessed. Ultimately this means fortifying their unfounded selves with the misdirected worship of other created beings. This captures the nature of the demons' "impurity": only because demons have turned their backs on the source of all light do they seek to gather to themselves and consume the light of other creatures' worship. Demons relate to all of created reality through demanding worship because they desire to be secure in self-ownership.

Unsurprisingly, Augustine identifies worship per se (*latreia*) with the consecration of "some part of our possessions or ourselves" to the object of our worship (X.1). *Latreia* means offering one's possessions and even one's self, because the desire for happiness seeks to render the self unto the power that can truly sustain and bless it. To offer worship to an object that is not the true source of life, or to refuse to relinquish the self at all, is to throw oneself away. If in theurgic rites demons seem able to give the self back to itself by "blessing" it with ostensibly divine visions, this is only a deceptive tactic for compelling further worship. Of demon worshipers claiming to receive such visions, Augustine writes:

> If they do indeed see anything of the kind, this is what the apostle means when he speaks of Satan transforming himself into an angel of light. For these phantasms come from him who, longing to ensnare miserable souls by the deceitful rites of the many false gods, and to turn them away from the true worship of the true God by Whom alone they are purified and healed, transforms himself, as was said of Proteus, into every shape. (X.10)

Thus, created beings who demand worship demonstrate they do not love their fellow creatures but wish only to "ensnare" them, to satisfy their

perverse self-love with the possession of beings as things rather than by resting in the source of all being.

In contrast, Christ is able to plead for us as our singly effective priest (X.3), because with him our worship and ourselves are not referred to anything but the true source of blessedness. Only faith in this Christ, faith in the mystery of his incarnation (X.2s4-5), saves us from the demonic mode of desire, because Jesus does not allow us to worship him as an idol. He would submit to crucifixion before permitting himself to be objectified. Our faith is thus our assent to God's revelation in Jesus of that one *way* of living that leads to blessedness – but also to certain, objective death. Every time we objectify Jesus as a static "achievement" rather than allow him to become our new, spiritual way of living, he dies, and we live only to ourselves. This is the uniqueness of Christ's mediation:

> The true Mediator, the man Jesus Christ, became the Mediator between God and man by taking the form of a servant. In the form of God, He receives sacrifice together with the Father, with Whom He is one God. In the form of a servant, however, *He chose to be a sacrifice Himself, rather than to receive it*, so that not even in this case might anyone have reason to think that sacrifice is to be offered to a creature, no matter of what kind. Thus, He is both the priest who offers and the sacrifice which is offered. (X.20; emphasis added)

Jesus exemplifies true worship because in the form of a creature he refuses to accept what is due to God alone; he refuses the demonic mode of securing himself with the worship and the possession of other creatures. To have faith in him is to affirm this refusal, and this faith disabuses us of our inclinations to idolatry and self-possession. To have such faith is to live truly, ever active in dying to self and world, and ever resting in God.

Sociality *ex nihilo*

That demons have turned and fallen away from God means their self-love is not satisfied, which in turn renders them incapable of truly loving any other creature. Animated by perverted self-love, they seek to consume the worship of other creatures and thus they inevitably bind their worshipers in a similar predicament. Because the demon worshiper finds herself not blessed

but ensnared, she too cannot love the neighbor. For Augustine, this applies also to those people, especially prevalent in modern western societies, who claim not to worship at all. For everyone has a desire for blessedness, but when this desire does not find its proper end, the person must seek another, false source of vitality. Such a self must puff itself up, to conceal from itself and others the fact of its being torn loose from "any relation to a power that has established it."[13]

To non-worshiping liberals who claim nonetheless to love their neighbors, Augustine would say they love them only with a flattery that disregards their true good. A "lover" who does not rest in the divine power that establishes both himself and his neighbors can only be a possessor, one who inflates the beloved ones only to affirm power over them. (Keep this in mind as we try to determine whether Augustine advocates a sufficiently "revolutionary" subordination to political powers taking earthly felicity as their supreme end. Does faith's inward striving to be related in truth to God, itself, and others require the additional social imperative of discipleship? Is faith as exclusively subjectivity already a revolutionary *way* of "being subject"?)

In contrast to the possessive lover, those with faith in Christ affirm God's revelation of rightly-ordered love in Jesus and Christ's willingness to give up even his very self instead of becoming a slave to a creaturely master. A Christian who by such faith is "consecrated in the name of God and pledged to God is himself a sacrifice insofar as he dies to the world so that he may live to God" (X.6).

Thus faith's assent to Jesus means an active dying to oneself and to the world, a repeated willingness to be alive to God. Hereby the believer is freed from the demonic mode of self-love that fills itself with as much created "being" as possible, by a mediator who shows that losing the possession or even the worship of all of created reality is to gain the true source of our living. Jesus "taught us to despise what we fear by undergoing it Himself, so that He might bestow upon us what we long for" (X.29); by dying Jesus freed us from the need to fear fallen creation's pretension to absolute authority. The believer thus attains freedom from fearing that if she does not hold on to life "in itself," she will lose herself. Rather, she willingly loses that conception of herself in order to gain her true self, in mysterious expectancy of resurrection and eternal happiness.

This existential description of faith as "exclusively" concerned with subjective becoming is clarified by a brief comparison with Stanislas Breton's argument in *The Word and the Cross*.[14] Breton claims that the servant form of Jesus, displayed most clearly in his crucifixion, is the manifestation of God's Word as a word of "dispossession." For Christians to have their fundamental desire mediated by the crucified one requires they renounce their desires not only for glory or power but for any ontological "somethings"-in-themselves. A person worships God in Jesus Christ only by ceasing to love any "thing" except the power by whom all things were and are made. Whoever so loves God in Christ will not love others by flattery that falsely builds its object up into a self-possessed "thing" but will instead love them, paradoxically, by considering them as nothing in themselves so that they might find their blessedness in the God who created them out of nothing. Such love is a kind of "liberating service, which makes of nothingness not only something but someone."[15]

Augustine too understands the word of the cross as one of dispossession, in that Jesus' mediation teaches us to worship God by worshiping no created thing and even by willingly losing our very selves as things.[16] Jesus, though one with God himself, in the form of a servant became a sacrifice instead of receiving one; yet God glorified him, conferring upon him true blessedness. Such blessing is promised also to us if we can only turn to Jesus, by virtue of whose "way" we may truly live, with God as our goal (XI.2).

The Yoderian ethicist might still worry that faith's exclusive concern with becoming a self before God, even if it extends to a dispossessive love, will nonetheless translate into an ambivalence to, or acquiescence in, even the most debased of political structures – and on ostensibly Christian grounds. So our discussion of subjective faith's inextricability from true love of neighbor must also show, again paradoxically, that only if Christianity is worthy of the charge of "political indifference" can it approach a "messianic" politics. We must clarify the connection between (1) faith's willingness to be a subject without attaching itself possessively to false objects of love and (2) a revolutionary indifference to the pretension of worldly politics to put externalized ends, and even history itself, at our disposal.

For Augustine, only a subject who worships the one true God, who lives the existential movement of giving up his very self in order to rest in

God, can love the neighbor in truth (X.3). But more than making faith-as-subjectivity the prerequisite of a sociality marked by neighbor love, this means genuine sociality is identical with the existential movement of right worship. Thus, after suggesting true neighbor love demands the Christian do "all he can to encourage his neighbor to love God," Augustine concludes "this is the worship of God; *this is true religion*; this is right piety; this is the service which is due to God alone" (X.3; emphasis added). The movement of sacrificing to God the possession of one's own self is united with sacrificing the "being-in-themselves" of one's neighbors.

Worship of the one true God thus cannot be separated from living a sociality in which slavery to another creature becomes radically impossible. In faith, one's subjectivity ceases being defined by *what* one is (for all "whats," all positions of slavery or mastery, are nothings-in-themselves), but with *how* one lives in *any* "what." Right worship for Augustine is the institution of a sociality *ex nihilo*, a way of being together that gives no human being authority over the "what" of the community as a *noun* or an achievement, but makes possible a certain *way* of living – communing as a *verb*. True sacrifice "is every work done in order that we may draw near to God in holy fellowship: done, that is, with reference to that supreme good and end in which alone we can be truly blessed" (X.6).

According to this peculiar *way* of being a social body, we love each other in God, which means we consider even the splendor of one another's created being as nothing in and of itself. This, I suggest, is what Augustine means when he says, "this is the sacrifice of Christians: 'We, being many, are one body in Christ'" (X.6). The body of Christ is "a universal sacrifice" because it is that one society whose relations are marked by a universal dying to anything that any member could pretend to possess. It is a unique society in not being defined by external characteristics that might serve as objective goals of a very conventional political efficacy. This community is known not as any definable thing but as the movement of dying to the possibility of being something in itself. The church "demonstrates that *she herself is offered* in the offering that she makes to God" (X.6).

A Messianic "Making Use"

Let us briefly consider the concessions Augustine seems to make to worldly politics in Book XIX, concessions Yoder would expect of an exclusively

"existential" Christianity. Granted, Augustine does sometimes seem to be trying to find a way for the two cities, heavenly and earthly, to live peacefully side by side, and more on the terms of the *civitas terrena*, since it at least pretends to know something about achieving earthly peace. However, as Rowan Williams notes, "the last thing [Augustine] is likely to wish to do is to draft a concordat between the city of God and its avowed enemies. His question in Book XIX is, rather, about the optimal form of corporate human life in the light of what is understood to be its last end."[17]

Just as worship only engenders a true subjective becoming on the basis of its proper mediation in Christ, so a corporate life not directed to its true end in God cannot be a fully "political" life at all. In fact, no political authority whatsoever, no mastery of some human beings over others, ought to be obeyed in and of itself. Servitude is not natural but "ordained as a punishment by that law which enjoins the preservation of the order of nature, and forbids its disruption" (XIX.15).

How, then, *should* Christians comport themselves with respect to this condition of servitude as punishment for sin? Should they obey it by crediting it with its self-proclaimed power to secure happiness as a calculable, temporal good? On the contrary, and in line with Yoder's reading of Paul, Augustine says Christians in positions of servitude should serve their masters in a way that makes "their own slavery to some extent free," which must mean transforming or subverting that slavery by "serving not with cunning fear, but in faithful love" (XIX.15). For both Augustine and Yoder, followers of Christ subordinate themselves to earthly powers without fear and without giving credence to those powers' claims to absolute authority.

Where might Augustine invite the opposite reading, or support the claim that an "existential" Christianity is unfaithful to the "messianic" ethic of the NT because it is more acquiescent than revolutionary? Recall that the politics of the *civitas Dei* and the *civitas terrena* are always distinguished, as are the existential lives of the Christian and the demon worshiper, by their ends.[18] One's political commitments are never separable from the internal ordering of one's desires (the latter only a modern liberal would conclude). This must give a certain negative significance to Augustine's statement that "the earthly city, *which does not live by faith*, desires an earthly peace, and it establishes an ordered concord of civic obedience and rule in order to secure

a kind of co-operation of men's wills for the sake of attaining the things which belong to this mortal life" (XIX.17; emphasis added).

The critical difficulty ostensibly arises with Augustine's subsequent claim that the city of God must "make use of this peace also," because this willingness to cooperate seemingly implies that faith itself provides no distinct way of living corporately, and that believers should therefore be happy to participate in a politics that hopes in the effectiveness of human self-help or in the capacity of the Powers to achieve a hold on history. Yoder cannot advocate such a cooperative "making use of this peace," because he interprets the Revelation of John as proclaiming "that the cross and not the sword, suffering and not brute power determines the meaning of history"; this means that "the key to the obedience of God's people is not their effectiveness but their patience."[19] For Yoder, what denotes true Christian living is not only right worship but a sociality refusing to make use of any causality but the one expressed in the mysterious relationship "of cross and resurrection."[20]

However, the argument of this paper leads us to conclude that, no matter how cooperative Augustine may sound on this matter, his "existentialism" means he can only be advocating a *revolutionary* "making use." This is so mainly because he does not make sociality or political life into something additional to, or derivative of, the existential root of Christianity. He refuses to separate true communing from faith as a revolutionary way of "being subject." Thus his description of right worship, as with *any* genuinely existential account of faith, already supplies a messianic critique of any politics not directed to the true peace inherent in a sociality *ex nihilo,* a social body in which every member dies to her effectiveness.

If this is true, then what does it mean for the *civitas Dei* to make use of the peace of the earthly city?

We saw when considering Book X that only those can truly love their neighbors who have died to their desire to possess created being in itself; this means only those have love in them who have been turned in desiring blessedness toward God alone. By extension, for Augustine a society is only truly social by virtue of its participation in a cruciform life, a life giving its self-possession to God, even to the point of death. A life animated by any other end, whether explicitly "demonic" or more benignly directed to the

increased socio-economic welfare of all human beings, is a life that takes shape existentially as possessiveness because it becomes, at best, politics as flattery. If a frustrated desire for blessedness can only result in such a life of possessive, anti-social "love," this means that a politics directed to any but the true end of self-sacrificing community is a politics of what Yoder calls the Powers.

Therefore, Augustine does not hesitate to say that demon worship takes a tyrannical political form which, when confronted with true worship, must resort to violence. Having excluded themselves from the true way of living by resting in God's establishing power, fallen Powers necessarily seek to kill any witnesses to living truth because such witnesses also refuse to submit to them and question their dubious self-ownership. But by wielding this weapon of violence, the Powers make such witnesses shine all the brighter, for martyrs cannot be divorced from truth even by death, as Jesus is the first to reveal. The power of such false politics is thus "found to be not merely harmless to the Church, but even useful to her; for it completes the number of the martyrs, whom the City of God esteems all the more highly, as illustrious and honored citizens, because they have striven even to blood against the sin of ungodliness" (X.21).

This is the use the city of God makes of the peace of the *civitas terrena*: a use of earthly goods and subordination to earthly authorities only in the service of Christ, though it will mean death at every moment. The city of God, the only true (non)city, cooperates with the *civitas terrena* through its constant willingness to submit "even to blood" before accepting the false ends of earthly power. Such a revolutionary, subversive "making use" can be engendered only by a relentlessly existential faith, because faith as assent to Jesus' refusal of objectification can have no characteristics of objective achievement, which would only undermine faith's spiritual vitality with the temptation to hope again in human effectiveness. This suggests, finally, that Yoder's articulation of Christianity as an injunction to "revolutionary subordination" is only weakened by his adding the achievement of empirical results to faith-as-subjectivity.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with a final passage from Augustine's Book XIX:

> The Heavenly City knows only one God Who is to be worshipped, and it decrees, with faithful piety, that to Him alone is to be given that service which the Greeks call *latreia*, and which is due only to God. Because of this difference, it has not been possible for the Heavenly City to have laws of religion in common with the earthly city. It has been necessary for her to dissent from the earthly city *in this regard*, and to become a burden to those who think differently. (XIX.17; emphasis added)

To modern Christian ethicists, this statement recalls the contemporary, liberal-democratic, largely amicable separation of church and state, according to which people are believers on the one hand and citizens on the other, an arrangement making revolutionary subordination nonsensical. We must concede to Yoder that classic Protestantism, at least culturally speaking, has had something, and perhaps much, to do with developing this arrangement.

However, this could never have been Augustine's vision, and I wager that a careful reading of the most "existentialist" of the formative Protestants would offer similar findings. *City of God* is written entirely in the knowledge that true politics cannot be separated from religion, because politics is about living the *telos* of human life and cannot help but be about *latreia*. A "mere" difference in worship between the two cities therefore cannot mean, for Augustine, that political disagreements will be few and far between. It must mean instead that any Christian "making use" of earthly peace – and indeed, any Christian living – comes with a risky confrontation with Powers (even those within our own souls) whose turn away from God makes them unwilling to allow any use not submissive to their total mastery; hence the inexorably revolutionary character of "existential" Christian faith and of properly Augustinian social ethics.

We can conclude, then, that an exclusively "existential" Christian faith is necessary for sustaining a properly "messianic" ethic. As Augustine shows us, only the inward activity of "becoming subject" in faith can support a revolutionary death to all the world's apparently good political ends and ostensibly effective means for achieving them. Thus, only those worshiping

God with the subjective passion of faith can really follow Christ to the cross in their political existence, an existence never achieved empirically but *lived* at every moment. Ultimately, we might venture that only a classic Protestant indifference to achieving objective righteousness can make possible that patient but active living in the causality of cross and resurrection that mark Yoder's "revolutionary subordination."

Notes

[1] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994 [1972]), 145.

[2] See Colossians 2:15, and Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, esp. ch. 8. Here Yoder acknowledges his heavy reliance on Hendrik Berkhof's reading of Paul in Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. John Howard Yoder (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1962).

[3] Yoder, 144.

[4] Ibid., 228.

[5] Ibid., 242.

[6] Ibid., 214.

[7] Ibid., 213.

[8] See, for example, Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), where Kierkegaard suggests that human beings are unique because they have the possibility of the sickness of despair, or the possibility of being a self that wills not to be itself (and so is not becoming a self), and that the blessedness of Christianity is its ability, through faith, to root out despair. Thus, the essentially Christian is to become a self such that "in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it" (14).

[9] Martin Luther, *On Secular Authority*, in *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, ed. and trans. Harro Höpfl (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 21. When Luther addresses his "presumptuous" opponent in these contexts, he is often referring to Yoder's revolutionary Anabaptist ancestors. See for example page 11 of this same text, where Luther says that only the wicked would claim their Christianity exempts them from subordination to the Sword and that "some of them are raving like this already."

[10] Yoder, 226.

[11] Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. R.W. Dyson (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), XIX.18. Hereafter I cite Augustine within the body of the essay. See also Luther, page 27, where he indicates that his only problem with secular authority pertains to the Roman, papal presumption to master the beliefs of human beings.

[12] Cf. Plato, *Symposium*, 203a.

[13] Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 68.

[14] Stanislas Breton, *The Word and the Cross*, trans. Jacquelyn Porter (New York: Fordham

Univ. Press, 2002).

[15] Ibid., 99.

[16] Cf. Breton, 97.

[17] Rowan Williams, "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the *City of God*," *Milltown Studies* 19/90 (1987): 58.

[18] See Letters 91 and 104 in Augustine, *Political Writings*, ed. E.M. Atkins and R.J. Dodaro (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), esp. 3, 17, where Augustine defends the supremely political character of Christianity in virtue of the object of its worship.

[19] Yoder, 232.

[20] Ibid., 232.

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'Holding Fast' to Principles
or Drawing Boundaries of Exclusion?
The Use and Misuse of the
Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective [1]

David Kratz Mathies

"The [D]ao that can be told of is not the eternal [D]ao; / The name that can be named is not the eternal name."[2] These opening lines of the classic Daoist text, *Laozi* (otherwise known as the *Daodejing*), speak significantly about the general relation between transcendent and mundane reality.[3] In what follows, I explore the import of these lines for what it means to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. The context is our ongoing Mennonite discussion of what it means to be a 'visible church' in relation to the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.[4]

It is not my intention to speak to the content of the 1995 *Confession*, but rather to examine the theoretical problems surrounding the formation and application of orthodox creedal statements. I argue that "holding fast" is not as helpful an image as that of open dialogue: creedal (or even "confessional") statements are *both* central to our theological task *and* inherently problematic, even dangerous, when used as tools of exclusion by the power structure of an institutional church.

Missionary Adaptation

In the late 16th century, Jesuit missionary Mateo Ricci began his work in China by studying the language and culture, immersing himself to the extent of "going native." Ricci was the first European to translate the classical Confucian texts, and it is to those first Latin translations that Westerners owe the names *Confucius* and *Mencius* for Kongfuzi and Mengzi respectively. The pejorative connotations of "going native" are perhaps earned when we consider the widespread condemnation of his mission's conclusion that Chinese ancestor rites (today termed ancestor worship or ancestor veneration, depending on one's viewpoint) were compatible with Christian practice.[5] But other aspects of Ricci's program arguably presage contemporary

missiological principles, what we might term "missionary adaptation." As Mary Jo Weaver puts it:

> Ricci's instincts and methods are acceptable practice today: missionaries from all branches of Christianity first adapt themselves to the culture and only later begin to draw their listeners into Christianity. Missionaries encourage people to maintain their cultural identity so that their possible conversions to Christianity do not force them to abandon their heritage in order to become Christians. In Ricci's time, however, such missionary adaptation was not possible. Roman officials were nervous about translating the Bible into Chinese because they feared that Christianity would become tainted with pagan Chinese beliefs. Vatican officials in charge of foreign missions insisted that new converts learn Latin in order to become priests and that native clergy follow the Western rules of celibacy, a practice that made no sense to the Chinese.[6]

Despite the overwhelming Christian consensus outside the Roman Catholic Church, not to mention current crises and controversies, the celibate priest is still regarded as the only normative Christian model by the Vatican hierarchy. Similarly, at least until the Vatican II council sessions in the early 1960s, the line was held on the orthopraxis of the Latin mass. Such entrenched yet controversial opinions on the essentials of faithfulness should provoke at least some suspicion when we evaluate absolutist claims to either orthodoxy or orthopraxy, even before considering the issue of different cultures.

One of the central problems encountered by Ricci, and by anyone attempting to translate scripture into Mandarin, is the name to be employed for God. Unlike the Qur'an, which is understood to be, as dictated to Muhammad for further transmission, the literal words of God (a characteristic that translations do not share), the Christian scriptures have always been considered open to translation. But what baggage does one accept by using either *Tian* (Heaven) or *Shangdi* (Lord on High) in the Chinese historico-linguistic context?

How does one convey meaning when the very mediators of meaning – in this case, words – are at best rough labels and symbols, already embedded

in systems of other such labels along with their practices of application?

More concretely, how are we to discern the divine message as it is mediated by the cultures, languages, and personalities of the Biblical record – most especially as it is incarnated in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ – in a way that transcends mediating particularities and that can be further understood by, and applied in, radically diverse times and cultures? At issue is the eternal divine intent for godly living and salvation as it becomes mediated through human language and manifest in human cultures and societies.

Judging from the work of missiologists like Paul Hiebert[7] and Charles Kraft,[8] who have made the discipline of anthropology central to their practices and scholarship, we could see this issue as the primary theoretical problem in carrying out the task mandated by the Great Commission. Hiebert points to Acts 15 as perhaps the earliest confrontation with the problem; the new Christian community struggled with how "Jewish" new converts had to be.[9] What, we must ask in missions today, is essential to living a Christian (rather than merely a Western or an American) life?[10] For example, could East Asians not celebrate the Lord's Supper with rice and tea with as much authenticity of commemoration as we do, with our typical yeast bread and grape juice in lieu of the Passover-prescribed unleavened bread and wine?

The Essential Question

This issue is not a problem just for missions and missiology. Missiologist Andrew Walls suggests a thought experiment wherein "a long-living, scholarly space visitor" travels to Earth at various periods in the history of Christianity.[11] Our "Professor of Comparative Inter-Planetary Religions" observes Christians in Jerusalem in 37 CE, at the Council of Nicea in 325, in seventh-century Ireland, and then in the modern era, encountering the global diversity of Christianity.[12] What, if anything, would this curious visitor conclude about the variety of Christian groups across time and place? "[W]ill our visitor," Walls asks, "conclude that there *is* no coherence? That the use of the name Christian by such diverse groups is fortuitous, or at least misleading?"[13]

Walls also asks whether today's variety of Christians might not share more things with contemporary Buddhists and Hindus than with groups

of Christians picked out across the span of history.[14] The source of this problem is clearly expressed by religious scholar Karen Armstrong, who characterizes the Islamic perspective on the global plurality of cultures, noting that "they might express the truths of God's religion differently, but essentially the message was always the same."[15] Walls, who would relate the first half of this claim to what he calls "the indigenizing principle," explains that this principle "ensures that each community recognizes in Scripture that God is speaking to its own situation. But it also means that we all approach Scripture wearing cultural blinkers, with assumptions determined by our time and place."[16]

A crucial tension exists between this "indigenizing" principle and the corresponding "universalizing" principle (the second half of Armstrong's claim). In Buddhism, the indigenizing principle is referred to as *upaya*, "skillfull means,"[17] and is often exemplified by a story in the *Lotus Sutra*, a Mahayana text in which a man lies to his children as an expedient means of saving them from a burning building.[18] *Upaya* thus represents a pragmatic emphasis on whatever works as an effective means of salvation, regardless of its relation to ultimate truth, and may be used to justify a wide range of contradictory and even proscribed practices so long as they achieve their goal.[19] Such an approach is perhaps not surprising for a religious tradition stressing impermanence, "emptiness," and no-self, and that generally eschews essentialism. One might almost expect this tradition to deconstruct itself,[20] and an appropriate question is whether the historical Buddha Siddhartha would recognize his teachings in all the extant traditions bearing the Buddhist label.[21]

Now, the same question could be asked about Christ and the diversity of groups currently and historically bearing his name. Is there not (or should there not) be something more to Christianity than mere historical continuity with the person of Jesus? The central component holding together the diverse Indian traditions under the dubious label "Hinduism" is mere acceptance of the canonicity of the Vedas.[22] Yet when examining the details of beliefs, practices, and self-identification of the various Indian sub-traditions, the impression may be one of historical accident more than perceptible unity. In the Christian tradition such a result would be completely unsatisfying to anyone who believes that Jesus Christ had a definitive mission.

This brings us back to the second part of Armstrong's assertion: the universal, univocal nature of God's will. I am not denying the essential reality of Christ's purpose, message, and saving act, anymore than the author of my opening lines above denied the essential reality of the transcendent Dao. And this accords neatly with a long tradition of apophatic Christian theology, exemplified in scholastic thought by the term *via negativa*. As with the scholastics' recognition that finite human language cannot adequately describe the transcendent character of God, therefore restricting claims to stating what God is *not,* I am simply denying our ability to definitively grasp and articulate God's intent for all time and all contexts.[23] To paraphrase Laozi, "The Word that can be confessed is not the eternal Word."

Through a Glass Darkly

To some, the diversity of interpretation and application of Christ's message through time and across the globe proves the "absolute" relativity of culture and meaning; to others, it emphasizes how privileged they are to have the only true and correct interpretation of God's self-revelation. To the rest of us, the transcendent will of God must be mediated through the mundane – through contexts, cultures, languages, worldviews, and personal experiences and perspectives. An excellent demonstration of this view is found in the impressive recent experiment in intercultural reading, *Through the Eyes of Another*, with results and interpretive essays published in a volume of the same name.[24]

Participants in this project found they gained new insights into scriptural passages as they read them together.[25] Diverse backgrounds allowed interacting groups to see the cultural, educational, and socio-economic assumptions through which they were each reading the Bible in a way that opened them up to new understandings, both about the other groups and the meanings of the passages. As Rainer Kessler reports,

> The question is not, Who is right? There are many aspects to be discovered in the text. By the process of intercultural Bible reading, we learn that our own reading is only one reading among many others…. In the traditional model, the ideal was to read the text without any prejudice—*sine ira et studio*. We have since learned that this ideal is not attainable: the supposedly

> neutral reader is in reality the European or North American professor…. The new lesson taught by intercultural Bible reading is that it is not enough to say who I am as a reader of the text. I must also listen to other readers from different contexts. Without their voices, I will not be able to listen to the full voice of the text that I wish to understand.[26]

It is important to note the multiplicity of the readings and the singularity of the "full voice."

Along these lines Andrew Walls describes another thought experiment involving a play given in a strange theater somewhat reminiscent of Plato's Allegory of the Cave,[27] a theater where no one has a full view of the stage.[28] As part of the drama of life, we witness what Walls calls "the Jesus Act," a crucial moment that is similarly viewed in a limited manner. But Walls claims (reminiscent of Hans-Georg Gadamer)[29] that

> This limitation is a necessary feature of our hearing the Gospel at all. For the Gospel is not a voice from heaven separate from the rest of reality; it is not an alternative or supplementary programme to the drama of life which we are watching. The Jesus Act, the Gospel, is *in the play*. That is the implication of the Incarnation. It has to be received, therefore, under the same conditions as we received other communication, through the medium of the same faculties and capacities. We hear and respond to the Gospel, we read and listen to Scriptures, in terms of our accumulated experience and perceptions of the world.[30]

The effect of this image is like that of the Indian story about the blind men who have different perceptions of an elephant, based on their ability to touch only the part of the animal closest to them.[31] However, Walls suggests that those viewing this play can improve their understanding by comparing notes outside the theater.

The notion of "holding fast"[32] assumes we have correctly grasped some truth and have since discovered no errors in interpretation or judgment regarding application. However, I question our ability to know this with any certainty.[33] I, for one, would like to waste no time in abandoning a position I later came to see was erroneous. So, "holding fast" is admirable when it

implies steadfast adherence to the truth, but not so admirable when it means blind clinging to our own judgments, surely just another form of idolatry.

There is no theology that is not a human interpretation; there is no magic hermeneutic key that guarantees right interpretation.[34] Our interpretation is limited and human, but it is our responsibility to pursue and live it out as best we can. Our believers church understanding necessarily stresses the possibility, contra Augustine, of a "visible church."[35] If the church is the body of Christ, the manifest in-breaking (however flawed) of the Reign of God, then the church's responsibility is to live out that role as well as it can, by creating a community that reflects that godly understanding.

The Visible Church
However, the task of maintaining a pure community – the task of discipling the brothers and sisters of congregations and the congregations within the fellowship of the wider church – is inevitably complicated by the reality of power dynamics. Creeds in particular have been divisive tools of power from the very beginning of Christian history: The first council (in Nicea) was called by Emperor Constantine as a political means of ending fractious controversies, though it ended in the imposed exiles of Arius and Eusebius. In subsequent meetings between Orthodox and Roman Christians, it is said that "they argued as heatedly about relatively peripheral matters— the kind of bread to use for the Eucharist, whether to allow priests to have beards—as they did about more substantial things like the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed . . . and clerical celibacy."[36] After the eventual East-West schism, Karen Armstrong reports that Roman Christians received Muslim conquerors with relief in those lands where Greek Orthodoxy had ruled, because the Orthodox had persecuted them for their heretical opinions.[37]

Those of us from the Anabaptist and Mennonite tradition may recognize the hindsight with which we can declare heatedly disputed issues "peripheral." Our history is replete with bitter divisions, mutual excommunications, church splits, and intra-family bans over various issues of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. But how many of those controversies, which at the time were seen as of utmost consequence, would we today feel were worth the inevitable damaging effects? Also, as Hans-Jürgen Goertz notes, while the early Anabaptists complained about the abuse of power the

magisterial churches practiced in their scriptural interpretation, this did not prevent the Anabaptists from misusing the Bible as a tool of power when they had the opportunity themselves.[38]

I am thus concerned by potential use of the *Confession of Faith* as a litmus test for employment in church institutions and as a means of disciplining, excluding, or silencing member congregations by conferences using the Mennonite Church USA's "Membership Guidelines."[39] The history of confession-signing requirements is not a happy one, nor one that I wish to see repeated. But I do not intend to imply that issues currently of concern in relation to the *Confession* – primarily homosexuality – are peripheral, or that the current formulation has obviously and conclusively gotten this wrong. The issues are important, and the discussions difficult and complicated. My argument is that both the traditionalist insistence on a definitively normative expression and the liberal presumption that all progress is *eo ipso* worthy are equally misguided. However impressive the evidence may be regarding a historical propensity for shifting public consciousness on various ostensibly "liberal" positions, it does not constitute an argument (either normative or predictive) in favor of any subsequent shift.[40]

Seeking an Alternative Model
Given the fallibility and limitations of our interpretive faculties, and given the power dynamics and questions of harm inextricably bound up in these questions, we should seek a polity, a way of being the visible church, that eschews "holding fast" to lines drawn in the sand in favor of an alternative model of an open hermeneutic community of interpretation.

I must clarify here what I think the problem is with the present model. It is certainly true that any means of *self-identification* will inevitably involve *separation*; that is, after all, integral to the process. It is also true that the issue is not reducible to the self-identity of a group but to our very pressing responsibility to live out our commission: *Nachfolge Christi* as individuals and the visible *body of Christ* on a corporate level. Michael King identifies the tension I intend:

> For 500 Years Anabaptist-Mennonites have stressed faithful living *and* community. We have believed we must practice what we preach in relationship with each other. Sadly, we

have often been true to our ethical stances while violating our
vision of mutual accountability. Repeatedly we have disagreed
regarding how to be faithful. Frequently we have resolved the
clash by affirming our own stand at the expense of continuing
fellowship. We see this in the history of splits in denominations,
conferences, congregations, and even families which continue
to this day. Is there another path? Is there a peacemaking way
forward which allows us, members of a historic peace church,
not to hate but to love the enemies we make of each other?
Is there a way *to be true to our deepest commitments without
splitting from those whose passions don't match ours?*[41]

Indeed, the issue is not merely one of self-identity but of ethics and
faithful (corporate) living. I concur with King when he says he is "[s]eeking
ways to live together without losing our own hearings of the gospel"[42]; our
faith commitments are important, and I am not interested in an "anything
goes" Christianity. I am concerned about the task of responsible, theological
discernment. But I also agree that "the effort to remain in relationship is
worth making."[43] The problem with the separation implicit in self-identity is
not the necessity of distinction, or even the integrity of faith commitments,
but the violence inherent in the means of separation through the imposition
of power.[44]

Here I return to the alternative model of "an open hermeneutical
community of interpretation." It is no coincidence that Mahatma Gandhi
saw epistemic humility as part of the *ahimsa* principle informing his pacifist
satyagrahas.[45] The most dangerous people in the world are surely those
so certain of the truth that they are willing to kill based on this certainty.
Violence of any kind is the paradigmatic example of privileging one's
own perspective.[46] Adopting a principle of epistemic humility would make
listening to other perspectives, as advocated modestly by the intercultural
reading project, an epistemic imperative, just as listening to other voices is a
moral imperative in the servant model of living the Jesus way.

Theoretical Ideal or Realistic Possibility?

The perennial question, when Christians speak of *really* living the Jesus
way, is whether this is indeed practicable. On the one hand, the question

itself can represent a dangerous attempt to covertly introduce a different set of evaluative criteria from an opposing worldview. Living out an ideal of loving nonviolence, this view might say, is fine for isolated communities choosing it as a form of Christian vocation (much the view of Reinhold Niebuhr, for example), but it is not practical for life in the larger world, and it is naïve to think there is *always* a nonviolent response to violence that will *work*. It is in the consequentialist evaluation of "working" where the world's criteria sneak in. How are we, in the case of the visible body of Christ, supposed to evaluate what "works"?

On the other hand, we must confront this question squarely. We must move beyond the false dilemma of faithfulness versus effectiveness by challenging the worldview from which the dilemma is posed. Indeed, interpretations of God's intent for living in the world must demonstrate their capacity for effecting God's Reign. Further, it is a fair enough question when a novel interpretation claims to offer a better model for being community while lacking a concrete example to appeal to. So, to the very important question of how such a model can work towards a visible church (our imperfect community is inevitably made up of imperfect persons and imperfect congregations), the answer I am suggesting is one of self-selection around a theme (cf. Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblances")[47] rather than imposed boundaries of principles that exclude and are maintained by power structures and ecclesial policing. Those who recognize in the current gathered body and confession document enough of their own faith identity that they will commit to working in community on the ongoing process of discernment should be included in the conversation.

Self-selection – and therefore *self-exclusion* – rather than imposed exclusion should be the mode of inclusion for this open alternative model. On a smaller scale, this is (within limits) how congregations already operate in practice with regard to admitting members. Let the tasks of correction and discipling happen in conversation rather than through the exercise of power. What little exemplification of mutual care still occurring in congregations is done this way. If this open model seems too loose for church conferences, I would further suggest that this is already how the church structure operates on the denominational level. What *conference* has yet been excluded (from above) because of its views, say, on women in leadership? For the

most part, denominations, conferences, and congregations operate on a principle of overlapping consensus,[48] not on a requirement of absolute unity that chooses to expel the impure who dissent but rather with enough common understanding to proceed with the tasks of corporate living and discernment.

However, despite the similarity to actual practice, the idea of *self-consciously* adopting overlapping consensus as a guiding principle might still be seen as an invitation to chaos, where the church becomes a rudderless ship with the potential to follow the currents of contemporary culture anywhere. Abandon the essentialist anchor of the creed and we abandon ourselves to drifting. But this objection misses the reality that such drift could happen (and arguably does happen) anyway: If a majority of members, congregations, or conferences decided the peace position was hopelessly idealistic and must be altered, the confession of faith endorsed by the denomination would in due course be altered to fit. Recall also that the Church of the Brethren is historically as a denomination fundamentally anti-creedal. They do indeed have disagreements within the denomination over the historic peace position,[49] but they seem to function as a viable institution. Moreover, I am not advocating we discard the role of creeds in our theology; rather I am affirming we use the *Confession of Faith* as a focus for our collective discernment.

The larger import of the objection appears to miss the point entirely. Concern about losing our Anabaptist peace position (or any other "essential") in the ongoing process of discernment by a open hermeneutical community presumes precisely what I am denying (despite my personal conviction about our peace witness), namely that we can have absolute certain, timeless knowledge about God's will, and that we can make this list of essentials and refute any model of community failing to safeguard them. The object of the model I propose is not the denunciation of collective discernment but of the use of power that accompanies organizing an institution around such discernment as though it were absolute, timeless truth. Surely the one thing such use of power guarantees is that errors will persist, because those who disagree are excluded from further participation in the community of discernment.[50]

Certainly, such a model risks including only those who see the value of such an open hermeneutic, but what other choice is there in this respect?

When the intent is to avoid the rupture of community by enforced exclusion, it seems unhelpful to suggest that those unsatisfied with open discernment will leave (voluntarily) and to call this a shortcoming. The important question here is which model more effectively realizes the Jesus way of living. I contend that the ban as historically employed has been a disastrous, damaging experiment which has paradoxically turned attempts to purify the visible body of Christ into dismal failures at following Jesus' teachings. Recalling King's terms, it is not "faithful living" *or* "community," because our model for ethical integrity calls us to be peacemakers.[51]

Confession in a Meta-traditional Perspective

Given this essay's methodology and argumentation, some readers may want to ask where I personally stand in respect to the tradition out of which I am speaking. After all, I claim there is no absolute perspective we can occupy to obtain absolute knowledge, no "God's-eye view" from which to stand above it all and speak from outside any particular tradition. This is, of course, correct; but to conclude from this that we can say nothing at all about traditions in the abstract, nor apply this understanding to our own tradition, would be absurdly illegitimate.[52]

We should immediately suspect a theoretical claim that so clearly contradicts the plain sense of the evidence: All the examples given, from my opening line onward, seem straightforwardly and appropriately relevant to our Christian discussion of the transcendent and the mundane, regardless of the tradition from which they came.[53] Put simply, the objection contends that, on the basis of a view of tradition in the abstract, one cannot logically make claims transcending the perspective of one's own tradition (i.e., claims about tradition in the abstract). But this means the objection is itself appealing to a perspective from which, *ex hypothesi*, it cannot possibly be speaking – exactly that very "meta-traditional" perspective.[54]

Even if this were not so, such arguments inevitably founder on the shoals of concrete reality, which refuses to conform to the essentialism implicit in the analysis of traditions (and their perspectives) as reified entities. Traditions are amorphous, dynamic, and multivocal fields of activity with porous boundaries that institutions try to reify and rigidify. This is perfectly natural, and we do well to attempt our collective discernment of God's will

for us as a visible body of Christ and to organize our community around that understanding. The error lies in being so sure we have grasped it that we are willing to enact the violence of throwing the first stone.[55] Confession in a meta-traditional perspective is aware that all confession is done from within a particular perspective (the Word confessed is not the eternal Word), and is thus open to learning from other perspectives. This is the essence of an open hermeneutical model, as exemplified by Andrew Walls's audience comparing notes outside the theater.[56]

Conclusions

I hope my position, suspended as it is in a tension between simpler extremes, is clear. By advocating an open hermeneutical model, I intend to hold together, on the one hand, both faithful discernment towards ethical living and mutual admonition, and, on the other hand, nonviolent forbearance of epistemic humility that might preserve a community.

If I were forced to say whether I agree unequivocally with the 1995 *Confession of Faith*, I would answer that I do not. But if permitted, I would pose these questions: Do I recognize the tradition that it stands in as my own? Do I wish to continue in fellowship – in communion – with those who wrote it, and to further the dialogue and discernment always necessary now and in the future? Do I accept the confession as a working document that represents our best current collective understanding? Then I could clearly answer that I do. My fervent hope is that the free church and peace church tradition that we call Anabaptist and Mennonite can finally move beyond the idolatry of the creed and the violence of the ban.

We do need a confession of faith as the focus of a continual process of discernment. It can provide our current best articulation of the good news to which we hope to bear witness; it can provide a basis for further conversation to start; and it can offer the overlapping consensus on the themes of our identity as an open hermeneutic community of faith. In a believers church, we must recognize the value of freedom of self-discernment, freedom to dissent, and diverse perspectives in offering new insights for our collective process of faithful discernment. We must never lose sight of the fact that we are "holding fast" to God's will as we can best discern it, and not to our tentatively grasped conception as seen "through a glass darkly"[57] and expressed in a temporally-located confession document.

Notes

[1] A version of this paper was presented on 9 June 2006 at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, for a consultation on *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.

[2] Wing-tsit Chan, trans., *The Way of Lao Tzu (Tao-te ching)* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 97.

[3] Insofar as this is a concern common to all religious and philosophical traditions tracing significant aspects of their formation to what Karl Jaspers has labelled the "Axial Age," it is appropriate and instructive to contemplate how other axial traditions have grappled with analogous issues (whether seen as "same" or "parallel"). I say more on this below. On the tension between transcendence and mundane reality as an axial theme, see S.N. Eisenstadt, "Introduction: The Axial Age Breakthroughs—Their Characteristics and Origins," *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, ed. S.N. Eisenstadt (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 1-8.

[4] *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1995).

[5] Ricci himself apparently had reservations on this point. See Justo González, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 402-03.

[6] Mary Jo Weaver, *Introduction to Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1998), 185-86.

[7] See, for example, Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985); *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994); and *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999).

[8] See, for example, Charles Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996).

[9] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights,* 29.

[10] Hiebert refers to the discernment of divine intent within the cultural context as "critical contextualization." See his *Anthropological Insights,* 171-92.

[11] Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 3.

[12] Ibid., 3-5.

[13] Ibid., 6.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History* (New York: Random House, 2002), 8.

[16] Walls, 12.

[17] Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom refer to this as "the principle of accommodation or expedient means" in *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999), 446.

[18] The relevant section is excerpted, with an explanation, in James Fieser and John Powers, eds., *Scriptures of the East* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 104-06.

[19] See Masao Abe's discussion of *upaya* in relation to the varieties of Buddhism in "Buddhism," *Our Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 71-73, 91, 99, 126-28.

[20] Abe briefly discusses a similar question regarding the Buddhist *Sangha* in op. cit., 126.

[21] Ronald Eyre poses a similar question in "Buddhism: The Land of the Disappearing Buddha—Japan," v. 9, *The Long Search*, Time-Life Video, 1977.

[22] Perhaps complicating matters further, even this minimal requirement is often nominal at best. See Arvind Sharma, "Hinduism," *Our Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 5.

[23] George Lindbeck contends that even a statement as simple as "Christ is Lord" is necessarily embedded in a much larger set of interpretive understandings: "The crusader's battle cry '*Christus est Dominus*,' for example, is false when used to authorize cleaving the skull of an infidel (even though the same words in other contexts may be a true utterance)." George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 64. The effect of this problem is neither trivial nor ultimately dissoluble.

[24] Hans de Wit, Louis Jonker, Marleen Kool, and Daniel Schipani, eds. *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2004).

[25] Hans de Wit, "Through the Eyes of Another: Objectives and Backgrounds" in *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* (see note 24).

[26] Rainer Kessler, "From Bipolar to Multipolar Understanding: Hermeneutical Consequences of Intercultural Bible Reading," in *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible*, 458.

[27] See Plato's *Republic*, Book 7 (514a-520a).

[28] Walls, 43-46.

[29] See primarily Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1998).

[30] Walls, 44.

[31] As the story goes (one version), the blind man feeling the ear says the elephant is like a fan; the one feeling the side, like a wall; the one feeling the leg, like a tree trunk, and the one feeling the tail, like a rope. For the Jains, from whom this story may originate, it illustrates *anekantavada*, the non-absolute nature of our perspectives (or the multi-faceted nature of reality), where each perspective represents a portion of the whole truth. See Walter Benesch, *An Introduction to Comparative Philosophy: A Travel Guide to Philosophical Space* (New York: Palgrave, 1997), 130ff.; also Bimal Krishna Matilal, *The Central Philosophy of Jainism (Anekanta-Vada)* (Ahmedabad: Institute of Indology, 1981).

[32] This paper's title refers to the conference at which a shorter version was presented. The official consultation title was "Holding Fast to the Confession of Our Hope: The *Confession of Faith* Ten Years Later," itself a reference to Heb.10:23 in the NRSV.

[33] I am not denying truth or even the possibility of knowledge. I am denying the possibility of Cartesian-style knowledge that is absolute and certain because it is based on indubitable foundations. There is nothing novel about this in contemporary thought; the important thing is applying it to our theological discussions in a way that still affirms the possibility

of knowledge. (Through his appropriation of the epistemological model known as "critical realism," I take Hiebert to be making exactly the same argument in the three texts cited above. See especially Hiebert, *Missiological Implications,* 68-116.) While we can know (though such knowledge is always embedded within an epistemic framework), we can never *know* that we know. My claim is that we can never have "strong knowledge," according to the terminology coined by Norman Malcolm in "Knowledge and Belief," *Mind* 61.242 (April 1952): 178-89.

[34] Brevard Childs makes a similar claim in *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 15; see also David Kratz Mathies, "Reading the Moral Law: A Hermeneutical Approach to Religious Moral Epistemology," *CGR* 23.3 (2005): 74-84.

[35] Alister McGrath explains the opposition between the Donatist notion of "pure body" against Augustine's "mixed body," matching the former with Menno's "assembly of the righteous" in *Christianity: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 157. For Augustine, the true church would be the "invisible church" hidden within the universal church, a "mixed body."

[36] Weaver, 73.

[37] Armstrong, 31.

[38] Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, trans. Trevor Johnson (New York: Routledge, 1996), 50-53.

[39] Whatever the intent of the Guidelines, they make explicit appeal to the authority of the *Confession* as the "teaching position of the Mennonite Church USA," an appeal which has been used to legitimate the role of the *Confession* as authoritative litmus test. See Mennonite Church USA, "Membership Guidelines for the Formation of Mennonite Church USA": http://www.mennoniteusa.org/doc_files/membership_guidelines/membershipguidelines.pdf.

[40] For an interesting discussion of hindsight, foresight, and faithful discernment, see Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 39-41.

[41] Michael King, *Fractured Dance: Gadamer and a Mennonite Conflict over Homosexuality* (Telford, PA: Pandora, 2001), 240, emphasis his.

[42] Ibid., 240.

[43] Ibid., 242.

[44] For a general discussion of the various categories of violence, see J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 7-9; for a discussion of violence focused on church discipline, purity, and creeds, see Peter Smith, "The Temptation to Scapegoating: A Theological Analysis of the Practice of Mennonite Church Discipline," presented at the consultation "Holding Fast to the Confession of Our Hope: The *Confession of Faith* Ten Years Later" (Elkhart, Indiana, 9 June 2006), text available at www.ambs.edu/files/confession/smith.pdf.

[45] Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse* (New Delhi: Sage, 1989), 156.

[46] I argue elsewhere that the sincere realization of this point suggests at the least a *prima facie* bias against violence. See David Kratz Mathies, "Does the Ballot Box Lie Outside the Perfection of Christ?" *CGR* 21.2 (2003): 107. The corollary for this context would be a *prima*

facie bias against breaking fellowship through coercion (by institutional action) and for paying special attention to the voices of those potentially the victims of power (a preferential option, of sorts, for the marginalized).

[47] More concretely than just "cluster concepts," I have in mind "theme" as explicated by A.S. Cua. See Antonio S. Cua, *Moral Vision and Tradition: Essays in Chinese Ethics* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1998), 31.

[48] An overlapping consensus on the model of family resemblances or a cluster concept would not have any central core – as is aimed for in a creedal statement or confession document – for the possibility of articulating a definitive essence is what I am denying, since we lack any *a priori* principle for timeless and error-free discernment. As this is a result of our finitude, it does not absolve us of the responsibility of faithful discernment, in an attitude of humble attention to our different perspectives on God's will.

[49] See, for example, Dale Brown, *Biblical Pacifism: A Peace Church Perspective* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1986), 1-39.

[50] In his discussion of "metatheology" as a step beyond his "critical contextualization," Hiebert notes that "The priesthood of believers must be exercised within a hermeneutical community." His view of this community includes principles of interpretive humility, testing with wider perspectives, and discernment as an ongoing process. See Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections,* 102-03.

[51] Given the way Jesus treated tax collectors and other outsiders – nor should we forget the Great Commission as instruction on how to treat 'pagans' – the irrevocable rupture caused by the traditional Anabaptist interpretation of Matt.18:17 (i.e., the ban) has never been compelling to me. See also Peter Smith (Note 44 above), 3 and 11.

[52] Technically, this is self-contradictory and not even capable of begging the question. The best way to show this is to demonstrate that it reduces to an absurd conclusion (*reductio ad absurdum*), hence my strong claim that it is absurdly illegitimate despite being a rather widely held view. The argument could be repaired to an extent, but the effect would be that any claim to grounds for the starting point (i.e., observations about traditions in the abstract) would apply to my own use as well.

[53] The objection thus seems susceptible to the "G.E. Moore Shift," since the evidence available is no less compelling than the starting premises of the argument under consideration. For a brief discussion of the application of this form of argument, see William L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1978), 90-92.

[54] The ancient Daoist sage Zhuangzi encountered a similar argument with his friend Huizi, who insisted that Zhuangzi could not possibly understand the mind of a fish because he was not himself a fish. Zhuangzi pointed out that by Huizi's own reasoning, Huizi could not possibly know what Zhuangzi was able to understand because *he* was not Zhuangzi. Chapter 17: "Season of Autumn Floods," Martin Palmer et al., trans., *The Book of Chuang Tzu* (London: Penguin, 1996), 147. Cf. also Ben-Ami Scharfstein, "The Contextual Fallacy," *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, ed. Gerald James Larson and Eliot Deutsch (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988), 88-9.

[55] John 8:1-11.

[56] The middle ground recognizes there is no neutral or absolute perspective while allowing

we are not so bound by our perspective that we cannot learn from others or learn about the nature of perspective in the first place. This is more than just implicit in Gadamer's references to expanding horizons through fusion with others. The common error is in reifying those perspectives or the traditions they are grounded in. On Gadamer's notion of expanding horizons, see Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 265-71.

[57] 1 Cor. 13:12.

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Graeme Hunter. *Radical Protestantism in Spinoza's Thought*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005.

There are two things about Spinoza that most students of philosophy come to learn: first, that he was either an outright atheist or a radical pantheist, both of which seem to result in the same modern rationalist irreligious outlook; second, that he was a harbinger of the Enlightenment, a modernist voice of reason in the charged religious wilderness of the 17th century. That the only work of philosophical merit that Spinoza published, albeit anonymously, is a work advocating the merits of religion, the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*TTP*), doesn't seem to deter this commonplace understanding. This is explained away, most notoriously by Leo Strauss, as an act of intentional duplicity. Spinoza cultivated a "dual language": beneath the exoteric veneer of insincere Christian gesturing hides the real Spinoza, anti-religious and Enlightened. This schizophrenic magician's Spinoza is the Spinoza of commonplace assumption in the scholarship.

Graeme Hunter attempts to overhaul the commonplace. His book directly engages both Spinoza and his interpreters in order to re-evaluate the level of Spinoza's religious sincerity. In the philosophy classroom, we read the *Ethics* first and only give an occasional – often dismissive – glance at the much more religion-friendly *TTP*. Hunter's proposal is simple and bold. He proposes that we read *TTP* first (it was published first), and that we take Spinoza at his word. Hunter does away with any notion of a hidden esoteric core and an exoteric sheen. The result is a profoundly religious – and profoundly Christian – Spinoza whose "religious teachings of the *TTP* are fully compatible with what is taught in the *Ethics*" (4).

One of Hunter's goals is to establish Spinoza's Christian *sincerity* without forcing on him a Christian *identity*. He thus must navigate his view of Spinoza away from commentators wishing to find in Spinoza either a Jewish core or the germs of a new type of Jewish identity: "Jewishness" or Jewish philosophy. However, in avoiding the identification of Spinoza with his Jewish religious background in light of his voluntary exile and rational-philosophical ethics and lifestyle, Hunter must also establish that some religious sentiment, and specifically Christian sentiment, remained. He thus argues that what Spinoza says about religion and Christianity is

far too consistent to be insincere, and he locates Spinoza in the milieu of the Dutch second-reformation Christian movements, amongst the shadows of Remonstrants, Collegiants, Quakers, and Mennonites. Overall, Hunter is well aware of his Scyllas and Charybdises, and treads a careful if at times pedantic path in his analysis and presentation.

Hunter divides his book into "Context," "Christian Philosophy?," and "*Ethics* Reconsidered." In the first section he narrows in on potential candidates for Spinoza's religious affiliation with a fairly straightforward biography, offering good historical background and incorporating some recent biographical scholarship. Clearly the historical context of Spinoza's religiosity is not nearly as important to Hunter as the philosophical evidence, so he quickly moves to a philosophical analysis of the sincerity of Spinoza's Christianity in *TTP* as it is related to Spinoza's *Ethics*.

Although Hunter neither wishes nor is able to identify Spinoza as a confessed Christian (the Collegiants and some Dutch Mennonites were anti-confessional and had nebulous membership criteria), he does not spend nearly enough time on the subject. One gap is in his discussion of the Mennonites. Although "Mennonites" is missing from the index, Hunter does consider them briefly in discussing Collegiantism in chapter 2 (40-46). After Spinoza left the Jewish community, most of his closest friends were Mennonite – and influential Mennonites at that: Jarig Jelles (writer of the preface to Spinoza's posthumously published *Ethics*), Pieter Balling (influential to the Quakers), Jan Rieuwertsz (publisher of the first Dutch translations of Descartes as well as Spinoza's *Ethics*), Pieter Serrarius, Simon de Vries, and others. Most of these were also Collegiants. But Hunter only draws us into their Collegiantism without looking at their Mennonitism.

Collegiantism was closely associated with the Arminian Calvinist heresy and its repression at the Synod of Dordt. Since these radical Calvinists were not legally allowed to meet publicly or have ministers, Arminianism went underground and met at informal colleges, and the movement as a whole became known as Collegiantism. Due to the contingencies of their repression, Collegiantism developed an anti-hierarchical, anti-creedal universalist and minimalist ecclesiology. "The Collegiants soon began to find a theological justification for their religious convictions going back into the earliest Reformation theology" (41).

Although the similarities to Dutch Mennonites are both well documented and striking, Hunter doesn't even raise the option. He notes that the Collegiants around Spinoza were interested in early Reformation theology, but uninterested in Calvin and Luther. Since they were also Mennonite, it seems natural that they would have appealed – and did appeal – to their Anabaptist radical roots. Anabaptism is a clear influence on Spinoza, and Hunter misses much detail that could aid his story. Further, he says the Collegiant movement as a whole "depleted" and "demoralised" (42) the Dutch Mennonite church by attracting its members away. But later he observes that many Collegiants, including those in Spinoza's circle – Pieter Balling, for example – were both Mennonite and Collegiants; neither was an exclusive club (46). A closer analysis of the Mennonite nature of Collegiantism and the influence of Anabaptist theological and religious thinking would benefit Hunter's attempt to understand Spinoza's own religious thinking. At the very least he could have admitted the existence of such a connection, as do his sources Leszek Kolakowski and Andrew Fix.

Another insoluble problem is one Hunter is well aware of: Is Spinoza's use of Christianity and Christian terms insincere salt pinching and hand waving, sincere political golden mythologizing, or sincere religious sentiment? Hunter's solution – the last option – is to find in Spinoza a type of Christianity that is far too consistent and thought-out to be insincere (4ff.) Yet Plato's golden myth in the *Republic* was thought-out, rational, and coherent, but for all that it was really insincere. Here, Spinoza's many letters would have added gravitas to the argument, but Hunter restricts himself to only the *TTP* and the *Ethics,* with only brief remarks about the earlier *Emendation of the Intellect* and nearly nothing on the letters.

The second part of the book offers Hunter's interpretation of Spinoza's theological and political arguments in *TTP*. Hunter is primarily dedicated to debunking Robert Misrahi's thesis in "Spinoza and Christian Thought: A Challenge" that resists "the very idea of there being a Christian discussion of Spinoza's thought" (52). Hunter offers a Spinoza who is sensitive not only to figures of the Old Testament but to figures and ideas in the New – a sensitivity that suggests he held positive feelings for such Biblical figures. The purpose of Spinoza's *TTP*, Hunter argues, was reform; it was a sincere attempt at reforming the Church from false religious belief.

Here Hunter either passes too quickly over theological and religious questions or spends too much time on obvious points. For example, he gives two long explanations, one describing what the Pentateuch is, the other describing what the New Testament is. Yet he fails to discuss what the confessional differences between Remonstrants, Calvinists, and Mennonites were. Such a tactic is consistent with his general approach, but surely the audience for such a specialized monograph already grasps the structure of the two Testaments, and it is rather the denominational subtleties that would influence Spinoza's religious sentiment.

But this is a problem that straddles the whole book: Who is Hunter's audience? The philosopher has little truck with Spinoza's religious sentiment anyway, no matter how sincere or rational it might be, and the Christian theologian has little interest in Spinoza's religious credentials since Spinoza isn't a theologian.

In the final part of the volume, "*Ethics* Reconsidered," Hunter looks at the philosophical consequences of Spinoza's views put forward in the *TTP* on the *Ethics*. He finds Spinoza's theological views abundantly consistent with his philosophical views. In general, this is where Hunter shines. His skills as a philosopher and his erudite, precise analysis of problems in Spinoza's thought are a breath of fresh air. He handles the material with grace and efficiency.

Hunter's book will provide much material for discussion on Spinoza's religious affinities and their consequences on his philosophy. His novel yet straightforward reading of Spinoza answers many puzzling questions, and it should help future readers of Spinoza better understand some of the consequences and issues at stake when comparing the *Ethics* with the *TTP*.

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Willi Goetschel. *Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine.*
Studies in German Jewish Cultural History and Literature Series. Madison:
University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.

On the front cover of *Spinoza's Modernity* is a famous, rather stoical portrait
of Spinoza presented in four different panels, ranging from a classic portrayal
to various degrees of modern distortion using graphic touch-up software. Yet
in each portrait the same Spinoza emerges in its own way, contrasting to the
others. Willi Goetschel's study of Spinoza's thought and reception depicts
the profundity of Spinozism at its inception and then at three crucial moments
in the German Enlightenment. Far more than a specialized examination of
Spinoza's relation to the Enlightenment, this book deals with the meaning
and possibility of "modernity" itself. Although it does not precisely spell out
what distinguishes Spinoza's modernity from other forms of modernity for a
reader unfamiliar with Goetschel's historical and philosophical concerns, it
does provide a detailed, convincing analysis of Spinoza's legacy as found in
Moses Mendelssohn, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Heinrich Heine.

 To consider the emergence of Enlightenment thought through this
prism puts an entirely different perspective on the project and meaning
of modernity. Similar to groundbreaking studies like Jonathan Israel's
mammoth *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity
1650-1750* (2001) and *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity,
and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (2006), this account of Spinoza's
originality and later reception highlights his thought particularly in regard
to what Goetschel calls his "Jewishness." The "scandal" of this aspect of
Spinoza's thought is what connects his trajectory with two key modern
Jewish thinkers, Mendelssohn and Heine, and one non-Jewish thinker,
Lessing, who devoted much attention to the role and meaning of Jews
in modern European society. Goetschel's analysis attempts to wrest the
"critical" Spinoza from traditional depictions or distortions at the hands
of late Enlightenment ideologues like Friedrich Jacobi that have largely
determined Spinoza's reception until very recently.

 Although the scandal of Spinoza's Jewishness is a central and
original feature of Goetschel's book, this is not a theological study or an
examination of Spinoza's religious thought in a narrow sense. Rather,

the angle of Jewishness aims to account for both what is particular about Spinoza's thought as a western thinker and what distinguishes the way he was received into some of the debates – though not the canon – of western philosophical traditions. This book's main argument, which resonates with Jonathan Israel's concurrent historical studies, is that Spinoza's legacy includes an element of "critical" modernity that is sharply distinguished from mainstream versions of the modern project.

Beginning with Spinoza and then receiving indirect expression in Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine, Goetschel finds in this critical Enlightenment tradition strong coherence with the recent "critical theory" movement in philosophy. Although some of these connections are largely inferred and not always stated explicitly, Goetschel's portrayal of Spinoza is especially fruitful for those sharing an affinity with contemporary philosophy, especially critical theory. Therefore, aside from using this as an alternative hermeneutic for reading Spinoza, one highlighting a largely unsung legacy in modernity, Goetschel finds the critical impulse in Spinoza's thought holds great potential for current thought as well.

The study provides a detailed contextual analysis of a wide range of primary texts, many unavailable in English, while using insights from recent literature. The first part offers a fresh re-reading of core aspects of Spinoza's thought that are crucial for understanding Goetschel's subsequent portrayal of late-Enlightenment Spinozism. Here his in-depth treatment of Spinoza's "critical" underlying philosophy allows readers to connect Spinoza's thought to concerns in contemporary philosophy and ethics, and prepares them for how these issues are taken up by Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine later in the study.

Arguing against interpretations that see Spinoza's *Ethics* as the ultimate form of a philosophical system, Goetschel stresses the anti-totalizing character of Spinoza's thought, which is constructivist and anti-hierarchical, as a special form of rationalism. The truth Spinoza sought was not one that was static and simply waiting to be grasped but one that unfolded in the act of cognition. The *mos geometrico* of Spinoza's *Ethics* thus constitutes a set of rules for engaging subject matter whose conclusions are not determined at the outset. This open, searching rationalism also characterizes Spinoza's approach to psychology, hermeneutics, society, and politics as found in his

most mature works. The "critical" form of rationalism challenges Cartesian dualist rationalism, and this element becomes the key to those who later share Spinoza's vision and project, however implicitly. While largely avoiding sociology-of-knowledge discussions, Goetschel relates the nature of Spinoza's critical philosophy to his status as an excommunicated Jew, doubly marginalized in the context in which he lived.

It would have been helpful for Goetschel's historical approach to include some analysis of the groups forming the immediate intellectual and social circles in which Spinoza lived for the rest of his life. To draw connections between his philosophical project and the concerns of the Collegiant, Socinian, and Mennonite intellectual communities in which he lived would further clarify the concrete historical environment in which his thought developed and was passed on. Here, in the marginalized Christian communities of the period, one may also find socio-political analogues of what Goetschel describes as traits of Jewishness. Indeed, the radical religious communities in which Spinoza eventually found a home provided an important social context for understanding the new intellectual movement of which he was a key leader.

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Brayton Polka. *Hermeneutics and Ontology*. Vol. 1 of *Between Philosophy and Religion: Spinoza, the Bible, and Modernity*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2007.

Hermeneutics and Ontology is the first part of two volumes intended to demonstrate and present the unity of Spinoza's mature thought. The first volume deals with Spinoza's hermeneutics and ontology, and the second will cover his politics and ethics. However, as Brayton Polka indicates, the unity of Spinoza's work involves not just consistency among Spinoza's claims but reciprocal interdependence. This is reflected in Polka's refusal to divide Spinoza's approach to issues by individual work; i.e., considering the *Ethics* as Spinoza's ontology and ethics, and his other mature works as merely political. The main theme of the overall two-volume work is that "to place ourselves with Spinoza *between* philosophy and religion is to be in the position of overcoming the paralyzing dualisms between modernity and the Bible and so between reason and faith, between the secular and the religious, and, ultimately, between the human and the divine" (viii).

Of the book's four chapters, the first is an introduction and the fourth is a conclusion. The bulk of the exegetical labor is accomplished in the two long central chapters. The introduction helpfully sets outs the themes to which the book consistently returns: the ontological argument for the existence of God, Spinoza's approach to Biblical hermeneutics, and their interrelation and mutual implication. The second chapter, based on a close reading of the first 15 chapters of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, explains Spinoza's separation of philosophy and theology. Against certain readings of Spinoza, Polka argues that this separation does not imply the subordination of faith to philosophy. On the contrary, only when they are separated can one understand the proper role of each and, paradoxically, their interdependence.

This separation is accomplished by distinguishing true religion from superstition. In the realm of biblical hermeneutics, this separation indicates that the Bible must be read "from itself" and be understood to reflect "accommodation" to the prejudices of its time. The Bible must be read in light of its fundamental norm – love of neighbor (a charity reflecting the hermeneutical charity that must be extended when interpreting the biblical

text) – in order for the religious core to be brought out of superstitious overlays.

The third chapter focuses on the significance of the ontological argument for the existence of God, as presented in first two parts of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Against the "contradictory" ignorance of reality characterizing ancient philosophy, the ontological argument "constitutes the ontology of modernity by founding it on and showing that it founds the necessary relationship between thought and existence" (144). Spinoza's ontological argument moves neither from the necessity of God for thought nor from the certainty of the self to God. Instead, it shows that God and humanity, existence and thought, self and other are reciprocally necessary.

The concluding chapter pulls the book's various strands together. Spinoza shows that modernity does not involve a contradictory opposition between faith and reason, the Bible and philosophy, or God and the self, but rather a paradoxical interrelation between terms. Just as the ontological argument shows there is no thought without God or God without thought, Spinoza's hermeneutics shows there is no interpretation of the sacred text without the reader, and the reader can only interpret the sacred text (or any text, as it turns out) properly by following the fundamental norm of the Scriptures – love of God and neighbor.

Polka's passionately written book reflects enormous erudition that is nevertheless held in check in order to focus on the subject at hand. The decision to relegate discussion of secondary literature to two appendices (the first on secondary literature in general, the second a critique of Leo Strauss's influential interpretation of Spinoza) helps Polka avoid the "commenting on the commentators" conundrum.

Polka's interpretation will no doubt be controversial and important, not only for Spinoza scholars but for scholars concerned with the more general political, philosophical, religious, and ethical dimensions of modernity. Against critics of modernity claiming that Spinoza represents the modern, secular destruction of the sacred, Polka argues that Spinoza actually saves the sacred by making it accessible to the human mind. Against modernists claiming Spinoza as a representative of secularism's rightful triumph over religious superstition, Polka's Spinoza shows that modernity's own roots lie in a biblical religion deeper than any superstition. Whether Polka's

interpretation of Spinoza or the particular positions taken are defensible will be settled through the discussion that I hope will emerge around this book and its sequel.

Matthew Klaassen, University of Toronto

Ursula M. Franklin. *The Ursula Franklin Reader: Pacifism as a Map*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006.

Canada has been blessed by visionary public intellectuals and social justice activists whose influence carries far beyond the borders of the "true North strong and free." One might think of Rosalie Bertell, a renowned scientist and Grey Nun of the Sacred Heart, who eloquently and passionately alerted the world to the dangers of nuclear power and weapons. Or Jane Jacobs, who challenged and transformed how we understand and organize cities.

Another such luminary is Ursula Franklin, an experimental physicist who has written and lobbied long and hard on issues of technology-gone-awry. Her analyses grow out of Quaker convictions, relying on deep-rooted pacifism and feminism. In 1989, she delivered the CBC Massey Lectures. (The Massey Lectures are remarkable examples of public intellectualism, and a striking number have been delivered by people of faith.) Besides teaching for decades at the University of Toronto, Franklin has often testified to her concerns before government bodies.

This collection explores Franklin's understanding of pacifism as a map, a paradigm for examining all of life, an act of alternative imagination. While Quaker versions of nonviolence or nonresistance are not equivalent to Mennonite understandings, we nevertheless benefit from knowing these are not just quirky ideas. Franklin is absolutely correct: if we take a peace position seriously, it affects our whole lives. If the Mennonite Church were less ambiguous and ambivalent about shalom-making commitments, it would sound a clearer alternative to middle-class North American culture and its inevitable compromises, and it would offer a more telling witness in a world possessed by globalization.

Peace, as Franklin speaks of it, means the presence of justice and the absence of fear, and thus has huge social implications. She forthrightly explains how seeing things through a pacifist paradigm is a lonely enterprise. Her social convictions are no naive enumeration: a native German, she was imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps where some of her relatives died, she endured the bombing of Berlin, and she lived through the Soviet occupation. Still, in one interview here she matter-of-factly observes that "I have spent the best part of my life trying to put these thoughts into the stream that makes decisions, and I've been spectacularly unsuccessful."

Franklin shows how our technology-dominated society is value laden, but the values are not ones we explicitly choose. Even more troubling is that there is little deep reflection on how technology shapes our lives. Why are people of faith not more articulate about how so many industrial technologies contradict human priorities of respect and love, interpose themselves between people and supplant relationships, displace meaningful work, pollute our landscapes, and deleteriously affect local communities? Why are we not more upfront about the fact that much modern technology either aims at, or derives from, changing understandings and practices of war? And how can people of conscience live with the fact that technology has freed nations from explicit physical conscription, meaning that all taxpayers are complicit with war? (Franklin is a major advocate for the peace tax movement.)

The issue is not one of simplistically arguing that technology is intrinsically good or evil. There has always been technology. But how do we choose technology that promotes lives of peace, honors justice, and frees us from fear? Franklin helps us to see differently. For example, she tellingly critiques various technological practices, including electronic systems in the classroom and even ski lifts! She raises questions that few others do.

> The ability to separate message from messenger, sound from speaker, and picture from depicted, together with the speed with which information is transferred, has created a reality in which the manipulation of space and time has become one of the driving forces behind a new and complex way of doing things. We need to think about that reality and what it means for us as citizens, as a country, as a community, and as a culture. Collectively and

individually, ... we need to think about how much of society is determined by the dictates of new technologies. (237)

In another essay Franklin reflects on "Silence and the Notion of the Commons." Previously sound was connected to its source, and most sounds were temporary. But now, without our consent, we are exposed to constant background noises whose purposes and intentions are clearly manipulative. So even our very soundscape has been colonized.

There are other gems, such as a telling analogy about the arms race. Imagine a community where neighbors keep acquiring dogs and devoting themselves to such acquisition. The resulting problems – and smells – are remarkable.

Edited collections suffer predictable downsides, however, and this one is no exception. Some pieces feel dated, there are occasional overlaps, and an index would be useful.

Arthur Boers, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN

Gordon Oliver. *Holy Bible, Human Bible: Questions Pastoral Practice Must Ask.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006; Ray Gingerich and Earl Zimmerman, eds. *Telling Our Stories: Personal Accounts of Engagement with Scripture.* Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2006; Paul Ballard and Stephen R. Holmes, eds. *The Bible in Pastoral Practice: Readings in the Place and Function of Scripture in the Church.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Gordon Oliver began ministry as "a rather fundamentalist evangelical" (xviii), but he intends *Holy Bible, Human Bible: Questions Pastoral Practice Must Ask* to spark renewal among "conventionalized adults who dominate the biblical gate-keeping leadership of the churches" (149). After decades of ministry Oliver is convinced that "treating the Bible as some kind of literary pope that utters holy truth without regard to…context will only serve to close some issues that should be left open to the speaking of God" (43). Instead, reading the Bible should take us to the boundaries of our lives and show us the way forward.

Many culturally Western pastors will recognize the various reading settings that open this volume: among inter-religious community organizers for justice, amid an adolescent's digital devotional life, within a seminary New Testament class, at a home Bible study, in a high church liturgical setting, and in a theological dispute between ordained leaders. Oliver labors on behalf of Christians encountering the Bible in these settings who may wonder how it relates to the Word of God, who owns the Bible, how it witnesses to Jesus Christ, and whether it is a bridge or a boundary. These and other hermeneutical questions form the book's chapter titles.

Oliver affirms many of the "pre-critical" and experientially-based ways that scripture is used today, while aiming to bring critical scholarship to bear on pastoral practice in ways that create a desirable "disruption" (15). Congregations can strive for a more adult relationship with the canon of scripture "instead of the Church speaking on Scripture's behalf like a parent on behalf of an inarticulate child" (13).

In order to hear the gospels and the "trajectories of truth" they offer for pastoral practice, the author suggests five features of our reading. First is receiving the Bible as a *holy inheritance*, both deserving our best questions about how it fits and does not fit with contemporary concerns, and able to guide us into holy living. Second is the *gradual discovery process* of discipleship as well as the moments of profound disclosure that communities of Bible readers experience. Third is the *reflection process* of discerning "what to do next" in light of an encounter with God's word. Fourth is *disillusion*: here Oliver wisely notes that in the gospels the disciples very often question, misunderstand, and confuse who Jesus is and what he means to do and be. Likewise, much pastoral practice includes not knowing the precise connections between the gospel and current pastoral issues. We should not assume we always know what is going on and how Christ is leading us. Jesus "calls his disciples to become literally disillusioned with all that is expected of the Messiah as they encounter the horror of his crucifixion, and then as they come to terms with their experience of him risen, alive and still calling them to follow" (102). Finally, for pastoral faithfulness, this disillusionment must result in *commitment*.

For Oliver, Christians must receive the canon of scripture into the life of their communities in such a way that God can speak into situations never anticipated by the biblical writers. Credible pastoral practice will

acknowledge the weight of difference between biblical and contemporary contexts, but also the deep resonances between the world of the Bible and our world today. The author suggests that intercultural and theologically diverse reading groups might serve as a guard against "increasingly static and conventional hearing and readings of Scripture" (112). Arguments arising from reading in the context of differences are ultimately bridges for the people of God across the swirling issues of homosexuality, militarism, and religious tolerance, among others.

At his pastoral and biblical best, Oliver describes what it means to be fully human in a biblical sense. Using scriptural themes of calling, covenant, wisdom, reconciliation, and maturity, the final chapter sketches a portrait of humanity in the image of God. "To be human and biblical at the same time involves living with the discomfort and the protest that arise from the connections and the disconnections that come from taking part in the living tradition and the active remembrance of the speaking and actions of God" (153).

Telling Our Stories: Personal Accounts of Engagement with Scripture includes just such discomfort and protest. In this volume 23 Mennonite leaders (scholars, pastors, and administrators) share their personal journeys with scripture. While my personal acquaintanceship with most of these leaders may contribute to my enthusiasm for the stories, I commend them because they record the stirrings of the heart, the boiling blood, the search, and the sweat of true engagement with the Word of God. Those of us whose aim is to preach, teach, and live the scriptures in faithful and winsome ways will be strengthened and supported by *Telling Our Stories*.

This book was published as an outcome of a non-traditional conference. In Part One the editors commend the conference process as one that could be useful in many other settings. In Part Two, the contributors, prompted with an essay by Walter Brueggemann (republished as an appendix) and the controversial topics of militarism and homosexuality, tell their personal stories of living with scripture. Part Three includes chapters in which four storytellers state their "presuppositions" as they read and interpret the Bible, and four others share their "theological grids" for reading it. These are helpful statements for students to examine, and invaluable for teachers and

church leaders to review. There is an invitation to consider one's own story, assumptions, and theological perspective so as to hear, better and more often, the good news of scripture.

Many of the contributors narrate childhood understandings of the Bible that are renegotiated in adolescence and young adulthood. A young Owen Burkholder on a camping trip hunkers down in a tent reading his New Testament while other boys are chasing rabbits. Liz Landis narrates the pain of church division over biblical interpretation regarding women's roles in the church. Jo-Ann Brandt admits once being more familiar with big-screen versions of the Good Book than with the Bible itself. An Amish-born man goes to college, serves abroad, earns a Ph.D., and persists in interpreting the Bible as Jesus did, through the eyes of the prophets. A gay man sees his story reflected in the eunuchs of biblical times and soars with the Spirit who inspired these words. Also described is the loss of households like the childhood homes of James Krabill and Marilyn Rayle Kern, which were steeped in scripture. Another contributor resists this assignment a bit, noting that one's experience with scripture may not easily conform to the logic of story.

Comparing these personal accounts with our own and those of our Bible-reading companions will release some of the tension we may feel to get it right, to win our case, or to prove our next point with the Bible. Paths toward adult faith and intellectually satisfying appropriation of scripture, as represented here, are varied. For a great many of the storytellers (and this reviewer), seminary education was an asset in learning to read the Bible. Yet seminary is not intended to supply all the answers, and the next stages of life – particularly community and vocation – seem to govern subsequent growth for these Mennonite Christian readers.

In contrast to the confessional voices in *Telling Our Stories*, contributors to *The Bible in Pastoral Practice: Readings in the Place and Function of Scripture in the Church* use their professional voices. And what Gordon Oliver pursues as an individual scholar, roughing out a bridge between academic biblical studies and pastoral theology, this book does through a multi-voiced project. *The Bible in Pastoral Practice* is divided into three parts. "Listening to the Tradition" includes six essays on the history of

Biblical interpretation, including a chapter on interpretation of scripture prior to canon formation and one on Eastern Orthodox appropriation of scripture. For brevity, authors choose rich examples to illumine broader themes in the historical periods treated, as when one author compares Christmas sermons by Friedrich Schleiermacher, John Henry Newman, and Karl Barth.

The second section, "The Problems Posed by Contemporary Biblical Scholarship," charts the academic territory since the historical critical method was dethroned. John Rogerson roots the interpretive concerns of biblical scholarship in scripture and Christian liturgy. He encourages church leaders to share the insights of current scholarship with their congregations for the purpose of enhancing Christian discipleship. This section takes scripture readers beyond the text as "material for scholarly adventure" (154) and toward contextual, theological, and churchly readings that take into account the whole scope and narrative of the Bible. These post-liberal, post-colonial directions are attentive to non-dominant voices in history (Anabaptists) and in the church (women, persons in the global South).

The final section, "The Bible and Pastoral Theology and Practice," deals with pastoral care, ethical discernment, worship, preaching, eucharist, spirituality (both classically evangelical and Roman Catholic Ignatian exercises), community building, and singing. Many of the essays demonstrate a satisfying interdisciplinary wholeness. For example, David Lyall in "The Bible, worship and pastoral care" traces the teaching, proclaiming, and nurture functions of preaching as well as the contemporary forms these functions take. "Biblical good news should be shared in diverse ways," he writes. "The Church lives within the tension of proclamation and pastoral care. It needs preachers who represent the ministries of both prophet and priest" (233).

If these three books have a common claim, it is that the essential critical distance required for reading our ancient Scripture should never be used to stifle the living conversation between God and God's people. Let anyone with ears to hear, listen.

Jennifer Davis Sensenig, Pasadena Mennonite Church, Pasadena, CA

Marlene Epp and Carol Ann Weaver, eds. *Sound in the Land: Essays on Mennonites and Music*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005.

Oh, the echoes of Mennonite singing that arose in my memory while I perused these pages! Brought up in the New England Congregational Church, I experienced a musical epiphany when I first heard the *a cappella* sound of familiar and unfamiliar hymns sung with such beautiful tone and such radiant intensity. I've always felt that it compares favorably with the most sophisticated choral singing in the land.

This book contains many references to *Hymnal: A Worship Book,* published in 1992. Its fifteenth anniversary occasions a looking back from both data-based and anecdotal sources. Among the conclusions drawn is the inescapable fact that these hymns spring from many different traditions and reflect the trends at work in all Christian music-making. There is both a strong and healthy respect for past tradition, and a welcoming of international and living voices, without kow-towing to the fripperies of our commodity-driven culture.

In articles by and about contemporary composers, we find that they do not share a Mennonite "style" but are torn between the demands of concert/academic circles and of community churches. Those interviewed confessed a deep love for the sound of unaccompanied voices that persists through years of performing and teaching in the secular world. That double-grounding, I think, results in a paradoxical tension which bodes well for the music of the future.

An evocative poem opens each of the four sections of the book, making it clear that Mennonite poets are also flourishing in creative tensions. Well-written articles about young folksingers, orchestral musicians, peace texts in the *Ausbund,* and trying to define "Mennonite" as a people and/or a music demonstrate both the breadth of the field that the book surveys and the vitality of its probing.

In addition to Mary Oyer's valuable opening overview of Mennonite Hymnals from the *Ausbund* to the present, I particularly enjoyed the viewpoint on Mennonite thinking in Allison Fairbairn's article, "Mennofolk Manitoba: Cultural, Artistic, and Generational Perspectives in a Music Festival Setting." She quotes Hildi Froese Tiessen from *"Beyond the Binary: Re-inscribing Cultural Identity in Mennonite Literature"* to the

effect that "Mennonites tend to view the world in terms of binary categories or opposites such as community/individual or insiders/outsiders." She notes that Mennonite folk festivals in Manitoba and Ontario operate in a "grey area" between these opposite poles, bringing together both insiders from the cultural and religious tradition, and outsiders drawn by the music into new fellowships. I would add that Mennonites are not alone in attempting to transcend this binary worldview: one of the dominant themes of this age is the tension between the traditional and the new. We all need to explore the grey areas that invite new openings and fruitful overlappings.

Another provocative idea is expressed in "Encountering (Mennonite) Singer-Songwriters: J.D. Martin and Cate Friesen" by Jonathan Dueck. He quotes Arjun Appadurai's "characterization of the world as a set of overlapping 'scapes,' routes that are traveled rather than places that are inhabited." [Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996).] Five "scapes" are listed: "finanscapes (money), ideoscapes (ideologies), mediascapes (sounds and images), technoscapes (technologies), and ethnoscapes (people) … [that] are disjunct—they are not moved through at the same time." This disjunction is again especially characteristic of this age, where people move about the world so frequently and change the focus of their lives almost as often. I find it fascinating to contemplate my own life (or any other person's) through this lens, as if the five categories were discs floating on an oily surface: They move apart, collide, coalesce and move on, constantly changing. What a change from a settled farmer two hundred years ago! No wonder we moderns feel dislocated – and look for connections that make life meaningful.

A final essay by Laura H. Weaver, entitled "Pleasure Enough: Four-Part A Cappella Singing as a Survival Strategy for a Mennonite-in-Exile," eloquently states the place that singing holds in the Mennonite imagination. Little more than the thought of such singing, the memory of a song, can bring one to tears, experiencing a joy that over-rides all the contradictions and stresses of our confused society. We're transported back to a world where we can "sit in a circle and sing" – and rediscover our true identity. Even for those of us not born Mennonite!

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Rebecca Slough and Shirley Sprunger King, eds. *Nurturing Spirit through Song: The Life of Mary K. Oyer*. Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2007.

Broader than its title suggests, this collection marries *Festschrift* to life history in celebrating influential Mennonite musician, scholar, and teacher Mary K. Oyer. It offers biographies of her life and work; stories and poems by students exploring her influence on Mennonites, global churches, and other institutions; and selected writings by Oyer that offer both a window on Mennonite music since the mid-twentieth century and still provocative ideas about church music.

Two central aspects of Oyer's work are evident, both running counter to scholarly and popular assumptions that musical meaning is situated in music's lyrics: first, the idea that musical *sound* has meaning; and second, that musical *practice* has meaning. In a 1965 essay, Oyer draws attention to the melodic question a tune may pose by rising and answer by falling (185). She argues this theologically as well, suggesting that beauty has meaning, in that God has given us a desire for beauty that encourages us to engage with creation (147-50); thus, beautiful musical sound has meaning, and it can call us to right relationships with others and creation. In a 1992 essay Oyer suggests that the organizational structure of the 1989 *Hymnal Sampler* and the 1992 *Hymnal* reflects a functional view of sound, recognizing, for example, that both the lyrics and the music of a hymn might have a function of "gathering" (211-13).

This volume also includes Oyer's 1967 article, "Cultural Problems in the Production of a Mennonite Hymnal," signaling a cultural turn in her work – a concern with the way musics represent and are owned or shared by the communities that practice them. Oyer places the making of the 1969 *Hymnal* in the popular-cultural sea changes of the 1960s and the divergent musical practices of the General Conference and (Old) Mennonites who partnered to produce it (189-92). But she also suggests that differences *within* each group might well outweigh differences between them (194).

The book's biographies weave together Oyer's work and its institutional contexts. Rachel Waltner Goossen considers Oyer as an insider scholar in Mennonite institutions, a gendered subject in Mennonite orthopraxis, and an anthropologist in relation to "world" Christian musics.

Rebecca Slough contributes a life history focused on Oyer's career, including doctoral studies, work at Goshen College and travels to Scotland and Kenya, and, later in life, work at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and in Taiwan. Slough focuses on Oyer's "improvisational" work, putting together her life from musical and social materials at hand (78-87). This useful frame allows Slough to track structures that both enabled and constrained Oyer, while taking her very seriously as an agent.

Reminiscences from students and colleagues illustrate Oyer's strong mentoring of students over long periods. Jean Ngoya Kidula notes that some North American Mennonite hymns taught by Oyer at Kenyatta University became part of the singing repertoire of Kenyan Christians, including "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" and "When All Thy Mercies" (117). When Kidula attended Goshen College, she encountered under Oyer's tutelage Zimbabwean music and the marimba for the first time (119).

The volume includes poems that were important to Oyer and art she chose as Goshen College's *Maple Leaf* art editor. But it is not a canonization. The biographical materials include stories of her regrets as well as triumphs. Slough, for instance, sees Oyer's nonlinear thinking as problematic for modernist scholarly argument but helpful for initiating creative change in academy and church (83). As a whole the volume contextualizes Oyer's work in terms of the larger scholarly and churchly influences on it, as well as the contributions Oyer made.

This focus on context extends the book's purview beyond Oyer's own life to that of the development of church music (and church leadership structures) among Mennonites. Her essay, "Two Centuries of American Mennonite Hymn Singing" (235-56), is a fine example, presenting a historical sketch of Mennonite hymn singing focused on the intersections of Mennonite practices with broader mission movements, Baptist ministers, diasporae, singing schools, and so forth.

Nurturing Spirit through Song succeeds marvelously as both *Festschrift* and biography, and exceeds the bounds of both. It should be of interest to scholars and students not only of Mennonite music but of Mennonite history, institutions, and society.

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Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI. *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration.* Trans. Adrian J. Walker. New York: Doubleday, 2007.

Some people familiar only with Joseph Ratzinger's role as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under John Paul II were taken aback by his election to the pontificate in 2005. There was substantial criticism of the cardinals' decision by those seeing Ratzinger as little more than a rigid enforcer of doctrinal conformity. Less well known at the time was his reputation as a renowned theologian, academic, and pastor, and it was only after the publication of *Deus caritas est*, his first encyclical as Pope Benedict XVI, that many discovered his theological depth. This depth is fully on display in this newly-published monograph.

Benedict's *Jesus of Nazareth* is the culmination of research and writing that began prior to his pontificate. In the foreword Benedict stresses that his book is to be understood not as an exercise of the magisterium (i.e., as doctrinally authoritative) but as his personal search for the face of the Lord. This search has roots stretching back to the 1950s when, Benedict notes, a substantial gap appeared between the "Christ of faith" and the "historical Jesus." Widely divergent reconstructions of Jesus grew in number at the same time as historical-critical scholarship gained ascendancy, and the emerging overall impression was that the testimony of the canonical gospels could not be trusted to provide an accurate portrait of the actual Jesus because they were composed after faith in Jesus' divinity had advanced. Benedict's book is a direct response to this development, and its central argument is straightforward: The Jesus of the canonical gospels is "much more logical and, historically speaking, much more intelligible than the reconstructions we have been presented with in the last decades" (xxii).

On the one hand, therefore, Benedict positions this book as an academic work. On the other, the starting point for his examination of Jesus differs sharply from that of historical Jesus scholars. Benedict unapologetically approaches the canonical gospels from a position of faith, and from the perspective that the words of scripture continually point beyond themselves to the divine. He emphasizes that the historical-critical method is essential

for interpreting scripture, but its limitations must be recognized, particularly its inability to transcend the historical so as to arrive at an understanding of scripture's unity and of its faculty to speak in the present. Each of these attributes is due to scripture's emergence from, and continual life within, the people of God, the church. Benedict thus advocates for a theological exegesis; exegetes are to take full advantage of the historical-critical method at the same time as they attend to the divine voice speaking through the words of scripture. Advocates of the historical-critical method would clearly view Benedict's hermeneutical approach as altogether incompatible with academic investigation, but the pope would not be bothered by their disapproval. He is far more interested in recovering for the church the wealth of Christian hermeneutical tradition, in order to arrive at a portrayal of Jesus that makes *both* historical *and* theological sense, than in pleasing ivory tower critics.

The examination of Jesus is multifaceted. Benedict explores various important events in Jesus' life; considers Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God; provides intricate analyses of the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord's Prayer, and the major parables; discusses differences between the synoptic gospels and the gospel of John; and investigates the titles ascribed to Jesus. Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection are to be explored in a subsequent book. With each exploration Benedict tries to detail the historical, cultural, and/or religious context as a means of demonstrating the viability of the gospels' portrayal of Jesus, and of drawing out the theological, christological, and soteriological ramifications of Jesus' life and teachings.

One of the most noteworthy chapters is the pope's interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. Here Benedict draws on Rabbi Jacob Neusner's work to argue that Jesus' Jewish audience would have clearly understood that he was making bold claims about his identity and authority which would have been offensive to many of his hearers.

Benedict articulates his ideas and arguments in a nuanced and subtle manner, and many interpretive treasures are found throughout *Jesus of Nazareth*. At every point he seeks to bring the full weight of tradition to his portrayal of Jesus, and his command of patristic and medieval literature as well as contemporary scholarship is evident in each chapter. But this is not

a book written only for the theologically educated. Rather, it is a work of devotion to Jesus Christ that manages the difficult task of being accessible to the lay reader while providing more than enough substance for the scholar.

Gregory K. Hillis, McMaster University

Don S. Browning. *Christian Ethics and the Moral Psychologies.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

This book is part of the Religion, Marriage, and Family series, edited by Don S. Browning and John Witte Jr., that stems from research projects originally located at the University of Chicago and, more recently, Emory University. Here Browning presents the fruits of a decade of work on the relation of Christian ethics and the moral psychologies, a time when he developed and expanded material included in earlier books such as *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies: A Critical Conversation in the Theology of Culture* (Fortress, 1987; rev. ed. 2004) and *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Fortress, 1991).

Browning seeks to fully answer key questions: Can the normative disciplines of moral philosophy and Christian ethics learn something from the workings of psychotherapy and the nature of moral development? Can Christian ethics trust these new psychologies? His main thesis answering these and related questions is this: "*Yes, contemporary moral psychology can contribute to Christian ethics, but only when it does its research with competent pre-scientific or pre-empirical understanding of morality* [the kind of philosophical and conceptual clarification of the meaning of morality that all good empirical moral psychology requires for conducting its observations, tests, and experiments].… Christian ethics must critique these psychologies at the same time that it learns from them [and] must also help develop more adequate pre-empirical and philosophically sound models of morality" (2-3).

The Introduction develops a perspective on the relation of modern moral psychologies and Christian ethics by identifying the book's main themes. Chapter one, "Multidimensionality of Praxis in Christian Ethics,"

presents the author's view of the content of Christian ethics with special attention to Reinhold Niebuhr. Chapter two, "Moral Psychology and Critical Hermeneutics," discusses human development as seen by various perspectives in contemporary moral psychology, including a critique of foundationalism (the attempt to find, and work with, an objective, value-free, and tradition-free way of considering moral development).

Chapter three, "Going Deeper: The Relation of Moral Education to Christian Ethics," focuses on Johannes van der Ven's view of the formation of the moral self and his application of Paul Ricoeur's theory of moral education and communication.

In chapter four, "The Dialectic of Belonging and Distantiation," Browning proposes using the phrase "practical theological ethics," one that constructively combines two fields: "Practical theology needs to be more normative and theological ethics needs to be more descriptive and transformative" (85). He also discusses critical hermeneutics in light of Hans-Georg Gadamer and, especially, Ricoeur.

The next two chapters –"Attachment, Love, and Moral Development" and "Altruism, Feminism, and Family and Christian Love"– focus on the multidimensional reality of human love and Christian love. "Generativity, Ethics, and Hermeneutics: Revisiting Erik Erikson" follows as chapter seven. In these three chapters Browning illustrates the diagnostic value of two of the more recent and commanding moral psychological traditions, evolutionary psychology and the psychoanalytic ego-psychology of Erikson. Chapter eight, "Flanagan's and Damasio's Challenge to Theological Ethics," introduces readers to moral psychologist Owen Flanagan and cognitive neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, who help clarify some premoral aspects of ethics and morality. "Christian Ethics and the Premoral Good," chapter nine, discusses why Christian ethics must attend more carefully to the premoral (morally relevant but not morally definitive) goods of life, and makes the case for "a Christianity that includes within the themes of creation, judgment, and salvation a proximate concern for human flourishing" (220).

Finally, in chapter ten, "Violence, Authority, and Communities of Reconstruction," Browning focuses on youth violence. He proposes that the most comprehensive reason behind this violence is the deterioration of the voluntary, face-to-face institutions of civil society, and that the most

inclusive strategy for curing youthful violence entails reviving society's authoritative and grassroots communities.

A thoughtful reading of this book takes considerable time and energy, mainly because of the complexity of its subject matter and the plurality of sources and voices that Browning brilliantly engages while constructing his own practical theological ethics. Also, his revision of a series of articles eventually leading to the publication of this volume would have benefited from further editing to make the reading smoother, especially the transitions between chapters and the flow of the overall argument.

This book should be required reading for advanced courses focusing on Christian ethics and the human sciences, as well as for interdisciplinary studies engaging psychology, philosophy, ethics, and theology.

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The Conference will explore the theme:
*"Congregationalism, Denominationalism,
and the Body of Christ."*

For additional information visit **www.cmu.ca**

The conference will feature plenary addresses and workshops by the three speakers introduced below, and paper presentations by some twenty-five academics and pastors.

Reginald W. Bibby (Ph.D., Washington State) holds the Board of Governors Research Chair in the Department of Sociology at Lethbridge University, Lethbridge Alberta. He is one of Canada's leading trackers and interpreters of social trends over the past two decades. In 1990 he authored *Mosaic Madness* which examines Canada's widespread social fragmentation. Dr. Bibby's best known books on religion are: *There's Got to Be More*; *Fragmented Gods*; *Unknown Gods*; and most recently, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Novalis). Dr. Bibby is widely sought as a lecturer, a media commentator, and as a researcher for a variety of denominations in Canada and the USA.

Fernando Enns (Dr. Theology, Heidelberg) is the founding director of the newly established chair of Mennonite theology at Hamburg University (2005-). He was Director of Studies at the Ecumenical Institute of Heidelberg University from 1996-2005. Prior to that he was pastor of the Krefeld Mennonite Church (1992-1996). Dr. Enns is a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. There he played a leading role in initiating the WCC's "Decade to Overcome Violence." His most significant publication is: *The Peace Church in the Ecumenical Movement: Mennonite Roots of an Ethic of Non-Violence* (in German), soon to appear in English translation (Pandora). Dr. Enns's areas of interest encompass ecumenism, ecclesiology, peace theology and ethics. His passion is to help the Mennonite church share its insights and also learn from the ecumenical context.

Jonathan R. Wilson (Ph.D., Duke) is Pioneer McDonald Professor of Theology at Carey Theological College, Vancouver (2006-). He came to CTC from Acadia Divinity College, Wolfville Nova Scotia where he was Professor of Theology and Ethics (2003-2006). Before that he taught at Westmount College, Santa Barbara CA (1989-2003). He pastored in Baptist congregations in Western Canada from 1978 to 1986. Dr. Wilson's publications include: *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World* (Morehouse); *God So Loved the World: A Christology for Disciples* (Baker); *A Primer for Christian Doctrine* (Eerdmans); *Why Church Matters: Worship, Ministry, and Mission in Practice* (Brazos). He has taken a keen interest in bringing the Believers Church tradition to bear on Baptist church life and thought.

CALL FOR PAPERS

In 2010 Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) will mark 90 years of service in the name of Christ. With this milestone approaching, MCC seeks to gather a wide variety of academics and others to reflect on different dimensions of these broad questions:

- **What is MCC?**
- **What has MCC been?**
- **What is MCC becoming?**

MCC invites people from various disciplines—including but not limited to historians, theologians, economists, anthropologists, conflict transformation theorists and practitioners, sociologists, communications studies scholars, cultural theorists, development studies scholars and practitioners, and missiologists—to submit proposals for papers addressing these questions for possible inclusion in a book of essays marking this milestone.

Proposals must specify the question(s) to be addressed, resources to be consulted and investigated, and methodological assumptions and approach to be used.

Limited funds are available to cover research expenses such as travel to archives and photocopying. To apply for these funds, authors should attach to the proposal a budget detailing anticipated expenses.

Proposals will be reviewed by a project coordinating committee. Authors of accepted proposals will commit to completing their essays by February 1, 2009 for inclusion in an edited publication to appear by 2010.

MCC is also planning a consultation at which authors of accepted proposals and others will gather to reflect on MCC's identity from multiple disciplinary perspectives.

DEADLINE FOR PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS: FEBRUARY 1, 2008

**Send your proposal (max. 2 single-spaced pages) to
project coordinator Alain Epp Weaver:
eppweaver@uchicago.edu.**