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Rashkover - The Semiotics of Embodiment - JCRT 3.3
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One of the greatest thorns in the side of Jewish-Christian relations has been contending with and overcoming Christianity's charge that Jews and Judaism remain bound by the flesh in contrast to Christians who, through Christ's resurrection, are elevated into the life of the spirit. This charge, of course, goes all the way back to Paul.¹ In recent years, Christian theologians have begun reconsidering the doctrine of the incarnation. This issue has captured the attention of two schools of Christian theology; narrative theology and radical orthodoxy. Currently however, only narrative theologians have analyzed how a reevaluation of the body of Christ can advance Jewish-Christian relations. In this paper, I will argue that despite its best intentions, this narrative approach remains supercessionistic. Conversely, despite its failure to attend to the implications of its incarnational theology for Jewish-Christian relations, radical orthodoxy's appreciation of the semiotic character of Jesus' corporeality better links Jesus to the rabbinic tradition's semiotic practices and thereby opens up possibilities for Jews and Christians to study sacred texts together. In what follows I will compare radical orthodoxy's incarnational theology with a portrait of Jewish semiotic life in order to highlight the eucharistic character of rabbinic hermeneutics and the rabbinic character of Christian hermeneutics. Furthermore I will discuss the role of desire within their parallel scriptural practices and articulate how these practices can provide a basis for an ethical and just society.

Narrative Theology and the Eucharist

3. The most developed effort by a Narrative theologian to articulate the value of the body of Christ for Jewish-Christian relations is Scott Bader-Saye's *Church and Israel After Christendom*. Bader-Saye argues that the "Eucharist becomes the place where God's corporeal election is extended to the Gentiles."² The Eucharist allows Gentiles to be grafted on to the narrative drama between God and the Jews, a drama that culminates in the eschatological future of peace. So engrafted, Christians can overcome prior Israel forgetfulness and recognize their participation in God's valid covenant with the Jews.
4. The difficulty with this narrative approach is its Christologically informed eschatology. Insofar as the Christian believes in an eschatological peace in *Christ*, she cannot appreciate the ongoing validity of God's covenant with the Jews. The Jewish covenant may be one path among many now, but it culminates in (and is therefore superceded by) the covenant through Christ. Bader Saye might respond by saying that the Christian covenant is nothing other than the Jewish covenant, only now with gentiles grafted on to it. If so, Bader Saye would make the classic Pauline error of attempting to retain the Jewish covenant without the Jewish law for he has yet to show how a life of Jewish law is possible within the covenant of Christ ' a covenant that takes for granted the notion that in Christ the law is dead.

¹Paul frequently associates Jewish law with a life of the flesh in contrast to the life of faith and the Spirit. See Paul's letter to Galatians, "Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? . . . (Galatians 3:3-4).

²Scott Bader Saye, *Church and Israel After Christendom* (Westview, 1999), p. 142.

Radical Orthodoxy and the body of Jesus

5. Graham Ward's essay entitled, "The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ"³ is a bold attempt to explore the doctrine of incarnation that states that Jesus' body is the Word of God. Ward maintains that Jesus' body is a/the place where "the material orders are inseparable from the symbolic and transcendent orders of mystery."⁴ As the Word of God, Jesus' body must take on the semiotic life of the Word of God and participate in its economy of donation.
6. According to Ward, a careful reading of the gospels reveals a portrait of Jesus' body as a constant movement of semiotic displacement. Ward marks five distinct moments of displacement in the narratives: incarnation/circumcision, transfiguration, Eucharist, crucifixion and resurrection/ascension. Jesus corporeality is indistinguishable from the migration of its semiotic identifications. Jesus, a circumcised Jew becomes Jesus transfigured as the translucent image of God, who becomes transformed into and handed over as bread, who deteriorates and becomes lifeless and alive in/with us as the body of the church. There is no one body of Christ immutably referenced, testified to and carried by the church community.
7. For Ward, Jesus' corporeal displacement has theological significance. As the Word of God, Jesus' "flesh [is] of complex theological designation."⁵ That is, Jesus' semiotic displacements mirror the displacements that transpire within the Word of God as the Word of God relates trinitarianly to itself and to the world it creates. Jesus' corporeal displacements engender a sense of the holy for those who bear witness to them. In its presence, "we listen, we receive, we worship, we give thanks."⁶
8. We can understand how Ward accounts for this worship experience if we read Ward as appreciating the performative (or what some refer to as the pragmatic)⁷ aspect of Jesus' corporeal displacement. More specifically, Jesus' corporeal displacement is a product of Jesus' own hermeneutical performance of giving and receiving signs. Ward's analysis of Jesus' hermeneutical practice is, arguably the key to his resuscitation of the Christian doctrines of incarnation and creation.
9. Superficially reviewed, Jesus' semiotic displacements *appear* to constitute a sequence of proclamation, or attestation, followed by negation. At once Jesus 'is' the circumcised Jewish body and then destabilized, the circumcised body is lost and replaced by the transfigured body which itself is lost again in the eucharistic body and its subsequent loss or displacement in the crucified and then resurrected body. Read this way, Jesus' own hermeneutical enactment promotes an endless sequence of proclamation and loss and mourning. But, this kind of hermeneutical enactment cannot engender the kind of religious inspiration expressed by those who witness to him.
10. Jesus' semiotic displacements do not, Ward argues, transpire within an economy of possession and loss but rather within an economy of gift or donation. Overly influenced by the logic of ownership and loss, we fail to appreciate how a semiotics of displacement mandates a

³Graham Ward, "The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (Routledge, 1999).

⁴Ibid., p. 165.

⁵Ibid., p.164

⁶Ibid., p.167.

⁷Robert Gibbs frequently employs this term when describing the practical events that take place in written and oral discourse. See Robert Gibbs, *Why Ethics: Signs of Responsibilities* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

logic of donation. If, at the very moment I issue my proclamation it becomes destabilized and displaced into a future sign, then, the sign I proclaim is always a result of a prior displacement ' that is, I can never possess or lose it because it was never mine to begin with. So conceived, displacement is never loss because proclamation is never possession. From this perspective, Jesus' proclamations of self-identity are themselves testimonies or signs that enact his reception of a gift that has already been given.

11. Of course, if proclamation is no longer viewed as an effort to lay claim to a signification, so the subsequent negation of the proclamation can no longer be viewed as loss but as the promise of everlasting inheritance. By semiotically withdrawing, Jesus participates in a poetic renewal of his material existence that promises him an endless inheritance of future gifts. Jesus' semiotic donation testifies to the presence of grace in the material order and thereby reveals the true nature of the material world as God's own gracefully offered Word. "The theo-logic for this . . . is Christ's lordship over creation and yet his identification with and participation within it; Jesus as God's Word informing creation."⁸ Moreover, as God's Word informing creation, Jesus' semiotically enacted body repeats and thereby witnesses to the trinitarian life of the divine Word as well, "the eternal displacements of the Trinitarian processions . . ."⁹

Re-viewing Desire

12. Consequently, for Ward, Jesus' semiotically displaced corporeality functions as the key to re-imaging and re-prioritizing the classical doctrines of incarnation and creation. By centering attention on these doctrines, Ward exonerates Christianity from charges of perpetuating a mind/body dualism without however, falling prey to an equally problematic singular embrace of the body and the material world. Ward's discussion of the character of Christian desire further evidences the strength of his theological renewal.
13. In Christ, Ward maintains, human desire for itself meets with the human desire for God. Jesus enjoys and participates in the vibrancy of his created body. Jesus is not bereft of desire or sensuality. He is driven by a will to creativity ' a will to participate in the everlasting renewal of the material order. Jesus' desire for himself is Jesus' desire for God and for the grace of God creatively threaded throughout the material world. There is no daunting divide between the desire for God and the desire for the body. For Ward, Jesus' death and resurrection do not signal the triumph over human corporeality and desire but rather, provide the possibility of "an even greater identification with that body."¹⁰ As displaced, the body heralds the beauty of human corporeal desire and the giftedness of all corporeality and materiality. "The Christian awareness of the absent body of Christ, and of death itself, returns us to our createdness ' to the giftedness of creation out of nothing."¹¹ Consequently, Jesus can hand over his body without regret and those who bear witness to this feel moved to worship and gratitude.

The Donating Community

14. Jesus' semiotic displacements not only map his material life on to the eternal displacements/poesis of the trinitarian life but also extend a parallel invitation to the remainder

⁸"Displaced Body," p. 167.

⁹Ibid., p. 170.

¹⁰Ibid., 172.

¹¹Ibid., p. 173.

of the created order. As the reception and donation of signs, Jesus' corporeal life presupposes and leads to a community of like interpreters. The community it presupposes is the community of God's trinitarian self-relation. The community it spawns is the human family who learns how to participate in the work of divine poesis through Jesus' own performance. According to Ward's reading of the gospel accounts, observers of Christ are initially drawn to the beauty of his transfigured body. "The transfiguration scene on the Mount of Olives presents us with Jesus as . . . bathed in a certain translucence . . . Marks' account . . . bears witness to the event's power to attract and engage . . ." ¹² Jesus' withdrawal from his circumscribed body into a transfigured self is, for observers, a dazzling and attractive gift. They perceive Jesus' body erotically and desire it.

15. Nonetheless, receiving his body, "we are attracted to the man and beyond him . . . the erotic economy propels our desire towards what lies beyond and yet does so in and through this man's particular body." ¹³ Attracted to Jesus' body, observers' desire, though real, is transformed. The gift of Jesus' semiotic displacement "breaks upon them as one situated within another economy . . ." ¹⁴ - that is, witnesses do not receive an object that they pry from its owner and take for themselves. They receive a sign already displaced - a sign, generously and consciously given - a sign whose source maintains no claim to possession. Consequently, "this transfigurability and, its subsequent beauty and goodness, is not something [we] lack and will now strive to attain. Jesus cannot now become an ego-ideal." ¹⁵ Instead, witnesses receive Jesus' body as a gift that testifies to the renewability of the created order they have inherited and will continue to inherit in the future. Desire is not denied or nullified. It is re-situated amidst plenitude and grace and merges with gratitude, worship and joy.
16. Following the transfiguration is the eucharist. Jesus withdraws and hands himself over to the disciples as the bread and the wine. Jesus' displacement is once again, their gift and this time they are invited to take on or participate in the semiotic activity of Jesus' body itself. By consuming Jesus' semiotic gift, the disciples' bodies become vehicles of the divine poesis as well. "The displacement of the body at the eucharist effects a sharing, a participation." ¹⁶
17. If the eucharist invites participation in the gift of Jesus' semiotic body, the crucifixion invites participation in Jesus' ultimate displacement or withdrawal. Nonetheless, the crucifixion does not undo the gift eucharistically received. It further testifies to it. By participating with Jesus in the loss of the body, participants accentuate its giftedness and do not claim it as their own. The meaning of the crucifixion is the resurrection. Withdrawing from their eucharistic testimony, they donate their semiotic identification with Jesus' body and offer it up to future messengers. Eucharistic participation in Jesus' semiotic body, consequently, links participants to the semiotic past that Jesus himself inherits as a gift as well as to the semiotic future of Jesus' body as it is passed on through future eucharistic communities. In this way, the crucifixion marks the displacement of Jesus' body into the hands of those who will testify to him. They become the new messengers in the chain of giving and receiving. "Jesus' presence is mediated through the discourses of those who will comprise the early Church." ¹⁷

¹²Ibid., p. 166.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 167.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 174.

18. As a result, Ward's appreciation of the displaced body of Christ lends new meaning to Christian witness. By testifying to Christ, Christians do not gain some immediate access to the presence of God in the incarnate body but position themselves in the orbit of God's created plenitude as participants and messengers of it. "The absenting body of Christ gives place to (is supplemented by) a body of confessional and doxological discourse in which the Church announces, in a past tense which can never make its presence felt immediately: 'We have seen him. He is risen.'"¹⁸
19. Of course, the New Testament gospel accounts are the church's earliest body of confessional discourse. Consequently, Ward maintains that the New Testament is nothing other than the witness to Jesus' own semiotic performance, as "reperformed and ventriloquized by the community he brought to birth."¹⁹ Like Jesus' own semiotic performance, the Gospel accounts invite readers into the economy of divine poesis that they have witnessed. Jesus' semiotic corporeality has initiated a community of messengers who receive and pass on the divine Word as it is re-created in the material world. A new collectivity, Ward says, "is born within and borne across the distensive absence."²⁰
20. Ward's re-vision of the Christian doctrines of the incarnation, passion and resurrection are a product therefore, of a new Christian scriptural hermeneutic. In stark contrast to either allegorical or narrative hermeneutical approaches, Ward reads the New Testament as a semiotic performance of giving and receiving of signs that invites audience participation. Ward's kerygmatic message is not a proposition or a story about who Christ is, but a practice of living within God's created order. Ward's New Testament is not, as narrative theologians would think, an invitation into a closed narrative world, but rather, a call to go out into the world and participate in the process of creating and re-creating the world we have already been given through God's creative Word.

Jesus' Semiotic Body and Rabbinic Hermeneutics

21. Judaism has long laid claim to a unique interpretative tradition within its own set of rules and practices. Jews have often maintained that Judaism's exegetical tradition differs markedly from the Aristotelian influenced Christian hermeneutic whereby language is, at best, a faulty representation of reality.²¹ Consequently, Jews and Christians have looked elsewhere for the bases of Jewish-Christian relations.
22. Much of my work has been devoted to developing an authentic and useful portrait of rabbinic hermeneutical practice.²² The portrait I have developed includes four key features that parallel Ward's semiotic analysis of Jesus' body and can therefore provide a basis for a comparison between Judaism and Christian modes of text study. First, the rabbinic hermeneutical imagination views Torah as the place where God has revealed Godself so as to be near to humankind. Second, rabbinic hermeneutics assumes that the Torah demonstrates the creative

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 163.

²⁰Ibid., p. 175.

²¹Susan Handelman is perhaps, best known for this charge. See her, *Slayers of Moses, The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).

²²See my "Exegesis, Redemption and the Maculate Torah," in *Textual Reasonings*, ed. Peter Ochs and Nancy Levene (SCM Press, 2002) and my "Re-Admitting Philosophy into Contemporary Jewish Thought: An Encounter between Jewish Feminism and Exegetical Jewish Thought," in *On Being Human: Women in Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Hava Tirosh Samuelson (Indiana University Press, forthcoming).

life of the divine Word. Third, the Torah's polysemic character invites readers to participate in the creative life of the divine Word. Finally, participation in the life of the divine Word through Torah study permits readers to commit their bodies and desires to the perpetuation of the life of the divine Word in the created order. Consequently, both Christianity and Judaism produce communities whose embodiment of the divine word enables them to commit their material existence to participating in the divine act of creation.

The Torah and the Nearness of the Divine Word

Responding to the story Joseph Soloveitchik says, "God does not wish to hand over His Torah to the ministering angels. . . he handed over His Torah to Moses, who brought it down to the earth and caused it to dwell among human beings . . ." ²³ Elliot Wolfson has done much to highlight the incarnational themes within the mystical tradition and speaks of "the textualization of God ' that is, God's becoming concretely manifest in the form of the Torah." ²⁴

Moreover, this plurivocal character acts as an invitation, a mandate, if you will for readers to participate in the creativity of the Torah. The Torah's plurivocality translates into its interpretability and as Levinas says, "this invitation to seek and decipher, to Midrash, already constitutes the reader's participation in the Revelation, in Scripture. The reader, in his own fashion, is a scribe." ²⁵ Rabbinic hermeneutics is eucharistic and through it "we get a first indication of what we might call the 'status' of the Revelation: its coming from elsewhere, from outside, and simultaneously dwelling in the person who receives it." ²⁶

23. The notion that the Torah is the place where God descends and draws near to the Jews occurs frequently within rabbinic and Jewish mystical writing. A famous rabbinic story offers a good example.

Rabbi Joshua b. Levi said: When Moses ascended on high, the ministering angels spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the universe! What business has one born of woman among us?' He answered them, 'He has come to receive the Torah.' They said to Him, 'That secret treasure . . . Thou desirest to give to flesh and blood! . . . The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses, 'Return them an answer.' . . . He [then] spoke before Him, 'Sovereign of the universe! The Torah which Thou givest me, what is written therein? I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt (Exod. 20:2). 'Said he to them [the angels], 'Did you go down to Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh?, etc. Again what is written therein? Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy (Exod. 20:8). Do you then perform work that you need to rest?, etc. Again, what is written therein? Honor thy father and thy mother (Exod. 20:12). Do you have any fathers and mothers? . . . Straight away they conceded to Him." ²⁷

24. By describing God's descent and nearness in Torah, Jews, like Ward, do not mean to suggest a vulgar theological positivism that elevates the material to identity with the divine. To speak

²³Joseph Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), p. 33.

²⁴Elliot Wolfson, "Listening to Speak: A Response to Dialogues in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy," in Stephen Kepnes, Peter Ochs and Robert Gibbs, ed. *Reasoning After Revelation: Dialogues in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy* (Westview Press, 1998), p. 99.

²⁵Ibid., 167.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷*Shabbat* 88b-89a.

of God's dwelling with Torah is not to speak about what the Torah is but rather what the Torah does, for God dwells in Torah through God's Word. But the divine Word creates and Torah becomes the stage of this creative activity. The rabbis linked Torah with God's *act* of creation. According to the Mishnah, Rabbi Akiba once said, "Beloved are Israel for unto them was given the instrument by which the world was created" ²⁸ God, the Mishnah tells us, "looked in the Torah and created the world ." ²⁹ This does not mean that the rabbis envisioned the Torah along the lines of Platonic logos. Rather, when they spoke of God's creation through Torah they meant in fact, "not a concept but the concrete Torah with its precepts and statutes, which are inscribed in letters. Out of those letters . . . are the utterances with which the Almighty created the world." ³⁰

25. A third feature of rabbinic hermeneutics is the notion that, as God's act of creation, Torah meaning is never fixed but always subject to further development. Emanuel Levinas makes this point when he says,

By going back to the Hebrew text from the translations . . . [one discovers] the strange or mysterious ambiguity or polysemy authorized by the Hebrew syntax . . . words coexist rather than immediately being coordinated or subordinated with and to one another . . . returning to the Hebrew text . . . makes it more difficult than one thinks to decide on the ultimate intention of a verse . . . there is no one verse, not one word of the Old Testament - . . . read by way of revelation that does not half-open to an entire world ³¹

The Semiotics of Torah and Desire

26. There are obvious parallels between the rabbinic conception of Torah as the place of and Ward's account of Jesus' semiotic significance for the church. Both Torah and Jesus are the sites of the divine creative Word. To say however that both Christian and rabbinic hermeneutics are eucharistic suggests that Jewish and Christian text study offer participants opportunities to materially and bodily participate in this divine nearness. At the heart of rabbinic and Christian hermeneutics is a semiotic practice that unveils the created character of our material lives and allows our human desire for self to become fused with the human desire for God.
27. When comparing Ward's Christian semiotics with rabbinic semiotics, one quickly discovers that both are driven by the desire to unveil the theological character of the created order. While Christians may uncover the theological nature of their embodied lives through the particular revelation of Jesus' semiotic body and Jews, through the practice of rabbinic exegesis, nonetheless, both traditions assert an interest in recognizing the theological value of our created order and this commonality can provide a basis for Jewish-Christian conversation.
28. In addition to their shared interest in unveiling the theological character of our created order, the comparison between Ward's Christian and rabbinic semiotics reveals a common exegetical pragmatics through which human desire for oneself becomes one's desire for God. If Christians, as Ward argues, are first attracted to Jesus' carnality in the hopes of erotically

²⁸M. 'Avot iii, 14.

²⁹Gen. Rabba i, 1.

³⁰Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages* (Harvard University Press, 1979).

³¹Emanuel Levinas, "Revelation in the Jewish Tradition," in *Contemporary Jewish Theology: A Reader*, ed. Elliot N. Dorff and Louis E. Newman (Oxford University Press, 1999), 166.

possessing it, Jews are often first attracted to the Torah in the hopes of meeting or fulfilling a whole host of diverse desires as well. Rabbinic readers have at one time or another been consumed by suffering, anxiety, loneliness, the need for existential completeness, etc. Said in Kantian terms, desire is the condition of the possibility of rabbinic semiotic activity. Rabbinic texts are cauldrons of the rabbis own desires and readers begin their own interaction with these texts propelled by their desires. Elsewhere I have analyzed the positive role of desire in rabbinic semiotic life and argued for its philosophical value.³² When I desire the text it means that I am questioning something in my existence and bringing that question to the text. Contrary to the modern philosophical dismissal of desire, it is desire and not some purely intellectual interest that both draws me to the text but also allows me to question the text. Desire brings me my materiality, my concerns, and my interests into the orbit of the text and prepares me for the eucharistic engagement that follows.

29. Of course, however, like Ward's Jesus, the Torah's own semiotic character does not make itself available to instrumental use by its readers. Elsewhere I have used the term 'dialectical' to describe this character of my encounter with the Word of God in the text.³³ Propelled by my desire to go to the text, I nonetheless meet the text and find that it challenges my own desire ' that is, the text itself makes a claim on me, judges and commands me. Ward does not use the language of judgement or command in his work.³⁴ Still, we can apply this language to his account of the witnesses' vision of Jesus' own semiotic life. As above described, witnesses go to Jesus in hopes of gaining an object of fulfillment and instead find a reality that defies their possession by virtue of its own refusal to maintain a stable identity or reality. It is not, therefore, the text's ability to offer a stable claim that mounts a critique of the reader's desire. This is not a Hegelian moment of negation. Rather, it is the text or the Word's instability that challenges the reader's desire ' challenges her own quest for a stable meaning. With respect to Christianity, this means that a witness' self certainty and desire is judged by Jesus' otherness. But for Ward, Jesus' otherness is the diffusion of his identity ' it's possibility for semiotic transformation and instability. A reader's desire for certainty therefore is challenged by the prospect of future interpretations of Jesus' semiotic body. So judged, the reader hereby encounters an authority outside herself and becomes aware of a mandate to participate with this other.
30. A similar dialectical moment appears within rabbinic semiotic activity. If Jesus is the man whose carnality is continually de-stabilized and re-created through the semiotics of receiving and giving signs, so the Torah is the concrete text whose meaning is always received from a prior interpretation and offered to a future interpretation. Christians are privy to and thereby seized by this semiotics when reading the gospel accounts of Jesus while Jews meet this dialectical moment in studying the conversations of rabbinic sages as presented in rabbinic texts. As Robert Gibbs' work has shown, a close analysis of rabbinic texts reveals that while the rabbis described in the texts enter a conversation out of a desire to justify themselves or their own particular claim, their semiotic behavior eventually indicates their awareness of the need to justify their claim for the future reader or interpreter of the claim, that is, for the other.

³²See my "Re-Admitting Philosophy into Contemporary Jewish Thought: An Encounter between Jewish Feminism and Exegetical Jewish Thought," in *On Being Human: Women in Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Hava Tirosh Samuelson (Indiana University Press, forthcoming).

³³Randi Rashkover, "Exegesis, Redemption and the Maculate Torah."

³⁴In my dissertation, "Rosenzweig, Barth and the Theology of Election," (University of Virginia, 2000) I discuss the ramifications of Ward's neglect of a doctrine of command and election in the context of my own effort to assess the theological significance of divine command in Jewish and Christian covenantal life.

Readers of rabbinic texts become privy to this semiotic behavior, both by studying rabbinic conversations as well as by becoming involved in the conversations the texts offer when those conversations offer attractive points of discussion. In rabbinic exegesis, Gibbs says, "I 'use' the text to interpret my world . . . [but] the relation to the text is always open to another reader, to another interpreter . . ." ³⁵ In other words, I go to the text to get something but so involved, realize that my reading is for another. Like Christian witness, rabbinic pragmatics includes this dialectical moment of challenge or command. And, like Christian hermeneutics, the text commands me not because it issues a perfect claim but because it is as David Weiss Halivni says, "maculate" ³⁶ ' that is, it is incomplete at any given moment and therefore implies and requires future interpretations. No witness or claim to interpretation is invulnerable to the creative life of the Word as it will continue through future readers.

31. However, the strength of Ward's semiotics is its appreciation of how the logic of semiotic displacement presupposes the reception of a gift. That is, neither eucharistic participation in the body of Christ nor, rabbinic exegesis mandate a denial of human desire. Rather, both re-situate desire within the context of divine plenitude and creative gift. If Jewish and Christian hermeneutical practice de-stabilize certainty in view of the promise of future interpretations, this suggests that these exegetical practices afford participants opportunities to balance their own desires with their responsibility to the future of the created Word. Still, if this were all, then Christian and Jewish exegetical practices might offer pragmatic bases for ethical life but would leave little room for meeting the interests or desires of the participants themselves. Participants would always, it would appear, forego their own desires for the sake of the future life of the created order. Only a utopian society could survive on such a program. Real societies must constantly balance between concern for the other and concern for oneself, between, in other words, ethics and justice. Fortunately, neither Ward's theology nor much of contemporary Jewish thought are guilty of charges of utopianism. ³⁷
32. As we have seen above, by appreciating how a logic of semiotic displacement presupposes a logic of prior reception, Ward's theology demonstrates the balance between my participation in the future life of the divine Word and my own desire. By contributing to the future life of the divine Word, I also participate in and benefit from the plenitude of the created order or divine grace. One can find the same dynamic within rabbinic hermeneutics. My willingness to forego my desire to possess certainty guarantees that I will also be the beneficiary of others' claims. I participate in an environment of plenitude. There is no rationing of the divine Word. I am always receiving a prior interpretation and always donating a new interpretation. My own individual desire, hereby becomes re-situated into the dynamic and everlastingly abundant life of the divine Word. In other words, participation in the plurivocity of the Torah forbids readers from idolizing any one claim, all the while guaranteeing them everlasting participation in its plenitude. Peter Ochs echoes this theme when describing his project of scriptural reasoning.

Scriptural Reasoning therefore emerges out of the dialectic of modernity as the expression of a new, creative activity. . . . One may begin to see a coherence among

³⁵Robert Gibbs, "Why Textual Reasoning?," *The Journal of Textual Reasoning: Rereading Judaism After Modernity*, volume 1.1., Spring 2002.

³⁶See David Weiss Halivni, *Revelation Restored: Divine Writ and Critical Responses* (Westview Press, 1997).

³⁷Gillian Rose often launched this critique of contemporary Jewish thought. See Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society*, (Blackwell, 1992). Nonetheless, Rose could not consider a number of thinkers whose work, written after her death, focuses on the relationship between desire and ethics e.g., David Novak, Miriam Peskowitz, Rachel Adler, et. al.

the use of the following chain of tropes: a world to come, which is the product of resurrection; the Oral Torah, in which the written Torah lives its resurrected life; recreation, which is the way in which this second life is created; and, finally the “revealing of the divine presence,” which – to be distinguished from some aboriginal divine voice ‘ God speaks again and there is new life. . . . By listening to the voice of our Creator speaking through the words of scripture we have received through the past traditions that have interpreted them, through the sufferings that have engendered the end of modernity, and through finally the hope that must move us if we are at all to move.³⁸

Semiotics of Embodiment and Jewish-Christian Relations

33. The above analysis of the rabbinic character of Christian hermeneutics and the eucharistic character of rabbinic hermeneutics offers new possibilities for Jewish-Christian relations. Not only does Ward’s appreciation for the semiotic value of Jesus’ life overturn any residual mind-body dualism within the classical doctrine of Christ but it also shatters Christian denunciations of Judaism as carnal Israel. Furthermore, Ward unveils a Christian semiotics that in fact, links Jesus with his Jewish body when body is understood rabbinically. Ward’s Jesus traverses the same semiotic journey of donation as the rabbis who converse within rabbinic texts. Eucharistic participation in Jesus’ corporeality parallels rabbinic participation in Torah texts and both enable participants to re-locate their bodies and desires within the environment of the poesis of the divine Word.
34. Once Jews and Christians appreciate the commonalities in their exegetical practices, they acquire the ability and the justification for side-by-side scripture study. Ward’s hermeneutics of witness invites Christians to appreciate and even appropriate strands of rabbinic interpretation. At the same time, Ward’s hermeneutics also shatters long held Jewish misconceptions regarding Christian biblical hermeneutics, revealing what can be understood as the rabbinic character of Christian witness. Finally, with these earlier misconceptions dismissed, Jews and Christians can come together to embark on the important work of celebrating the work of God’s creative Word within the material world.

Notes

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³⁸Peter Ochs, “Rules of Scriptural Reasoning,” *National Society of Scriptural Reasoning*, 1999.