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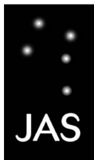

Abrahamic Scriptural Reading from an Anglican Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a distinctively Anglican evaluation of the practice of Scriptural Reasoning. It draws upon personal experience, and frames its discussion with two 'case studies' describing SR study in action. It engages closely with Peter Ochs's positive theorization of Anglican postliberalism from a Jewish perspective in his book *Another Reformation*. With Ochs, the article rejects the premise that a neutral 'common ground' of theoretical agreement is a prerequisite for fruitful encounter across religious traditions, and claims that the traditions in question have generated their own tradition-specific resources for dialogue. The central part of the argument looks for correlations between an Anglican trinitarianism that valorizes historical process and analogical reasoning (something that, with Ochs, might be described as a pneumatological emphasis on the 'found'), and an Anglican legitimation of SR. The value of reading commentary from the Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions alongside scriptural texts is asserted.

KEYWORDS: Anglican, interfaith, postliberalism, Scripture, SR, trinity

Scriptural Reasoning (SR) is above all a communal practice, which makes it very hard to distil or to theorize in the discourse of a single person. That is one reason why the multi-vocal and inter-religious nature of this edition of the *Journal of Anglican Studies* is so welcome and appropriate. But, even when writing in the company of others, the

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risk of discussing SR is that the sense of 'live' interaction with sacred texts and commentary traditions, and the moments of epiphany that seem to go with such interaction, elude capture and therefore go uncommunicated. I do not suppose that I have a solution to this challenge, but I will do my best to address it by beginning and ending this article with a recollection of some of the things that have happened, for me, when reading intensively in SR groups in recent years, and what especially spoke to me as an Anglican in those moments.

Time-taking and Torah

The opening recollection is of a period of several days spent in 2010 studying texts about children and parents. The particular moments of epiphany in these days were, I found, related to the interaction of a passage from Luke's Gospel about the child Jesus growing in wisdom (along with early Christian commentary by Origen on the text[2]) with one of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20 on honouring one's father and mother (along with midrashic commentary from Tractate Bahodesh[3]). The key verse in Luke was this:

> And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man. (Lk. 2.52)

This line comes at the end of a complex passage in which Jesus seems, initially, to rebel against his parents' authority – quitting their care in order to return to the Temple and discuss Torah with the teachers there, and asserting that he is under a higher obligation to his heavenly Father than any he has to them – and then, subsequently, to submit to them again. The divine Wisdom seems momentarily to disclose his supreme power of insight, before veiling himself again in the processes of growth that mark teenage existence. How can this perfect Wisdom at the same time be subject to a process of growth? Even if the authority of parents is shown here to be a relative authority – referred to its source in God – it is nonetheless reaffirmed as a place where Wisdom is nurtured by the teaching and care of people, and in

2. Origen, 'Homily 19, Luke 2.40-46', in *Homilies on Luke, Fragments on Luke* (trans. J.T. Lienhard SJ; Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), pp. 80–83.

3. This tractate forms part of the Mekhilta, which is thought to have gone through a number of redactions before it acquired its final form, probably in the later third century CE. See H Strack and and G Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (trans. and ed. M. Bockmuehl; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), pp. 274–80.

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sets of loving earthly relationships that unfold over time. Jesus Christ returns home with Mary and Joseph.

The key verse from Exodus 20 was this:

> Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. (Exod. 20.12)

What initially caught our attention here, and seemed to find traction with the questions that were arising for us in relation to the Gospel text, was the idea of 'length of days' as a blessing. Exodus tells us in a number of places that having a long time in a good place ('in [or on] the land') is a blessing. We should seek it. Having a short time is undesirable. Moreover, knowing how to honour one's parents well will be to have a path to such blessing opened up. Deciding that we wanted this blessing – length of days in a good place – we asked: what should honouring our father and our mother actually entail?

Tractate Bahodesh 8 generated the beginnings of an answer by giving us a description of some of the fatherly and motherly actions that should elicit and justify the child's honour:

> Rabbi says: It is revealed and known before Him by whose word the world came into being that a man honors his mother more than his father because she sways him with persuasive words. Therefore in the commandment to honor He mentions the father before the mother. And it is revealed and known before Him by whose word the world came into being that a man is more afraid of his father than of his mother because he teaches him the Torah. Therefore in the commandment to fear He mentions the mother before the father. Where something is imperfect Scripture seeks to make it complete. Perhaps, however, it means that the one preceding in this text should actually have precedence over the other, but there is a teaching against this in the passage: 'Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father' (Lev. 19.3), where the mother precedes. Scripture thus declares that both are equal, the one as important as the other.
>
> *Honour Thy Father and Thy Mother that Thy Days May Be Long*. If you honor them the result will be that your days will be long, and if not, the result will be that your days will be short.[4]

Strikingly, this description focuses not on roles like bread-winning, protecting, nursing or feeding us, all of which we might have expected to dominate an account of good parenting, but instead on persuading us with words (the mother) and teaching us the Torah (the father). First and foremost, by wise words, and even seductive words, our

4. Jacob Z. Lauterbach (ed.), *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), I, p. 333.

parents are those who teach us to take time with the words that make us wise: Torah's words. Our parents are conceived here as the primary conduits of Torah, at least at the beginning of life. If our parents teach us well, it is because they themselves have learnt the art of time-taking, and give us time so that we may learn it too. So paradoxically, the pathway to length of days is … length of days! Length of days in the form of (i) a learning and maturing process – a process of growth – is what helps you to perceive and to appropriate length of days as (ii) a blessing, and thereby to value and cherish time itself. Length of days – time-taking – is the condition under which Torah is to be encountered; time is 'where you find' Torah. Honouring your father and your mother might precisely have 'taking time' as one of its key forms, for to take time with your parents (if they are fulfilling their calling) is to take time with Torah, and therefore also with God. If so, this commandment could be read: 'Take time with those who are good at taking time; those who can teach how you should take time with Torah'.

Torah – the divine Wisdom – has its abode in time. Time is given with and in Torah as the condition under which it is to be encountered – which is why length of days comes to be seen as a blessing for those who love Torah.

This provided the context for a moment of illumination of the text from Luke's Gospel (and – even more – Origen's commentary on it[5]). Read in the light of Exodus and Tractate Bahodesh, it became easier to discern a fuller significance in the Gospel's suggestion that Jesus' perfection was quite compatible with – quite displayable in – growth, even if unusually rapid growth, in 'wisdom' and 'favour'. As the one who from a Christian perspective is Torah incarnate, his temporal development is the expression within creatureliness of the fullness of perfection. Time-taking practices – including loving interactions with parents – are where Torah makes its abode. 'Going home with Mary and Joseph' is, so to speak, what you would expect Torah to do.

The scene in the Temple may be a sign of the completeness, or perfection, of Torah. But time-taking practices are how perfection manifests itself in the world of creatures.[6] This is perhaps another way

5. 'Scripture says, ''he grew.'' For, ''he humbled himself, taking the form of a slave.'' By that same power by which he humbled himself, he grows.' Origen, 'Homily 19:2', p. 80.

6. Tractate Bahodesh 8 tells us that 'where something is imperfect Scripture seeks to make it complete' (Lauterbach, *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, p. 333). The art of time-taking is an art which demonstrates how Scripture makes completion out of imperfection.

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of saying that time is the moving image of eternity – or to turn again to Luke's Gospel, saying that Jesus' growing up in the home of Mary and Joseph was the moving image of that brief moment with the teachers in the Temple.

The epiphany for me in this event of reading across religious traditions was an epiphany about some possible meaning(s) delivered by the text of Luke's Gospel itself, as disclosed in interaction with Exodus and rabbinic commentary on Exodus. But it was also – as often in SR – an epiphany about the act of scriptural reading itself, when that reading is devout (i.e., undertaken in search of the texts' divine intent). The set of insights that emerged about the importance of taking time with Torah, and about how completeness is manifest in temporality, undergirds a theology of reading Scripture. If we read a verse and are puzzled by it, or if a verse gives us only one part of a picture, we have to read back and forth between texts, connecting them, letting them resonate with each other until we see the completeness that is really there. This takes time. Taking time over scriptural interpretation is how the completeness of Torah manifests itself to human beings, just as the fullness of perfection that is Christ can only be known by mortal creatures in the mode of time-taking, relating things in time.

The appeal of this emphasis on time-taking for an Anglican is one that ought not to need labouring; David Ford's conversations with Dan Hardy's thought bring this out well. Anglicanism is typically ('at its best') historically highly alert. The adoption of theological methods that were unusually attuned to the effects of historical process may in part have resulted from the need to deal theologically with the peculiar impact of historical circumstances upon the English Church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Such methods have remained prominent in later Anglican thought.

Peter Ochs, whose extraordinarily perceptive Jewish appraisal of contemporary Christian theology in *Another Reformation* has already been referred to by Ford,[7] identifies in this self-conscious valuing of ongoing history as a medium of divine revelation something insistently 'pneumatocentric'. He contrasts it with the christocentrism that typically marks the *sola scriptura* emphasis of the American postliberal enterprise, though he always acknowledges (rightly) that these are differences only of emphasis, and that each 'school' needs the insights of the other. Following Ochs we may say that, for Anglicans,

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

the perfection of God's revelation in Christ is not compromised by – indeed, precisely implies – an ongoing historical dynamic whereby, in God, human beings are constantly invited to relate the given to the found. The givens come alive only in this indefinitely extended series of encounters with new circumstances, and the Anglican assumption is that no new found thing need be construed as a threat to what has been given, for we have to do with the same God both in the given and in the found. The God who has 'stocked our backpack for the journey', so to speak, also 'places things in our path', up ahead of us. The presumption already familiar in theologies that descend from the Yale School[8] that the givens of Christian faith will help to order and illuminate newly encountered experiences or challenges can work the other way too: found things, conceived as gifts of the Holy Spirit who unfolds all the riches that are in Christ, can and must reconfigure, unlock, and amplify what is already held true by the Church.

Supersessionism: The Background of Ochs's Critical Assessment

It is worth highlighting the fact that Ochs's prolonged engagement with contemporary Christian theology in *Another Reformation* has a particular focus and goal: it aims to test how well equipped these varieties of postliberalism are to repair a long Christian history of supersessionist attitudes to the Jews, in which the Christian Church is thought to have simply replaced the Jewish people as 'the people of God', the 'new Israel' having taken over the 'old Israel's' covenant relationship with God.

Ochs identifies three historical periods, or epochs, in Jewish-Christian relations – the third of them only just opening up in the present. We might summarize these three epochs by caricaturing the three attitudes that seem respectively to dominate each of them: kill, marry, or befriend (though, less melodramatically, Ochs calls the first two epochs the epoch of formation and the epoch of assimilation respectively).

In the pre-modern period, after the splitting of church and synagogue, the predominant mark of the relationship was one of competition: one side must be right; the other ought not to exist. In this first epoch, each seeks to eliminate (or 'kill') the other, sometimes intellectually, and sometimes – in some mediaeval Christian treatment of Jews, for example – literally.

8. Ochs points to the work of George Lindbeck and Robert W. Jenson as especially typical of this tendency; see, for example, Ochs, *Another Reformation*, p. 39 and p. 68.

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In the period of Enlightenment – at least in a liberal and rationalist climate of ideas – it was believed by many that religious difference could fall away in the face of a recognition that both, essentially, enshrined the same universal aspirations to human brotherhood and the same commitments to transcendent values. A higher philosophy could effect the union of religious adversaries. They could be 'married'.

But there was a betrayal of some irreducibly precious aspects of the distinct traditions in this supposed consummation, and a growing dissatisfaction with the Enlightenment 'solution' is what Ochs regards as precipitating a present-day re-evaluation of how they can best relate – a postliberal one:

> This epoch … is first and foremost a time when Christian theologians and Jewish theologians both began to observe that their respective communities were no longer burdened primarily by the deep questions that stimulated the second epoch and no longer strengthened by that epoch's answers. … On the level of philosophical and theological reflection, [the third epoch's] primary question is how to rearticulate the rationality that emerges from out of the scriptural traditions, in place of the regnant dialectic between antimodern skepticism and fideism on the one side and, on the other side, various efforts to reassert the 'universality' of rationalist discourses and arguments.[9]

Rather than asserting an absolute difference across which the traditions cannot transact and which they do not wish to tolerate ('kill'), or a 'making one flesh' of the traditions that can only be achieved by a reductionist discourse which eliminates all significant historical differences of practice and thought ('marry'), this third approach believes that their difference can generate friendship. It asserts particularity in the face of attempts to enforce universal reason or values. The differentiating particularity of non-mutually-substitutable religious traditions can give them each their own distinctive resources for appreciating one another and receiving from one another. This is real relationship – not the clash of self-enclosed discourses (that being another contemporary option – one that Ochs calls the 'skeptical').

What this means is that Jews can find ways to approach Christians by being more Jewish rather than less, and Christians can approach Jews by being more Christian. But it also, to reiterate, allows for exchange between them. SR models this possibility, enshrining the right to give unapologetically tradition-specific reasons for engaging in inter-religious encounter and dialogue.

9. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, p. 5.

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The implications of this are potentially immense, and are not just limited to the way that conversation across religious traditions is pursued. I have used ‘friendship’ as a shorthand to describe this third way of relating, and this chimes well with David Ford’s emphasis in his article on the ways that SR fosters deep friendships between its participants. But that should not be the ground for supposing that all SR does is create warmth between intellectual allies. It does something far more remarkable than that, and that is a ‘double deepening’, in which one is frequently equipped for a more full, alert, critical and appreciative inhabiting of one’s own religious tradition by means of a deepening of one’s experience of another (or of several others). I find myself able to gain from the encounter with representatives of other traditions – even when there is quite stark disagreement between myself and them – because it delivers my own religious identity back to me in an enhanced way. I do not just find my particular tradition (in my case, Anglican Christianity) affirmed for the way it gives me grounds for coming to SR conversation in the first place; I find it affirmed also in the process of, and in the wake of, such conversation – and this is, I believe, something that various Muslim and Jewish participants in their varieties of Islam and Judaism also find. This is one reason that quite doctrinally conservative, or traditionally orthodox, Jews, Christians and Muslims are often to be found at SR tables. And here is where a wider set of implications suggests itself, for if SR offers a mode of peaceful engagement across genuine differences not first by confecting some putative common ground at the level of ideas, but by permitting those differences to be aired and explored by harnessing sets of tradition-specific resources in practice, then its success could fuel some more imaginative ways of dealing with other kinds of social pluralism. There is, unfortunately, not space to follow up this suggestion here, although it is given attention in Nicholas Adams’s excellent book *Habermas and Theology*.[10]

A Trinitarian Anglican Rationale for SR Practice

A celebration of the tradition-specific is what justifies an essay like the present one; it permits a specifically Anglican ‘explanation’ of why talking to Jews and Muslims makes sense to me. It will not be – and would not want to be – a generic explanation of why SR makes sense to all Scriptural Reasoners.

10. Nicholas Adams, *Habermas and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See especially ch. 11.

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In my case, I have found the-sense-I-make-of-SR taking a trinitarian form – one that found its way into the Anglican report *Generous Love* to which David Ford has already referred, and to which I was a consultant.[11] The trinitarian structure I was encouraged to articulate in the consultative group's discussions about the report, and which was eventually included by its drafter, will be evident in the three paragraphs that follow here:

> Acknowledging that there is one God, the Creator, an Anglican approach dismisses nothing as outside God's concern, but attends to the world in its manifold differences in the expectation that it ultimately coheres, having one source and one goal in God. This is a discipline against sectarianism, and a resource for living with plurality.
>
> Acknowledging that God is manifest in the particular human life of the Son, Anglicans have been committed to working out their concerns historically. As Jesus' ministry initiated an indefinite series of particular encounters, now limitless in reach in the light of his resurrection, so the Anglican Church has sought in making decisions to attend to the particular contexts of its work. It has treated with caution [universal[12]] claims made for timeless and ahistorical systems, preferring to make its judgements – including those relating to other religions – through seeking to discern the implications of the catholic faith within particular historical and social situations.
>
> Acknowledging that the work of the Holy Spirit is not just about 'inwardness' but provides the operative conditions for flourishing social life, Anglicanism has sought the formation of social contexts in which pressures towards liberty and towards order are both made to subserve a positive vision of human community. Refusing to prioritise either inner conscience or external authority alone in the quest for human flourishing, Anglicans have been determined to minister to whole communities, to find ways of enabling people of robustly differing convictions to live together so that a public good may be formed. This understanding of the Spirit as the source of ground rules for productive social life is transferable to new situations of religious plurality.[13]

The first and third of these three 'articles' underwrite the belief that God, as Creator of all, gives me my neighbours, and that I cannot ever

11. Anglican Communion Network for Interfaith Concerns, *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue, an Anglican Theology of Interfaith Relations* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 2008).

12. I have substituted the word 'universal' for 'generalized' here, for reasons that should become apparent below.

13. Anglican Communion Network for Interfaith Concerns, *Generous Love*, p. 4.

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therefore regard them as beyond my concern. It requires me and my fellow believers to take all that we find seriously; to be open to all comers (as Anglican parish clergy in England in fact are). This does not only mean taking seriously what we find in our Scriptures and tradition, but also what (and who) we find in our parishes, in our communities and in present-day events.

We have observed already how the celebration of tradition-specific resources as the basis of inter-religious encounter and friendship between Christians and Jews is an attitude shared by all the postliberals that Ochs discusses, on whichever side of the Atlantic they are at work. But the additional difference made by this Anglican openness to the 'found', so Ochs argues, is that it finds a warrant for dialogue with Jews not just in the fact that Scripture delivers 'the Jews' to them and thereby foregrounds the task of finding the right way to relate to them, but because the fact that they are present-day neighbours to Christians in a modern social and political order is also seen as the work of God. If a postliberalism of the 'given' can identify in its Scriptures the issue of the ongoing existence of Jews and ask how best to respond to them, an Anglican postliberalism of the 'found' finds the Jews also 'in the Spirit's contingent actions in history'; actions 'that have led Jews and many others to the precincts of the Anglican Church'. Ochs identifies this as a more pneumatological perspective than one looking only to written Scripture for its warrants; it is one that honours the 'unpredictable actions' of the Spirit.[14] Moreover, on this same basis, the British-based postliberalism has the resources for a fuller theological justification of Christian-Muslim dialogue as well, despite the fact that (for obvious reasons) there are no Muslims in its Scriptures: 'The primary basis for Anglican-Muslim dialogue is … pneumatological, with little parallel in American postliberalism.'[15]

This, it can plausibly be claimed, is one beneficial consequence of something for which the Church of England is often fiercely criticized: its close identification with the powers of government vested in monarch and Parliament. Stanley Hauerwas, for example, distrusts the Constantinian nature of this alliance, seeing it as profoundly compromising of the Church,[16] and there is no doubt that it can be,

14. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, p. 191.

15. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, p. 191.

16. Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Politics of Salvation: Why There Is No Salvation Outside the Church', in *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), pp. 23–44.

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and at times has been. What Ochs discerns in this proximity, however, is a framework that is also capable of sustaining responsible attention to the world and to history (i.e., to what must continually be found if the Church is to fulfil its task):

> [T]he Church of England attaches itself to a worldly polity and … shares responsibility for the welfare of all citizens of that polity. … The subjects to whom the church is responsible are not determined a priori; they come as history has led them. … [T]here is no predicting whom history may lead to the polity's – and the church's – doorstep.[17]

The pneumatological openness to meeting Christ 'wherever and however he appears'[18] that Ochs identifies as a general mark of an Anglican ecclesiology here takes the form of an obligation to those one finds 'on one's doorstep'. The Church of England in its established form is committed by its parish structure to minister to all those who live in England. Every area of land is covered by a parish, and every resident of every parish – whether she or he is an Anglican or not, whether she or he is a Christian or not – is someone to whom the Church has an obligation. They are 'souls' for whom the parish understands itself to have 'curatorial responsibility'. The parish and its priest enact a 'chaplaincy to place',[19] not just a targeted ministry to those individuals who are signed up members of the institution. In these terms, no one ought to be regarded as just 'happening to be in the area'. Each person is to be treated as a significant 'finding'. Admittedly, the Church–State relation has taken markedly different forms in other manifestations of Anglicanism worldwide, and the Church of England is by no means a typical province of the Communion as a whole, but my own experience of hearing the Primates of the Communion describe what their churches do is that there is a recognizable family resemblance between them in the degree to which (even when they are minority churches) they take on a high degree of social responsibility.

Returning to the trinitarian 'articles' I set out earlier, we may now ask about the second of them. Its understanding of God's work in Christ is actually a further reason for the emphasis on historical process which was the major theme of the first part of this essay. It underwrites not universality but indefinite extension (analogically structured)

17. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, p. 173.
18. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, p. 169.
19. I owe this concept to Timothy Jenkins. See Jenkins Timothy, *An Experiment in Providence: How Faith Engages the World* (London: SPCK, 2006).

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as the way in which God asks to be encountered in the world of creatures.

Ochs's own distrust of universalizing tendencies leads him to endorse an analogical habit of thought he calls 'pleonasm in reasoning'.[20] He is referring to John Milbank's essay 'Pleonasm, Speech and Writing'.[21] Pleonasm, in the sense of the word that Milbank deploys and that Ochs takes up, is not so much excess verbiage as non-identical repetition, a creative repetition that is at the heart of generative, historical language-use.

Judges in law courts, when they pronounce judgment, announce that they have 'found' in favour of plaintiff or defendant, and in doing so acknowledge that a productive interaction has happened between an inherited set of criteria and a uniquely new circumstance. There may be all sorts of pressures to base law first and foremost on universal principles, but however much any particular tradition of law tries to set such principles up (and some are more consumed with doing so than others) the business of judging by analogy can never wholly be left behind. The English common law tradition's eschewal of ahistorical appeals to timeless principles in favour of a commitment to a 'sapiential' coming to judgment on the basis of close attention to historical precedent is one of those legal traditions that has been most committed to the historically generalizable over the artificially constructed universal. It too is in this sense 'pleonastic', and Anglican theological tradition shares much with it in this respect. It recognizes not a regrettable problem but a participation in God's work whenever the Church finds itself invited to interpret Scripture in new contexts, or whenever it is required to make judgments about complex new issues, or adapt its practices to new situations.

A characteristic feature of such theology is its patience; it is patient in a theologically informed and spiritually sustained way, refusing the idea that the efforts of the ordering intellect can achieve the reconciliation of all historical experience in a definitive formulation or scheme. The humility of the intellect this demands can be explicitly correlated with the awareness that we cannot lay claim to complete holiness this side of the eschaton. Both those 'conservatives' concerned with the 'purity' of a body of doctrine delivered by a cadre of sound knowers to an audience of obedient recipients, and those 'liberals'

20. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, p. 240.

21. Milbank John, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 55–83.

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confident that they know better than the tradition because of their superior intellectual and analytical resources are thereby challenged, as they are by the examples of their forebears, to beware of selling short the principle of the free, prevenient grace of God; the priority of the divine initiative, and our dependence on it at every point, whether in our growth in sanctity or in our growth in knowledge. It is a commitment to this that makes us ready both to find and be found by the Holy Spirit.[22]

In continuity with this, Ochs's model for the non-supersessionist 'befriending' he hopes may be possible between Christians, Jews and Muslims depends upon the idea that each will be able to draw analogies between the divine life that they find in history, world and their Scriptures, and the divine life that they find in other traditions too (in those other traditions' relation to history, world and their Scriptures). They can each hope to find insights in their own traditions non-identically repeated in the other – insights that will prove themselves capable of being brought into relation with one another, and that will thereby bring the different religionists into relation too.

This will mean identifying not a universal concept in reason as the necessary *tertium quid* for relation, but a significant form of some kind – one that emerges within a religious tradition and is situated in its practice. An example that Ochs takes as especially significant for Anglican Christians, with good reason, is the Eucharist. He works this out at greatest length when he is discussing Dan Hardy's theology. In the Eucharist, according to Hardy, Christians find the Spirit (and find Christ in the Spirit). This becomes the condition for their sociality. Eucharistic participation then becomes a particular resource for understanding all dimensions of the Church's life and practice. For Hardy:

> [T]he church will be repaired only if it literally revitalizes the way Eucharistic communion is practiced in each church. On another level, [this] means that the church will be repaired only when the activity of the Spirit that we know prototypically in the Eucharist is reiterated in every dimension of church life.[23]

22. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit that is closest to this in recent theology is, perhaps, the one articulated by Rowan Williams in his essay 'Trinity and Revelation' in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford and London: Blackwell, 2000), in which the Spirit is conceived as spiralling generatively forward in history, helping the Church to think ever more deeply about the meaning of its own thought and practice.

23. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, p. 188.

Notably, Ochs regards the Anglicanism of Hardy's Eucharistic theology as especially suited to this pleonastic extension, and this is because an Anglican doctrine of the real presence does not depend on a model in which an ideal Eucharistic form is subsequently distributed but only validated with reference to its immaculate prototype. Rather, the Eucharistic form is only ever sustained within 'historically and spatiotemporally particular' contexts.[24] It is real, but always also local and temporally situated.

Another way of putting this is to say that the sacramental form of Christ is 'everywhere in particular' by the work of the Spirit. This is a point which the Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes has echoed when arguing that an English tendency to see nature itself as sacramental is a tendency to which Anglicanism has been crucial: real presence without a special metaphysic of transubstantiation makes that presence 'infinitely extendable' (or, in the formulation I am preferring here, 'indefinitely extendable').[25] At this point we see again the category of the general to be a category that is both crucial and risky. For Hardy and Ochs do indeed want to say that a certain sort of generalization is legitimate – and indeed essential if any of their optimism about the possibility of recognition across religious traditions is to be justified. But this cannot be a generality that is really supposed-universality by another name. It is a generality that may only be approached by way of the particular in a series of specific analogical connections; a generality which may never leave the particular behind:

> [W]hat Hardy recognizes within his denomination's experience of communion must, he believes, have an analogue in the way that the Spirit visits each human community, however differently each community may name and recognize these visitations.[26]

He is for this reason willing to draw analogies beyond his specific Eucharistic examples, but he is not willing to do so by way of a universal concept. Or to put it another way, his ecclesiology is 'always local to his account of a particular church in the Anglican Communion', even if, at the same time, 'always general' – both in its claim to illuminate a wider account of the Church and also to yield a description of the dynamics of human sociality.[27] For Ochs, this is

24. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, p. 252.

25. Paul Fiddes, in a point made in discussion at the Oxford Theological Society in May 2008.

26. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, p. 188.

27. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, p. 183.

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reminiscent of Talmudic thinking, even as it is typical, arguably, of a figural tradition of reading within the Church:

> [Hardy's] kind of … generalization displays what the philosopher Charles Peirce calls 'indefinite growth,' as opposed to abstract 'universalization.' This means that the type will reappear in various analogous ways, but not in ways that we individual thinkers can anticipate.[28]

At the beginning of this article, I made an argument that Scripture requires time-taking. It is as though Scripture comes in a little sachet with a message that reads 'in order to enjoy this product at its best, just add time'. Time, and the work of interpreting Scripture in time, are almost in some way 'internal moments' of Scripture's very fullness of perfection.

The sections that have followed – and especially these last paragraphs about analogical reasoning – have widened that claim. It is not just time that helps us to enjoy the 'product' (Christian Scripture) at its best; it is an openness to the world in which the forms of reasoning and belief encoded in Scripture, and expressed in liturgy and sacrament, find echoes, resonances and amplifications in analogous forms. These too are in some way called for by Scripture, and they help to disclose Scripture's fullness, or completeness. Reading with Jews, Muslims, non-Anglican Christians, and others besides, can help to draw some of that fullness into view. What might initially have felt like an interruption, or a transgression (even an 'emergency') comes to feel like an occasion of epiphany (an 'emergence').

Under the stimulus of this thought, I want to end with a second recollection of SR in practice.

States of Emergency and What Emerges from Them

In 2009, we studied texts about the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34, the flood in Surah 11 of the Qur'an, Jesus' three urgent encounters in Luke 9, which we read as recalling the night of the Exodus or the flight from Sodom and Gomorrah, and the problem of wayward widows in 1 Timothy 5. One striking theme that manifested itself in different texts was precisely the role of what could be termed 'states of emergency'.

States of emergency can generate exceptions, and exceptions can themselves provoke states of emergency. So, as Noah's instructive question to God in Surah 11 helped us to see,[29] the son who perishes

28. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, p. 189.

29. In effect, having lost a son in the flood, Noah holds before God his earlier promise that none of Noah's family would be lost (Surah 11.45).

in the flood is an exception to God's promise to save Noah's family. And, as Augustine's commentary on Luke 9 helped us to see, Jesus' command to follow him in this place, time and circumstance is an exception to the general (and still valid) law to honour one's parents.[30] Then we have the 'exceptions' represented by Dinah's forced entanglement with someone outside the tribe, which prompts its own state of emergency. And there is the 'exception' represented by the widows of 1 Timothy, who seem not to be very 'widow-like' (at least in the view of the text).

What happens with these exceptions? A certain highly creative, innovative activity goes into defining a new context within which the exception will no longer be an exception, but will henceforth make sense. In Surah 11, the new context is the disclosure of the son's unrighteousness, and the implication that the natural family bond is not enough in itself to guarantee his salvation – a 'de-naturalization' of family and tribe which we may compare with certain passages in the New Testament. In Luke 9, the new context is the Kingdom and its demands, and the pressing imminence of the Passover sacrifice on the cross which will inaugurate this Kingdom. In the story of Dinah (if we go with the tradition of Genesis Rabbah[31]), the amazingly creative new context is the redesignation of Dinah as a Canaanite, thus making her sufficiently other to the tribe to reintegrate her with it through marriage (even marriage to her brother). This gives her a home again, and a place 'whither she may carry her shame'. And in 1 Timothy, a less adventurous piece of creative legislation makes a list, and a set of criteria to help distinguish the real widows from the others.

In all this, I was reminded of aspects of the peace process in Northern Ireland – as of various other processes of mediation and reconciliation between opposed groups – where at the same time as certain official pronouncements were being made that had a hard-line and 'absolute' feel to them ('we do not do deals with terrorists'), there was also a more invisible but crucially creative process of quiet negotiation going on, and it was this perhaps even more than the

30. '[I]t is place, and time, and circumstance, which is in this case to give way to place, and time, and circumstance. A father must be honoured, but God must be obeyed. He that begat us must be loved, but He that created us must be preferred. ''I am calling you,'' says He, ''to my Gospel; I have need of you for another work'. Augustine, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* (trans. R.G. Macmullen; Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1844), Sermon 50, p. 399.

31. *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis* (trans. H. Freedman and M. Simon; London: Soncino Press, 1939), II, pp. 735–44.

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official pronouncements – and certainly this in addition to and in dialectical relation to the official pronouncements – that eventually yielded the new settlement. In our texts, we meet some hard-line official pronouncements ('we do not intermarry with Hivites'; 'you owe absolute obedience to your parents'; or, indeed, 'if you join this religious group you are to have no more relation to your natural family'). Commentaries then emerge as one of the crucial places where mediatory negotiation goes on in relation to such texts (and is perhaps, secretly, authorized by those texts, as negotiators are by politicians). Commentaries negotiate the relation between the pronouncements of the scriptural texts and new places, times and circumstances.

The value of reading authoritative commentary traditions alongside scriptural texts has been an important recognition for SR practitioners (though some still feel uncomfortable with it on the grounds that the practice is at its best when focused on Scripture alone). This does, of course, bring into view the important fact that there are significant differences in the authority accorded to scriptural texts in Judaism, Christianity and Islam respectively (and differences between their various denominations too). Most vividly obvious is the difference between an Islamic belief that the Qur'anic words are a pristine rendition of divine utterance and the general (if not ubiquitous) Christian view that the interpretative activity of human intellects played a part in the composition of the Bible. SR activity permits these differences to be aired, and they do have an evident effect on the sorts of contributions that participants seem ready to make. Many Muslim participants, for example, will be cautious about entertaining a variety of possible interpretations of a text too playfully.[32] What is important for our purposes here, however, is that despite the differences in attitudes to scriptural authority that exist between the various traditions, all of them have generated plentiful bodies of commentary material.

As an Anglican, I feel able fully to endorse the use of commentary material in SR – partly because of the fruits it has yielded, and partly because it is part and parcel of my valorization of the historical medium in which Scripture is transmitted and continues to be encountered.

32. I think there is a valuable and potentially fascinating piece of research to be done into how different accounts of the authority of scriptural texts correspond to different modes of contribution to SR practice. This has not yet, to my knowledge, been undertaken.

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The theory of reception first developed by Hans Robert Jauss in the 1960s and 70s[33] has seemed to be an ally here, in the way that it relates the past to the present by insisting on the importance of the historical series of interpretations that binds them. It is fundamentally committed to the inescapability of historical process as the medium of human interpretation, and indeed is largely celebratory of it. It advocates the constant relating of the given to the found. As Jauss says, 'embedded in a work' is 'the successive unfolding of the potential for meaning' which belongs to that work, and this meaning is 'actualized in the stages of its historical reception as it discloses itself to understanding judgment'.[34]

Does introducing the study of commentary to SR imply a deficiency in Scripture that needs to be made up? Not if commentary – perhaps also doctrine – is understood as our participation in the process by which 'Scripture completes imperfection'. In some sense, therefore, Scripture requires commentary as a mode of its fullness, not because it has some emptiness that needs compensating for. The exciting possibility of SR is that it is itself generating new bodies of commentary – bodies of commentary that are the product of the collective labour, thought and love of Christians, Jews and Muslims working on these texts together.

Is SR an 'exception', which perhaps arises from a state of emergency, and perhaps – for some – represents one? If so, what creative and energetic activity might SR provoke in our respective religious traditions to give it a new context in which it is no longer an exception but makes sense, and yields a new settlement, and new peace?

33. Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (trans. T. Bahti; (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

34. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 30.

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