PRAGMATIC CONDITIONS FOR JEWISH-CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE*

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How is Jewish-Christian theological dialogue possible today? Assuming that the possibility of dialogue is not something to be envisaged by any individual thinker *a priori*, I offer here a study of two examples of successful Jewish-Christian theological dialogue: George Lindbeck's dialogue with Jewish sources and Michael Wyschogrod's dialogue with Christian sources. To garner some general lessons from these examples, I try to reconstruct the general conditions of dialogue which they appear to share. Discovering that the two dialogues may share identical conditions of problem-solving, I label these "pragmatic" conditions, after Charles Peirce's definition of pragmatism as the claim that the purpose of rational inquiry is to solve the problems that stimulate it.[1] I conclude that these are the conditions that may underlie theological dialogue among the specific group of Jewish and Christian theologians to which I believe Lindbeck and Wyschogrod belong. These conditions may underlie dialogues typical of other groups, too, but there is no way to know this *a priori*.

In this study, I use the term "dialogue" to refer to a verbal exchange in which two parties expect that what each one believes may be modified by what it hears and, therefore, in which neither party prejudges the outcome of the dialogue. I do not assume that the parties must bring to the dialogue benevolent feelings toward each other; ethical emotivism (or the attempt to adopt what one believes to be morally correct feelings) may in fact interfere with dialogue by prejudging its conditions and results. I say two "parties," because this definition need not refer to two individual persons speaking

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face to face. In the examples I am considering, we have a contemporary rabbinic Jew in dialogue with Barth and a contemporary Christian influenced by Barth and in dialogue with rabbinic Judaism.

By "theological", I mean that the dialogue is about what the two parties understand to be the fundamental relationships, principles or rules that inform their religious lives. I will leave the term "religious" undefined: the specific case I am discussing concerns contemporary versions of biblically-based notions of how to act in the world and of who tells us to do so.

Let me offer a few examples of Jewish-Christian exchange which would not fit my definition of theological dialogue. First, the medieval disputation-trials, such as those of Barcelona and Paris. These were theological, but not dialogues, because neither party expected its beliefs to be modified (note that I do not take up issues of morality or power, only the structure of expectations). Second, the 18th century exchanges between the Jew, Moses Mendelssohn and such Christian proponents and subtle critics of the Enlightenment as Wilhelm Dohm, John Lavater and Josef Sonnenfels. Mendelssohn was challenged to explain what reason there was for a separate Jewish religion after the European Enlightenment and the Jewish eman-cipation. In his *Open Letter*, in *Jerusalem*, and in other writings Mendelssohn responded, indirectly, by calling on both religions to identify what they held in common independently of their revealed traditions. It was a call to separate natural religion from the merely conventional religion of these traditions and thus to discern a universal natural law.[2] In the terms in which they were offered, I find these Enlightenment exchanges less than dialogic because the visions of universality which animated them could not be modified through dialogue any more than the corresponding medieval visions. Both the Enlightenment and the medieval discussants tended to regard truth as ultimately fixed and knowable *a priori* and therefore not dependent on dialogue for its expression.

I. Jewish-Christian Theological Dialogue in the Works of Lindbeck and Wyschogrod

Lindbeck's dialogue with Jewish sources is displayed most clearly in his *The Nature of Doctrine*, along with several more recent essays.[3] Wyschogrod's dialogue with Christian sources is displayed most clearly in his *The Body of Faith*.[4] In this long section, I search out the conditions of Jewish-Christian theological dialogue in these writings of Lindbeck and Wyschogrod by asking what the writings reveal about the purposes for which each inquires into the other's faith. I begin by examining the two theologians' explicit projects, as displayed in the plain sense of their texts. Turning from one set of texts to the other, I then examine what other dimensions of inquiry may be displayed less overtly.

The plain sense of these two books indicates that their authors are biblical theologians. Wyschogrod explains in his Introduction that, unlike some other Jewish philosophers, he received a traditional background and was not an outsider rediscovering his roots, but "an insider whose Judaism has been deepened by his philosophy and whose philosophy has been enriched by Judaism." He adds, "My Judaism is biblical . . . because the Judaism of the rabbis is biblical."[5] The central analyses of his book, in fact, are about what the Bible says of Judaism and to Judaism and about how Judaism could not be other than biblical. But more on that in a moment. First, let us consider Lindbeck's biblicism. In an essay entitled "Doctrine in Christianity: A Comparison with Judaism,"[6] he notes that both he and David Novak — the Jewish philosopher whose work I will be discussing in detail in Part II — "take an approach to doctrines which stresses their role in the formation and maintenance of communal traditions of practice and belief."[7] He observes that both he and Novak are concerned with the mainstreams of their respective traditions, within which they seek to distinguish "what Novak calls an 'authoritative structure'."[8] For Lindbeck, this structure consists of "narratives of what Erich Auerbach called the 'realistic' type, as represented centrally by the gospel stories about Jesus."[9] These stories, he says, are community-constituting to the extent that the dogmas they engender regulate communal belief and practice.[10] If, with Novak again, Lindbeck's perspective is related to what he calls the "sociology of knowledge", it is because of their shared conviction "that biblical religion has to do with chosen peoples, and that is why the social or communal role of doctrines is primary."[11] For Lindbeck, in other words, Christian doctrines are the way the Christian community — as "the story-shaped Church" — reads the biblical narratives as directives for communal belief and practice. It is at this point that Lindbeck invokes Jewish prototypes of his approach to Christianity. But before considering what these are and why he invokes them, let us return to consider Wyschogrod's Jewish biblicism.

Wyschogrod, too, reads biblical narratives as directives for communal beliefs and practice, in this instance deriving the premises for his theological reasoning from the Bible's portrayal of humanity's capacity to reason. He writes, "reason as such is not an object of investigation for the biblical writer."[12] Humans are central to the Bible, but not as reasoners; "humans are not an object in the biblical narrative, but the beings to whom the events recorded happen." They are therefore, above all, subjects, and to the extent that it is possible to define this subject, "it is only possible by relating [it] to the supreme subject, God . . . Humanity's fundamental project is not understanding but obedience to the divine command. . . ."[13] "And yet, reason plays a very important role in the Bible", or, rather,

intelligence. Reason is a philosophic construct with definite theoretical implications. Intelligence is a working endowment rather than a theory

and can be active in the absence of a philosophical theory about the rationality of the universe and the structure of mind that enables it to grasp the rationality inherent in the world. Intelligence is a quality of brightness that enables all human beings to some extent and some to an extraordinary extent to grasp relations and implications in complex situations . . . In Judaism, intelligence has always played a rather prominent role.[14]

Wyschogrod explains that, as explicated by the rabbis, this Jewish intelligence, obedient yet assertive, is the intelligence of the rabbinic Bible interpreter who receives the biblical word as law. Entering into "the primordial clash of [human and divine] subjectivities, this law is 'the will of God'."[15] As such, "it is directed towards a class of actions,"[16] and is thus abstracted from the particular cases displayed or presupposed in the biblical text. Since God has given Israel its law text, Israel's sages, here the rabbis, have the power, autonomously, to define the abstract meaning of their law intratextually. Nevertheless, Wyschogrod adds, the meanings abstracted by the rabbis only inadequately represent God's will, which is enacted only in particular or concrete situations. The rabbis therefore supplement their textual hermeneutic with considerations of precedent and case law. To learn from case law is, once again, to abstract the law from the cases given, which means the rabbis must, once again, assume the authority to offer autonomous judgments about what God wants of the people of Israel. Wyschogrod warns that this authority remains limited[17] and that modern Jewish orthodoxy errs when it forgets these limits. It is true, he says, that in delivering the Torah as law, God withdrew from immediate communication with Israel: Israel's autonomy is correlative to God's post-prophetic distance. Nevertheless, he adds, even in this time of withdrawal, rabbinic judgments are subject to verification:[18] our judgments await God's confirming word, and this is the word we seek through prayer and await in the unfolding drama of Israel's and thus humanity's future. It is at this point that Wyschogrod involves Christian as well as Jewish prototypes for his argument, which means it is now time that we return to Lindbeck's work and ask how and why each of these thinkers calls on the other's biblical tradition to support his own argumentation.

First the how. For Lindbeck, the rabbinic practice of Scriptural interpretation exemplifies certain fundamental features of the Christian practice he finds authentic and worthy of renewal. The foundational story of the story-shaped Church is the story of Israel, without which the Gospel story is not the story it is: "history", he writes, "shows that Israel's story has unique ability to confer communally significant meaning on whatever happens."[19] The life of the Church is shaped by the way it interprets the story of Israel, and the prototype for this kind of interpretation is the rabbinic practice of homiletical interpretation, *midrash aggadah*. In a paper on "Martin Luther

and the Rabbinic Mind'', he argues, in fact, that Luther's conception of the creed is fundamentally homiletic, or ''haggadic'', because the gospel itself is *haggadah*.[20] Following Max Kadushin, Lindbeck understands rabbinic or gospel stories to be applications of the dogmas, or ''value-concepts'', basic to Judaism or Christianity. While identified through certain doctrinary formulations, these dogmas display their meaning as rules for regulating communal belief and practice.[21] Rabbinic *halakhah* is a prototype for this kind of regulation, and the rabbis' *midrash halakhah*, or legal interpretation, a prototype for regulatory interpretation in the Church. Lindbeck writes, ''my suggestion is that Christianity has been and could again be much more like Judaism in this respect than is often supposed.''[22] The rabbinic community, or *kahal*, then becomes a prototype for the community of Christian interpreter-practitioners.[23]

Wyschogrod writes in his Introduction,

> In this work there is an ongoing dialogue with Christianity. While the dialogue between Judaism and Christianity has been of interest to me for some years, it is not the primary focus of attention in these pages. Nevertheless, it is far from absent. Given the centrality of theology and the resulting high state of its development in Christianity, I have found it most helpful to compare the Jewish standpoint with that of Christianity at certain critical points in the discussion . . . The temptation here is to make the contrast as sharp as possible, thereby, at times, distorting Judaism. I have attempted to avoid this temptation. The incarnational direction of my thinking became possible for me only after I succeeded in freeing myself from the need to be as different from Christianity as possible.[24]

The ''highly developed'' theology of interest to Wyschogrod belongs to the Reformation, since ''it is not until the Reformation and the work of Luther and Calvin that the gulf between philosophy and the Bible is perceived.''[25] Into the twentieth century, Wyschogrod's Reformation model is Karl Barth, whose *Church Dogmatics* offers a Christian prototype for Wyschogrod's own dogmatics of the people Israel. Wyschogrod notes that, ''for Barth, the Church is the community of those elected in grace for testimony to their faith,'' a testimony of life led, of public worship and of proclamation.[26] Church ''dogmatics is thus an act of proclamation by means of which the Church remains faithful to its trust from its founder.''[27] Finally,

> Barth proclaims the word of God. He does not philosophically reason his way to it. He does not provide a bridge for the reader by means of which he can pass gradually from the world of man to the world of God. Instead, he plunges his reader into the world of faith without defensive introductions . . . Reading a page of Barth is somewhat like shock

therapy because it introduces the reader . . . to a frame of reference that attempts only to be true to itself and its sources and not to external demands . . .[28]

If we substituted Israel for the Church, this would sound very much like a description of Wyschogrod's own project in *The Body of Faith*: a dogmatics of the elected people, whose testimony is displayed in their life led, their worship and in proclamations of faith like Wyschogrod's own, which are proclamations of how the biblical word is lived in the history of the people Israel. In his proclamation, Wyschogrod makes bold use of one other Christian prototype, available to him "only after [he] succeeded in freeing [himself] from the need to be as different from Christianity as possible." This is the Pauline complaint, reiterated as he says in the works of Martin Buber,[29] against the Pharisees' attempt to live that biblical word as law. Here, Wyschogrod's own proclamation reads like "shock-therapy". After having assured the reader of his commitment to *halakhah* as the performative life of the biblical word, Wyschogrod turns to consider what he calls "the disobedience of Orthodox Judaism". Sure, he says, the Orthodox uphold the Law, but Buber has reason to upbraid them for allowing "God's living presence as the Thou of this moment [to freeze] into an objective system of demands from which the living presence of God must have departed long ago."[30] In Wyschogrod's terms, orthodoxy errs in this way when it forgets that, in an age in which revelation has ceased, the rabbis have both the power to interpret God's will and the capacity to err in their interpretation. Their judgment is compelling only when offered with a prayerful sense of its dependence on God's acceptance. "The lack of inner turmoil that describes much of Orthodox existence probably results from a weakening of the sense of direct responsibility to God that is the basis of religious reality."[31]

There, then, was a brief review of *how* Wyschogrod and Lindbeck each calls on the other's tradition to support his own argumentation. I turn, finally, to consider *why* each chooses to do this.[32] This is the point where I take up my pragmatic analysis, describing the implicit "why" I believe we may read into the explicit "how".

My thesis is that the theological inquiries of Wyschogrod and Lindbeck are in dialogue because they are responding to analogous problems that really affect their religious lives; that they have analogous but complementary interpretations of these problems; that they believe these problems have something to do with the limits imposed on their religious practice by the dichotomization of their two religions; and that they therefore believe that there is in the other religion an essential part of the solution to their problems. In other words, they are in fruitful dialogue because each believes that the other's faith is in some way essential to him: they are not both seeking the same truth (a static goal), but each is seeking that truth which could be spoken to him at this time only by the other. Specifically, I believe

each thinker identifies his problem with a modern version of the perennial Western tendency to practice theology as ontology (what I will label the practice of ''onto-theology''). In addressing the specific ills which this tendency engenders in his own religious tradition, he discovers that the other's tradition may offer remedies for these ills.

This thesis translates into a pragmatic model of Jewish-Christian theological dialogue, which is simply the model I have constructed to account for why this particular dialogue succeeds as a dialogue. I am not arguing that their theologies are necessarily successful, only that their dialogue is. According to the pragmatic model, theological dialogue succeeds if it fulfills four conditions. I conclude this section by outlining the four conditions and suggesting how they are illustrated in the writings of these two theologians.

The Pragmatic Conditions of Jewish-Christian Dialogue

The first condition is *reciprocal interest*. To be in dialogue, sub-groups of Jews and Christians must be concerned about real problems that affect their respective communities, and they must be attracted to something in the practices of the other community that may assist them in resolving the problems. In our case, the Christian Lindbeck is attracted to the performative and communal character of traditional rabbinic text interpretation; the Jew is attracted to the spirituality and sophistication of Christian theological reflection. It is very difficult clearly to define the irritants that may underlie these problems.[33] To begin the search, groups may consider the practices to which they are attracted to be indices of the irritants. In our case, the Christian group may ask why their problem seems to indicate a need for more performative community; the Jewish community, why they seem to need a more direct sense of God's presence among them as well as need for more sophisticated tools of critical reflection.

The second condition is the *possibility of reciprocal, pragmatic inquiry*. Pragmatic inquiry here means the attempt to identify an irritant in such a way that the identification engenders appropriate corrective behavior. Sub-groups of Jews and Christians in dialogue must acknowledge the reciprocal character of their pragmatic inquiries and then suspect that they may in some way share a common irritant. In our case, the reasoning might go something like this: we have assumed our practices are different. We appear to help each other in contrary ways: very loosely put, the one who has the law needs the spirit and vice-versa. Perhaps, then, we suffer contrary problems. If contrary problems arise in what we might call contrary practices, then perhaps the problems are symptoms of the way contrary practices respond to a single irritant. Indeed, we are both critics of onto-theology, so let us suppose that the ontologizing tendency is our shared irritant.

In pragmatic inquiry, a way of naming an irritant has truth-value with respect to the success or failure of the corrective behavior which that naming engenders. Having, *per hypothesis*, identified a shared irritant, Jews and

Christians in dialogue may share information about how to remove it. They will most likely generate this information by offering accounts of how their communities came in contact with the irritant and of how the irritant then elicited their respective problems. In our case, the two may, for example, identify the ontologizing tendency with a tendency both communities have acquired through their involvement with Hellenistic thought and practice,[34] with certain hermeneutical developments,[35] or with modern university inquiry.[36] They may then account for the complementarity of their dis-comforts this way: the effect of the ontologizing tendency was to bifurcate their communities' practices, forcing dichotomizing alternatives. Among these were attempts of the patristic Church to affirm spirit over body, letter over law, the new Israel over the old; and attempts of modern Jews to affirm their orthopraxy over understanding (Orthodoxy) or universal ethics over national cult (Reform). If so, corrective action should enable Jews and Christians to reaffirm non-dichotomizing practices.

   The third condition is the *possibility of a shared, corrective affirmation.* Jews and Christians in dialogue will consummate their dialogue by declaring their shared commitment to a corrective activity, which is a redemptive activity. Their redeemer is one, as unique or dynamical object of their pragmatic inquiry. As immediate or concrete subject of their renewed lives, their redeemer becomes again two, or more, that is, known intimately only in the distinct if complementary lives of their two or more communities. For Lindbeck and Wyschogrod, this reaffirmation entails what they consider a return to biblical narrativity. It is a declaration that, independently of their ontologizing practices, our communities live, in fact, by way of our interpretations of biblical narratives, so that, if we suffer from ontology, then our redemptive activity lies in recovering our relationship to those narratives, whose author we now know as our redeemer. Our redeemer is one who speaks and whose redemptive word we hear by way of our biblical texts. These texts are not one, however. Their differences are the differences of our communities, complementary in their contrareity.

   The last condition is that other questions are left unanswered, or for another dialogue. The pragmatic theory of dialogue is, itself, occasioned by the dichotomizing character of onto-theology. That fact should give pause to students of Lindbeck or Wyschogrod who might be tempted to generalize the conclusions of this particular dialogue beyond the conditions of this dialogue. This includes those who might privilege biblical theology the way their perceived adversaries privilege various sorts of onto-theology. What am I saying? Wouldn't such students found their theologies in the scriptural *text* rather than in ontology? To respond to this question, I turn next – with apologies to less specialized readers – to a more technical philosophic analysis of the relation between scriptural reading and ontology in contemporary theological dialogue. In this case, the analysis is itself dialogic: a dialogue between the pragmatic method of studying theological

dialogue and the phenomenological method David Novak introduces in his ground-breaking, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue, A Jewish Justification.*[37] Readers will find that Novak's extensive undertaking provides a scholarly context for my own exercise. In fact, I believe that Novak's phenomenological method of analyzing dialogue is a cousin to the pragmatic method I employ in this essay.

II. Ontology and Scripture in Postcritical Theological Dialogue

Novak's Theology of Jewish-Christian Dialogue

I begin with a summary of Novak's book. Novak offers a new, theological model of Jewish-Christian dialogue as an alternative to three earlier, unsuccessful models. The first of these is triumphalism, of the sort I earlier attributed to the medieval disputations and, in a modified way, to Enlightenment arguments.[38] The second is theological relativism, which overcomes triumphalism at the cost of denying each community its claim "that it has received a revelation of the truth from God unlike that of any other community."[39] The third unsuccessful model is what Novak calls "religious syncretism": the assumption "that the experience of the dialogue itself is so profoundly original that it has the power to generate new forms of religious life."[40] Against these models, he argues that "for the dialogue to remain a dialogue *between* Jews and Christians, it can only be an expression *from* Judaism *to* Christianity and an expression *from* Christianity *to* Judaism."[41]

The leading principle of Novak's argument is phenomenological. Following the phenomenological method, he first establishes what is given to us: the fact that Jewish-Christian theological dialogue "is a present reality and one that shows no signs of being abandoned in the foreseeable future."[42] Then he seeks to identify the transcendental conditions for the possibility of this fact: in other words, "to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic manifestations of it"[43] and to identify the conditions of its authentic manifestation. Distinguishing his approach from Husserl's, he explains that he identifies these transcendental conditions from "a standpoint from within Judaism as a living religious tradition to which I am primarily bound," rather than from the standpoint of "the ego qua cogito."[44] This is his pivotal move, for it enables him to argue from the singularity of fact to the generality of presupposition without extending this generality beyond the bounds of an actual religious tradition. In the last chapter of his book, Novak introduces his theological innovation in terms of this conception of generality. Before generalizing, however, he devotes five chapters to placing his analysis within the bounds of previous Jewish discussions about the possibility of theological dialogue. He examines the rabbinic doctrine of the Noahide Laws,[45] attitudes towards Christianity in medieval European law (*halakhah*), Maimonides' view of Christianity, the

Reform Jewish Quest for the Jewish Jesus, and Franz Rosenzweig's theology of the Jewish-Christian relationship. Observing that no single source in Jewish tradition provides an adequate model of the conditions of authentic dialogue today, he concludes that a new theological formulation is needed to bring the strength of previous formulations to bear on the contemporary discussion.

Novak bases his formulation on the only "logic of the relation of the singular and the general" that he believes will enable us to identify the authentic conditions of contemporary Jewish-Christian theological dia-logue. The issue is how to conceive of those generalities with respect to which the two dialogue partners can discuss their different accounts of revelation. Novak argues that previous models of dialogue failed because they were attached to notions of generality that were incompatible with Jewish and Christian claims about the singularity of each of their accounts of revelation. According to the triumphalist model, "the general is governed by the singular,"[46] which means that one partner's rules of discourse are extended over the others. According to the universalistic model, "the singular is taken to be that which leads toward the general,"[47] which means that there must be a single, universal truth the acquisition of which would dissolve individual differences. According to this alternative, which he attributes to the Stoics as well as to Kant and to Hermann Cohen, the task of each dialogue partner is to learn to transcend its particularity and, thus, to achieve generality at the cost of singularity. Novak finds a third alternative almost compelling. This is to characterize "the general as an undifferentiated mass that develops into structured singularity at the completion of its process."[48] This model, which he attribute to Aristotle and Maimonides, enables us to refer to a general potency which is actualized, in varying degrees, in the discourses of each of the dialogue partners. He judges the model inadequate, however, because, by envisaging only a single teleology that links potency to act, it requires our judging one of the dialogue partners more complete than the other.

Novak notes that, by acknowledging the role of grace in revelation, Maimonides left room for a less deterministic teleology: or, in other words, for a model that lets God influence the potentially plural ways in which generality may be realized in the singular. According to Novak's model, "the general [is] the background of possibility, part of which is realized in the singularity of Jewish revelation,"[49] but then part again in Christian revelation. Adapting Kant's language to a use Kant did not endorse, Novak characterizes this ground of possibility as the conditions of experience which enable human subjects "to accept revelation and order it in humanly intelligible ways."[50] Re-applying Kant's categories to a religious epistemo-logy the way Maimonides reapplied Aristotle's teleology, he interprets Kant's intelligent or *noumenal* thing-in-itself (*Ding-an-sich*) as "what stands behind revelation, or better, *who* stands behind revelation. It is not a surd,

as it is for Kant, because God speaks."[51] God is the ultimate source of revelation as a singular object, given to experience and contingent. The general conditions for experiencing that object lie within the human subject.[52] For Novak, these conditions constitute the shared border between Jewish and Christian religious traditions, which border becomes then the condition for Jewish-Christian theological dialogue. George Pepper has lucidly paraphrased Novak's position this way:

> In Jewish-Christian relations, the general is the realm of possibility for God's revelation to be realized in singular faith communities. It constitutes the border both religious communities share. Revelation would then be the object given to finite human experience, together with structures that make revelation immediately understandable to its recipients.[53]

Novak concludes by identifying the common border between Judaism and Christianity as a shared theonomous morality or anthropology, rather than as a shared faith: the common morality is realized differently in the different faith traditions. He says the common morality displays the following "four theological affirmations":

1. The human person is created by God for the primary purpose of being related to God.
2. This relationship with God is primarily practical . . .
3. The human person is created as a social being . . .
4. The ultimate fulfillment of human personhood . . . lies in a future and universal redemptive act by God, one as yet on the unattainable historical horizon.[54]

From Phenomenology to Pragmatism: On Novak's Community of Inquiry

The pragmatic method of inquiry is founded in the phenomenological method, from which it is separated by just one question: "what problem perceived from within what community of inquiry would stimulate a given phenomenological study?" To move from a phenomenological to pragmatic study of dialogue, we therefore need only ask "what problem perceived from within what community of inquiry would stimulate a phenomenological study like Novak's?"[55]

On several occasions,[56] I have identified Novak as a member of the community of "postcritical" Jewish and Christian theologians, joining Jewish thinkers in a tradition that links Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig to Abraham Heschel and Wyschogrod and Christians in a tradition that links Karl Barth to Hans Frei, Stanley Hauerwas, Paul Van Buren and Lindbeck. Members of the postcritical community display such common characteristics

as these. All are philosophically trained religious practitioners who have examined and found faulty attempts to place theological discourse within *a priori* philosophic categories and, thus, to identify God in some way with being and theology with ontology. They find that the word of Scriptures – *dibbur* or *logos* – is more than being, yet is made manifest in the way it influences the ontologies and belief systems of historically contingent communities of practice. They are thus biblically-based theologians. At the same time, these thinkers find in philosophic discourse a powerful tool for clarifying the bearing of supra-ontological realities on the everyday lives of community members. Most of them also find themselves engaged, willy nilly, in some struggle to place their philosophic drives in the service of what they consider a faithful life of obedience to God. Not averse to drawing lessons from their own experiences, they write about the misuses of philosophy in modern religious inquiry and about how they may be corrected. Finally, while respecting historical and theological differences between Christianity and Judaism, they also find that some forms of Jewish-Christian exchange contribute to their work in an essential way.

According to Novak, as noted earlier, this exchange emerges out of a "general background of possibility", which he identifies with the four "theological affirmations" of a common, theonomous morality. As a pragmatic interpreter, I cannot yet conclude that these affirmations represent the background, or what I call the "conditions" of theological dialogue in the postcritical community. I have to ask, first, what would *stimulate* members of the postcritical community to ground their theological dialogue in a description of these affirmations. To find out, I return to the central topic of this essay: Jewish-Christian dialogue in the works of Lindbeck and Wyschogrod, Novak's colleagues in the postcritical community.

The Place of Phenomenology in a Pragmatic Model of Theological Dialogue

Both Lindbeck and Wyschogrod are attracted to Barth's critique of modern philosophy's intrusion into theological discourse and to his doctrine of the textual, or narrative, foundations of theological inquiry. At the same time, their critique of onto-theology may not bring with it an adequate account of the role of philosophic inquiry in postcritical dialogue. I believe that integrating Novak's phenomenological model of dialogue with the pragmatic one may provide us with an adequate account not only of the conditions of postcritical dialogue, but also of the role of philosophy in the postcritical community.

For Novak, the "background of possibility" for Jewish-Christian theological dialogue is a noumenal reality about which he believes Jews and Christians share the "four affirmations" of a "theonomous morality". I assume that, following his phenomenological method of inquiry, he has

identified these affirmations by formulating what he, from within the Jewish tradition, takes to be the transcendental conditions for the possibility of the norms of behavior shared by Jews and Christians. Following a pragmatic method of inquiry, I have asked "what problem perceived from within what community of inquiry would stimulate a formulation like Novak's?" Having offered a theory about the community of inquiry, it is now time for me to offer a theory about the stimulus. Drawing on the study of Novak's two colleagues in the postcritical community and assuming that community members are stimulated by a common family of problems, I offer the following, multi-leveled theory to account for the role of phenomenology in Novak's inquiry and, more generally, for the role of philosophy in postcritical theology.

The theory is based on a characterization of ontology similar to the one Lindbeck presents in *The Nature of Doctrine*.[57] In the terms I use, an ontology describes the most general features of the created world as it is experienced by a community of everyday practice, which means one that shares what Lindbeck calls first-order concerns. A given ontology is associated with a particular set of guidelines for behaving in that world. This means that, consistent with Novak's claim about the singularity of faith traditions, ontologies would be considered specific to specific communities of practice. If a community's practices were associated with the interpretation of an authoritative or a revealed text, then we would consider the community's ontology to be specific to a tradition of text interpretation. According to some philosophers, certain people compose ontologies for the sheer wonder of it, or because it is their nature to do so. According to others, members of a particular community generalize about their worldviews in order to compare their views with other views, real or imagined, and thus to consider alternative solutions to problems that affect the life of the entire community. Rather than speculate about the origins of ontological thinking, I find it more helpful to ask when and how we can evaluate the truth or falsity of ontological claims. A pragmatic answer is that we can identify the truth conditions for ontological claims if we *suppose that* those claims are offered only for the sake of comparing worldviews and thus considering alternative solutions to community-wide problems. In this approach, ontologies are considered true if they successfully contribute to the solution of such problems *and* if they are formulated in accordance with a verifiable standard of rationality. Adapting Wyschogrod's distinction between "intelligence" and philosophic "reason",[58] I would add, finally, that, if "intelligence" is the "quality of brightness" that guides everyday inquiry in the community of practice, then philosophic reason is intelligence placed in the service of ontological thinking. Intelligence is for solving everyday problems; reason is for speculating about possible solutions to community-wide problems. Intelligence is for living in the world; reason is for formulating ontologies about how we live in the world. Intelligence is "bright", concrete and ever

responsive to the flux of experience; reason is abstractive, iconic (picture-making) and tradition-bound.

Understood in these terms, Lindbeck and Wyschogrod are concerned about the inappropriate adoption of reason as a model for intelligence in the everyday lives of Christians or Jews. Nonetheless, they must make use of reason to address the problem of reason. This use will appear ironic or even confusing if we suppose that they are addressing their philosophic arguments to members of their particular communities of practice, Jewish or Christian. Their message to these communities is to attend, once again, to the particular and not the general — not to reason, but to God's Word as it is displayed in the concrete details of text, of life and of world. We will be perplexed in a different way if we suppose that Lindbeck and Wyschogrod are addressing their arguments to non-postcritical philosophers. In this case, the text- and communal-specificity of their arguments would seem to place them simply outside the canons of modern philosophic discourse. I believe we will avoid perplexity, however, if we suppose that their *philosophic* arguments are addressed, specifically, to a postcritical community of theological inquiry.

As suggested earlier, the postcritical community is not a community of everyday practice, but a community of inquiry that has emerged specifically for the sake of repairing the misuses of philosophic theology in both Jewish and Christian everyday communities. This means that post-critical theologians are philosophically trained ontologists to begin with: they enter into dialogue already prepared to compare the philosophically informed ontologies of their everyday communities, to discuss the problems that are displayed in these ontologies, and to consider alternative models. At the same time, they recognize that the discourse that guides postcritical dialogue is not itself ontological. While each particular ontology may be associated with a particular text tradition, they recognize that they speak to each other from out of at least two different text traditions. What, then, guides their discourse? If their dialogue is guided by a particular model of reason, then they will, after all, be forced to acknowledge the epistemological primacy of some language of philosophic theology, even if not an onto-theology. If, on the other hand, their dialogue is guided by a single tradition of text interpretation, then they may be unable to acknowledge the singularity of both Jewish and Christian revelations. Without speculating about the literal origins of Novak's enterprise, I find it helpful to portray his study as having been stimulated by a concern to formulate some third alternative.[59]

According to this portrayal, Novak presented his model of theological dialogue to provide postcritical theologians a workable set of guidelines for prosecuting their reformatory work. He presented his model in two parts: a model of "generality/singularity" and a model of "theonomous morality". We may redescribe the former as a "meta-ontology" of the most general

features of postcritical practice: *meta*-ontological, because members of the postcritical community share a way of *reforming* ontologies rather than forming them. Members of the postcritical community share in the belief that a singular, noumenal reality is displayed, *generally*, albeit in different ways, in the practices of their various, *singular* communities of practice. They join the postcritical community to discuss ways of repairing their singular communities' misrepresentations of that noumenal reality. While proper representations of this reality will differ from community to community, the model of theonomous morality identifies those minimal and essential features which all representations should share.

Like an ontology, a meta-ontology is true if it successfully serves its purpose and if it is formulated rationally. From the perspective of this pragmatic study, Novak's model of generality/singularity is verifiably rational and useful as a meta-ontology of postcritical theological dialogue. I am left, however, with a few questions about the model of theonomous morality. I suggested earlier that this model appears to be a formulation of what Novak, from within the Jewish tradition, takes to be the general features of the norms of behavior shared by Jews and Christians. If so, the model would not be meta-ontological – a shared method of reforming ontologies – but something in-between an ontology and a meta-ontology: a set of features selectively abstracted from various Jewish and Christian ontologies. If misused, this in-between ontology might, despite Novak's disclaimers, serve the purposes either of an onto-theology or of a form of religious syncretism.[60] From the perspective of this pragmatic study, Novak's model of theonomous morality would appear to be rational and useful if it were to be redescribed in either of the following ways. It might be described as a working standard against which to evaluate the misrepresentations of God's Word within any Jewish or Christian ontologies. In this case, it would be formulated as an "in-between" ontology, but it would be adopted only while the postcritical community is emerging, in order to reassure members of the possibility of shared discourse. The model would be relinquished once members discovered they shared ways of reforming rather than forming their ontologies. As an alternative, the model of theonomous morality might be described as a set of guidelines for conducting postcritical dialogue itself. While the model of generality/singularity would explain to postcritical theologians how they came to work together, this second model would describe the conditions for their continuing to work together. These conditions would not be displayed within the members' various ontologies, but only within their experiences of actually coming to work together. For here, we would say, God is at work in a singular way. The previous list of "pragmatic conditions of postcritical dialogue" is one formulation of this way. Other formulations might be grounded in more precise phenomenological analysis of the experience of dialogue and in more attentive textual study of its scriptural prototypes.

NOTES

* I presented an earlier version of this paper at a session on "Post-critical Dialogues Barth, Lindbeck and Rabbinic Judaism," at the November, 1989 meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Anaheim In this version I have tried to make use of very helpful comments from the other panelists in that session Bruce Marshall, Michael Wyschogrod, George Lindbeck and David Novak I include some of Novak's written comments in the body and endnotes of this paper

1 See Peirce's early essays in pragmatism "The Fixation of Belief" and "How to Make Our Ideas Clear", *Popular Science Monthly* 12 (1877–78) pp 1–15, 286–302, in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, eds C Harteshorne and P Weiss (Cambridge, MA Harvard University Press, 1934, 35) Vol 5 Par 358–410 hereafter, references will be to CP + volume and paragraph number

2 In his "Open Letter" to Lavater, he wrote that "I can therefore quite well believe that I recognize national prejudices and erroneous religious views among my fellow citizens and yet be *bound* to remain silent if these errors do not *directly* condemn either *natural* religion or *natural* law, but are, on the contrary, linked *coincidentally* to the furtherance of the good" (*Gesammelte Schriften, Jubilaumsausgabe*, VII, eds I Elbogen, J Guttmann, and E Mittwoch Berlin Breslau, 1929–38), p 14 Cited in Michael A Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew* (Detroit Wayne State, 1967), p 31 Meyer notes that "this is the way Mendelssohn proposed to look upon Christianity it was the way he hoped Christians would look upon Judaism "

3 George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine, Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia The Westminster Press, 1984) hereafter, ND I cite the essays below

4 Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith, God in the People Israel* (San Francisco Harper & Row, 1989) hereafter, BF

5 BF, p xiv

6 "Doctrine in Christianity A Comparison with Judaism," delivered at the American Theological Society, Princeton, 1987 hereafter, "Doctrine"

7 "Doctrine", p 2

8 "Doctrine", p 2

9 "Doctrine", pp 12–13

10 "Doctrine", p 4

11 "Doctrine", p 2

12 BF, p 3

13 BF, p 4–5

14 BF, p 5

15 BF, p 200

16 BF, p 200

17 Compare Charles Peirce's characterization of two kinds of "indeterminate signs", or signs which describe in some way, but not completely, "how an individual intended is to be selected " He wrote that a "general" sign "turns over to the interpreter the right to complete [its] determination as [s/] he pleases" (CP 5 448n1 1906), while a "vague" or "indefinite" sign "reserves for some other possible sign or experience the function of completing [its] determination" (CP 5 505) For Wyschogrod, it appears that "God's will" retains an irremiable vagueness

18 or, perhaps, falsification?

19 "The Story-Shaped Church Critical Exegesis and Theological Interpretation," in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, ed G Green (Philadelphia Fortress Press, 1987), p 175

20 "Martin Luther and the Rabbinic Mind", in *Understanding the Rabbinic Mind, Essays on the Hermeneutic of Max Kadushin*, ed P Ochs (Atlanta Scholar's Press, 1990), pp 146ff

21 "Doctrine", p 4

22 "Doctrine", p 12

23 "The Story-Shaped Church", pp 169, *passim*

24 BF, pp xiv–xvii

25 BF, p 75

26 BF, p 76

27 BF, pp 76–77
28 He continues, "Dogmatics is therefore the living self-definition of the Church by means of which and with divine grace it attempts continually to understand its mission and thereby bear testimony to the greater glory of God   " (BF, pp 78–79)
29 and, he adds, despite Buber's demurral¹
30 BF, p 186
31 BF, pp 189–90
32 I want to suggest that the reason is *not* that each recognizes a common text tradition out of which both Judaism and Christianity emerge If this were the reason, each would cite the other's tradition merely as a nicety, rather than call on that tradition as an essential element of his own argumentation If this were the reason, furthermore, they would each have to claim that there is some way of describing the text they shared independently of the obviously different practices through which they interpret the meaning of that text as Jew or Christian In other words, they would have to offer us some contextually neutral and privileged description of a shared Scripture Having done that, we might then expect them to declare that possessing such a description was the *a priori* condition of Jewish-Christian dialogue They fail to make such a declaration, however, as they argue specifically against attempts to make theological use of contextually neutral, privileged descriptions Their arguments against such attempts are very forceful, and very similar I suggest, in fact, that we will find the reasons for their Jewish-Christian sharing in the similarity of their critical arguments, rather than in any explicit similarity of their scriptural sources
33 I am drawing a functional distinction here between the subjective and objective sides of a perceived problem problems and irritants or, in the terms of Peirce's semiotic, the "immediate" and "dynamical" objects of an unsettlement The immediate is the object as perceived, the dynamical is the supposed causal agent or that in response to which corrective action is to be taken
34 See, for example, Lindbeck's account of the patristic Church See ND, pp 91ff
35 See, for example, Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven and London Yale University, 1984), *passim*
36 See, for example, Wyschogrod's accounts of Jewish philosophy (BF, pp 40ff) or Lindbeck's accounts of expressivist and cognitivist inquiries (ND, pp 30ff)
37 David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue, A Jewish Justification* (New York and London Oxford University, 1989) hereafter JCD
38 JCD, pp 16–17 Novak cites as contemporary examples of the "merely tolerant" variety of triumphalism the "Nostre Aetate" of Vatican Council II in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed W M Abbot, S J (London and Dublin, 1966), p 664–65, and J D Bleich, "Teaching Torah to Gentiles", *Tradition* 18 2 (Summer, 1980) pp 192–211
39 JCD, p 17 Novak cites as an example Benedict Spinoza, *A Political Treatise* 3 10, trans R H M Elwes (New York, 1951), pp 305–6
40 JCD, p 20 One of Novak's examples is "the interfaith service" where "Jews and Christians design an ersatz liturgy that could not be described as Jewish at the expense of Christianity or as Christian at the expense of Judaism " He cites *Ecumenical Bulletin* 44 (November–December 1980) pp 37–40
41 JCD, p 23 In a note, Novak cites the warning of Abraham Heschel "The first and most important *prerequisite* of *interfaith is faith*   Interfaith must come out of depth, not out of a void absence of faith It is not an enterprise for those who are half learned and spiritually immature " ("No Religion Is an Island", *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 21 2/1 [January 1966] p 123 cited in JCD, p 177 note 1)
42 JCD, p 14
43 JCD, p 14
44 JCD, p 159 note 24
45 The most important classical source for the discussion of relations among Jews and non-Jews is the second century rabbinic collection, the *Tosefta* The Noahide Laws were introduced as the seven commandments received by the sons of Noah and, therefore, incumbent upon *all* humanity to perform For the rabbis, these represented "the minimal prerequisite for naturalized citizenship in a Jewish state " See also David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahide Laws* (New York and Toronto 1983)

46 JCD, p. 115.
47 JCD, p. 118.
48 JCD, p. 124.
49 JCD, p. 130.
50 From a letter to me, of July 1991, in which Novak corrects my previous misrepresentation of his position.
51 From the letter of July, 1991.
52 See JCD, pp. 135–38.
53 Review of *Jewish-Christian Dialogue* in *Cross-Currents, Religion and Intellectual Life* 40.4 (Winter, 1990–91) (pp. 548–555), p. 550.
54 JCD, pp. 141–42.
55 Novak has answered this question in his own words: "The problem is historical, viz., Jews and Christians find themselves today as embattled minorities in a secular culture. Finding themselves in the same company, which is certainly a new state of affairs, stimulates them to discover commonalities that were not evident in those periods of history when there was no such irritant" (from the letter to me of July, 1991).
56 See, "A Rabbinic Pragmatism", in *Theology and Dialogue, Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, ed. B. Marshall (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990), pp. 214–248; and "Max Kadushin as Rabbinic Pragmatist", in *Understanding the Rabbinic Mind, Essays on the Hermeneutic of Max Kadushin*, ed. P. Ochs (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1990), pp. 165–96. Here, I describe the Jewish members of this community as "aftermoderns" and the Christian members as "postliberals."
57 See Ch. 3, "Many Religions and the One Truth Faith." I present my own characterization more fully in "A Rabbinic Text Process Theology", in *Jewish Thought* 1.1 (Summer, 1991) pp. 1–36.
58 BF, p. 5. See above, note 30.
59 According to In Chul Han, both Lindbeck and John Cobb have also sought such an alternative, recognizing "difference" as "a precondition for dialogue." See In Chul Han, *Christianity in the Making: A Critical Study of John B. Cobb, Jr.'s Process-Relational Vision of Christianity* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Drew University, 1992), pp. 80ff.
60 Novak responds that his model represents "an *a posteriori* category, whereas the singular/general dichotomy is *a priori*. It simply indicates what Judaism and Christianity share on the common anthropological/moral border between them. As long as revelation is not reduced to being a function of morality (as it is for Kant, and even for Hermann Cohen), I do not think there is much danger of its serving 'the purposes of onto-theology or of a form of religious syncretism'" (from the letter to me of July, 1991).