Religion without Violence

The Practice and Philosophy of Scriptural Reasoning

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EXCERPTS

Contents

CHAPTER 2

How SR Reads and Interprets Scripture
A Scriptural Pragmatism

"Deep calls to deep at the thunder of thy cataracts; all thy waves and thy billows have gone over me" (Ps 42:8).

In Chapter 1, I introduced SR from the outside: its history, some descriptions of how we practice it, an overview of some of its purposes and goals, and a few illustrations of when and where SR has been practiced. To learn how to teach SR, readers will want to examine it from the inside as well. By "the outside," I mean the public display of SR, especially the specific methods we have found most successful: how to sit around the table, for example, or what texts to choose. By "the inside," I mean the cognitive, intuitive, and sapiential knowledge that an experienced practitioner has gained of the overall purpose and spirit of SR. In this sense, SR is no different than any other religious, aesthetic, ritual, or wisdom practice. To practice any of these, one must learn some things by rote (the "alphabet" of the practice, the set of building blocks that is the same for everyone) and some things through the kind of non-identical repetition that makes a practice one's own. The latter element is not optional: there is no non-personal way to enter the inner life of a practice of this kind.

I. INSIDE SR: FROM DEEP TO DEEP

The purpose of this section is to introduce one insider's view of SR: a sample of what we old time scriptural reasoners have slowly learned through our personal engagements in SR. To make sense of what we learned, readers will need to begin fashioning their own, inner accounts of what SR means, revising the accounts to make sense of each new lesson learned about SR or about comparable modes of study and encounter. The inner patterns of reasoning and relationship that we associate with SR are not displayed in some wholly general way, but only by way of the concrete settings of each fellowship of study: of the specific, interpersonal and inter-textual relations that formed among a given set of people from a given set of text traditions in a given space and time. The reasonings that emerge within such settings may have many other applications (they are *reasonings*),[1] but *not just any* application: only after the fact may we learn that one reasoning seems to apply to any setting of a certain type X, while another reasoning seems to apply to settings of type Y. These are, in other words, the kinds of reasoning we might otherwise associate with kinds of wisdom or with habits of judgment gained through years of a given type of experience.

The Scriptural Text is the Primary Teacher. While egalitarian in various ways, SR also models the asymmetrical dimension of scriptural study. The asymmetry begins with the authority that SR practitioners lend to what we will call the "plain sense" of scriptural texts. For the Tannaim (the founding generation of rabbinic sages), this is the *peshat*, or the meaning of the text in its intra-scriptural, literary context, which meaning includes the unconditional un-substitutability of the literal, black-on-white letters-and-spaces of the inherited, Masoretic tradition of the written text of Tanakh—the *torah she b'khtav*—every "jot and tittle." As we will discuss below, the *peshat* does not carry performative meaning—which is displayed only through deeper-readings *in situ*—but bears only the range of grammatical implications implied by the order of the letters and the range of intra-textual semantic meanings of these letters within the flow of the biblical text. This means that the plain sense allows the scriptural text to retain its literary coherence without, at the same time, freezing its capacity to address its readers in their specific historical space-time. For Christian readers of SR—and here we generalize a bit for the sake of a simple introduction—"plain sense" tends to refer to the *sensus literalis*: as in Hans Frei's formulation, for example, the consensual sense of the words of Scripture for the evolving and

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1. In chapter 2, I examine "reasoning" only within the contexts of textual, scriptural or reparative reasoning. In chapter 3, I address the philosophic question of how to char- acterize reasoning more generally.

catholic community of the church.[2] There are occasional tensions between this meaning and the rabbinic one, but these tensions enliven rather than interfere with the flow of SR reasoning. The Christian *sensus literalis* tends to treat more of the text's meaning as determined, upfront, but less of the literal letters and spaces as necessarily contributing to that meaning. Muslim scholars of SR tend to read more like the Jews in some ways and more like the Christians in others. Here, the plain sense refers to the *zahir*, or visible sense as opposed to the *batin* or inner, interpreted meaning. While Muslim scholars of SR are less willing than the Jewish scholars to refer to the indeterminacy of scriptural semantics, they also assume that the *ayaat*, or individual verses, of the Qur'an will display their meanings only through their relations to many other verses and to the entire literary context of a *sura* (chapter) as well as its setting in the life of the Prophet. A verse or even a *sura* does not teach by itself, therefore, but by way of the tradition, in light of *haddith* and *sunna* and later commentators.

Despite differences among the three traditions' ways of reading the plain sense, SR scholars tend to agree, overall, that the plain sense has an asymmetrical authority in their study fellowship: it is the immediate sign of God's authoritative presence among them and Scripture's clearest figure for the role of teacher in an SR classroom.

A deep concern of SR is to temper the modern tendency, excited by the Enlightenment, to press individual thinkers to overcome their creatureliness—as if not overcoming it meant remaining childish or boorish or petty or irrational or merely tribal. Scriptural reasoners may suggest that this tendency imposes unreasonable and unworldly choices on individual thinkers, as if they had to choose between two masters: for example, either local custom or universal reason, either personal, familial, and ethnic identity or the identity and goodness of humanity per se. Scriptural reasoners may suggest choosing both, but not in an additive sense, as if "universal concepts" had discrete existence separate from "local habits" and that thinkers had always to wear two identities. Scriptural reasoners tend, instead, to read their earthly identities—somatic, psycho-social, ethnic, tradition-specific—as also signs and conduits of God or the Absolute and to read this Absolute as more universal than "universals." They do not, therefore, refuse Enlightenment aspirations to serve all humanity, to know the world and the good, but they read and adopt these as aspirations to serve God who created humanity, to know the creation, and to behold and serve its goodness. This re-inclusion of Enlightenment into the Abrahamic project generates an

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2. Frei, "Literal Reading." For related sources, see Lindbeck, *Church*; Jenson, *Canon and Creed*; Soulen, *Divine Names*; Hughes, "Sources Chretiennes."

approach to universality and particularity that readers may find surprising at first but that should enable students of SR to move comfortably back and forth between academic and scripturally based ways of reading and reasoning. Our comments on the plain sense offer a good place to introduce this approach.

Interpretive reading moves from "deep to deep." As the Psalmist says, "Deep calls to deep at the thunder of thy cataracts; all thy waves and thy billows have gone over me" (Ps 42:7): Scripture and reader meet each other at comparable depths. Alongside the psalmist's image of waves crashing, scriptural reasoners may remember that it is crisis and suffering, in particular that of the reading community as a whole, that most often exposes "the watery depths" of both reader and text, reader to text. This is what philosophers might call the "pragmatism" of SR: that it understands reading beyond the plain sense most often to be reading for the sake of repair. The reader may observe something disturbing in the plain sense: something that needs repair in the text, whether a grammatical or semantic conundrum, some apparent contradiction among verses of a text, *or* something that appears morally or religiously offensive in light of what the reader expects of the text. But on what ground will the reader recommend repairs? And how will the reader know if the repair is right or wrong, helpful or not helpful? While recognizing that readers have answered and will continue to answer these questions in a variety of ways, a pragmatic approach is particularly useful in the interreligious setting of SR. We may note five major features of this approach:

(i) The problem in the plain sense should be read as a sign that something needs to be repaired in the relation that joins the text to a community of readers. This does *not* mean either that the text needs to be adjusted to fit the community or the community needs to be adjusted to fit the text. (These are, we might say, plain sense ways of putting things, while the problem *in* the plain sense calls for repairs beyond the plain sense.) It means, instead, that the reader is being called to open up a deeper story about what is now amiss in the community of readers. *Disclosing this story should, in turn, call up a deeper dimension of the story of Scripture.* This deeper story will most likely also be troubling: either because it enables the reader to see even more sharply what is amiss in the reader's world, or because it seems to connect this trouble to troubles in the deeper story of Scripture itself, or, most likely of all, because, in a less clearly either-or way, it opens the reader even more painfully to the "groanings" of the world (to use a Pauline phrase).

(ii) When moving forward from an apparent problem to its hoped-for repair, the reader must distinguish carefully between what we call "Textual Reasoning" and "Scriptural Reasoning." The term *Textual Reasoning* was first

used in the mid-1980s by a group of Jewish text scholars and philosophers to name the patterns of reasoning that emerged in their communal study of classic rabbinic literature.[3] When we formed the SR group, we drew a distinction between two kinds of reasoning out of sacred sources. *We used the term "Textual Reasoning" to refer to tradition-specific ways of reading, interpreting, and reasoning about Scripture by way of a tradition's primordial literatures of scriptural commentary.* This therefore means reasoning about Tanakh by way of rabbinic literatures, Bible or New Testament by way of Patristic literatures, or Qur'an by way of the literatures of hadith and Sunna. We extended the domain of any Textual Reasoning to include medieval, modern, and contemporary commentaries as well, provided the reasoning reached back to its basis in Scripture and in a single tradition of reading Scripture. Our tendency is to mark this term with the name of a given tradition, so that we have Jewish or Christian or Muslim Textual Reasonings.

We used the term *Scriptural Reasoning* to refer to the *simultaneous study and interpretation of texts from all three Scriptures by a community of participants gathered from all three Abrahamic traditions.* In this case, the defining movements of study are from plain sense to deep reading, from one scriptural canon to another and then back again, and from reading to reasoning. While comparing canons is a useful instrument of study, it is not a goal of study. For each SR meeting, the shared goal is to "feast" on a modest set of texts (with an equal portion from each canon); the goal for each individual is to study all the texts with comparable intensity and for their own sake[4]—to understand, to question and inquire, to consider; the goal for group dialogue is to allow the texts to be illumined by all participants' readings and questions; to allow each verse to illumine each other verse within a given canon and across the canons; to allow the flow of verses to call up the readers' deeper recognitions and concerns; to leave time and space for a flow of dialogue to emerge and, through the dialogue, various lines of reasoning—about the meanings and implications of given verses or relations among verses; about the textual, social, ethical, or theological issues that may be raised by the reading.

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3. See Ochs and Levine, *Textual Reasonings*, 3–7. For founding statements of the methods of TR, see Kepnes, ed., *Why Textual Reasoning: Journal of Textual Reason- ing* (New Series) Vol. 1.1, including the essays by Steven Kepnes, "Introducing the Journal"; Robert Gibbs, "Why Textual Reasoning"; Aryeh Cohen, "Why Textual Rea- soning"; Randi Rashkover, "The Ground of Textual Reasoning"; Shaul Magid, "The Brokenness (and Sacrality) of the Human Voice"; Jim Fodor, "Textual Reasoning as Social Performance."

4. See Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, 81, 120, 203, 302–3, 349. See also Higton, "For Its Own Sake."

It is important to maintain separate environments for Scriptural Rea-soning and for Textual Reasoning. SR fails when the contributing traditions are given either too little or too much consideration. "Too little consider-ation" occurs when individual participants fail to consult their traditions as resources for preparatory study, when they fail to listen to their hearts and deeper beliefs when reading, or when group facilitators fail to cite traditional—as well as academic—commentaries when preparing and in-troducing texts selected for group study. "Too much consideration" occurs when individual participants voice traditional commentaries as their defin-ing contributions to group study or when a single tradition is consulted as the authoritative source for understanding its own canon. *Except for initial introductions to the plain sense of each set of texts, individuals or tradition-specific sub-groups must not be permitted to lecture about the scriptural texts,* as if given texts had given meanings and these individuals knew what they were. *A very firm yet subtle distinction sits at the heart of SR: on the one hand, the group honors the sacred bond between members of one tradition and their scriptural canon; on the other hand, no tradition is treated* during the give-and-take of group study *as if it had privileged access to the meanings of each verse within that canon.* These meanings rest with their author, and they are equally pursued by all readers. *In these ways, Textual Reasoning is out of place in the circle of SR study—just as much as Scriptural Reasoning, with its openness to inter-traditional exchange, is out of place within the circle of Textual Reasoning.* Over the years we have learned that an SR session is headed for trouble when it begins to look like three parallel sessions of Textual Reasoning: the Jews teaching the Christians teaching the Muslims teaching the Jews (and so on) about "their own" texts. SR is not show-and-tell among the traditions, nor is it inter-faith dialogue. At the same time, SR is also troubled when the individual traditions are poorly embodied in the character and intentionality of individual members. Is there a contra-diction, therefore, between SR practice and the religiosity of its members? No, not if these two constituents of SR are bound together in the relational patterns of SR itself.

(iii) Within the context of SR study, problems in the plain sense are there-fore signs that SR is an appropriate place to give voice to troubles among the Abrahamic communities as well as within each community. This means that SR is a place, at once, where these troubles can be heard and where answers to them can be sought. The "pragmatism" of SR includes an understanding of Scripture as a place of special sorts of sign. *According to what we might call SR's theory of signs (or, technically, its semiotics), problematic words or verses or texts in Scripture are dual signs, at once, of some trouble that has been festering in the reader's world and of some source of repair that is yet to*

be opened in a world that links this entire company of readers to this entire set of canons.[5] This means that, as represented in these problematic words, Scripture is the face of a three-part relation that draws particular places of human suffering into reparative relations with the "One who speaks and the world is" (*amar vayehi*), who is the One who speaks these words, Creator Revealer and Redeemer, who "comes when you but call," who names himself as "I am with you" (*ehyeh imach*) or Emmanuel or friend. SR study is another means, outside the liturgical practices of each community, to call on this Redeemer, especially about troubles that concern all three communities at once or that can be ameliorated by the concerted efforts of all three communities at once.[6]

(*iv*) *Within the context of SR, SR reasoning is a face of this redemptive or reparative presence*. SR reasoning is SR fellowship as collaborative engagement among group members, among the canonical traditions as they are given voice around the table, and among readers and scriptural verses. For some scriptural reasoners, this collaborative engagement *already answers* what most troubles them. They are troubled by inter-Abrahamic and interreligious enmity and violent conflict, and they are most troubled by their fear that the traditions lack indigenous resources for a reparative response to this strife. SR answers their fear: not because it directly ends strife, but because it demonstrates that the traditions do not lack such resources. *The resources lie in the traditions' founding discourses, or Scripture, which become active sources of repair when engaged in ways comparable to SR*. For such scriptural reasoners, SR's collaborative engagements therefore serve as an eschatological or at least hopeful sign: a glimpse of inter-Abrahamic (or also interreligious) engagement without enmity or violent conflict. The source of hope is the way that engagements like SR introduce a three-part hermeneutical relation among text, readers, and God, which includes three-part relations among texts and readers from different canons.

(*v*) *SR as apprenticeship in reparative reasoning.* But how can such a three-part relation define a *pattern of reasoning*? In SR, such a pattern is not something one sees written on a piece of paper and then reads and obeys it. *Instead, it is a prototypical pattern of activity that one tends to acquire by participating repeatedly in a certain type of three-part relation.* The circular sound of this formula is a sign that *SR is learned by apprenticeship within SR groups, not by any kind of individuated reading.* But this does not mean that "Scriptural Reasoning" is a name *only* for what goes on strictly within

5. For complementary studies in SR and semiotics, see Susannah Ticciati, "Scrip- tural Reasoning and the Formation of Identity."

6. See Kepnes's extension of SR-like practice to "liturgical reasoning": Kepnes, *Li- turgical Reasoning.*

an SR fellowship. *An SR fellowship may be the prototypical place to acquire the patterns of Scriptural Reasoning, which patterns may then inform one's reasoning in all sorts of places.* An analogy would be that, after learning (or not learning) how to love others in one's family, one may hope (or fail) to love others in many other places.

When, finally, we add the term "reparative" to "Scriptural Reasoning," we refer to an activity that, guided by the pattern of SR, helps move something away from a state of trouble or suffering. In these terms, readers may begin to see *the fellowship of SR study as not only a place for SR activity, but also a prototypical place for learning-and-teaching SR so that SR-like activities may be carried on elsewhere.* To speak of SR study as prototypical suggests that it may raise up of activity that may be transported elsewhere, not only as patterns of reparative text study but also as patterns of some more general practice of repair. We may then conceive of the prototype of reparative SR as a fellowship for studying scriptural texts that some group considers troubled or wounded. In prototypical study, group members uncover troubles or wounds in their own social lives that appear to converse with these troubled texts, deep to deep. They then share in a dialogic practice of reading and interpretation that, according to SR, may open pathways of healing or redeeming both text and reader simultaneously. If SR is transportable, it is because these pathways are not merely experienced in the moment but also *learned* as patterns of reparative reasoning that can be enacted elsewhere. We may suppose that, if these patterns of reasoning are transportable enough to be enacted in other contexts of scripture study, then they might be transportable enough to be enacted in other contexts of living, as well. By learning to reason reparatively in relation to troubled scriptural texts, scriptural readers may also learn to reason reparatively in relation to troubled social contexts of many sorts. They may learn, in other words, something of what the founding Abrahamic communities may have meant by reading Scripture as God's commanding and healing word: that the practice of reading Scripture is an apprenticeship in the practice of helping heal the world.[7]

From one perspective, the movement of reparative study concerns the hermeneutics of text reading: it goes from (1) examining the troubled plain sense of a set of texts to (2) uncovering deeper meanings behind the plain sense to (3) observing the power of such deeper meanings to guide reparative action into the world. *From another perspective, this movement addresses the readers' societal lives:* it goes from (1) recognizing the societal troubles they bring with them to text study, to (2) taking time off to study Scripture as an unexpected source of (3) possible approaches to repairing

7. Ochs, "Jewish and other Arguments."

those troubles as well as a source of hope that the world offers resources for attending to such troubles. *From another perspective, the movement of study addresses the SR group's practices of reasoning:* it goes from (1) a practice of fellowship for which troubled texts and troubled societies first appear as independent objects of study, to (2) a dialogic practice of reading that may give rise to a shared practice of reasoning that brings troubled texts and societies into mutually illuminating relation, to (3) patterns of reparative reasoning that appear to be transportable from this fellowship of study to the group members' various, societal homes.

Illustration: David Ford's reparative study of Ephesians

David Ford offered his 2001 essay, "'He Is Our Peace': The Letter to the Ephesians and the Theology of Fulfilment,"[8] as an illustration of the reparative character of SR. Prepared for the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning,* "'He Is Our Peace'" is a reparative reading of texts from *Letters to the Ephesians* that have traditionally been read in a supersessionist manner. Ford's reading fits naturally into the argument of this chapter, because he presented it, explicitly, to complement my account of reparative reasoning in *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture.* Ford cites Charles Peirce's pragmatic maxim as frame for his reading:

> *"*[T]he pragmatic meaning of a conception is the sum total of its practical consequences for the long run of experience."[9] How might that maxim relate to the quotation from the *Letter to the Ephesians* in my title? The whole verse is: "For he is our peace, in his flesh he has made both groups into one, and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (2.14). The reference is to Jews and Gentiles, and in view of "the long run of experience" over nearly two thousand years it must constitute a major problem for the interpretation of Ephesians today. If pragmatic scriptural reading aims to read "in response to human suffering" and "with a community of readers for the sake of changing the practical and communal conditions of suffering,"[10] then in view of the terrible history of Christian persecution of Jews there is a need for correction of Christian conceptions of Jews. The constructive question is whether there

8. Ford, "He is Our Peace."

9. Paraphrasing Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" (1878), in Peirce, *Collected,* Vol. 5, Par. 402. Future references to this collection will be to CP, followed by volume and paragraph number (CP 5.402).

10. Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture*, 313.

might be a valid and strong reading of Ephesians that not only resists Christian hostility to Jews but even allows the communities today to be of mutual blessing. How might this tradition not only correct itself but even surpass itself with the aid of a pragmatic reading of Ephesians?

The problem: Illustrating the movement of reparative study we diagramed above, Ford begins his reading by examining the troubled plain sense of a set of texts that accompanies his SR community's recognition of a certain set of societal troubles. He argues that the plain sense of Ephesians offers a realized eschatology from which "it is a short step to a supersessionism which sees no further role in history for the Jewish people outside the church": "a plan for the fullness of time" in which "he [God] has put all things under his [Christ's] feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body" (1:22–23). For Ford, it is therefore easy to imagine how Ephesians could have contributed to Christian efforts to write Jews out of history, "with all sorts of appalling consequences when Gentiles became dominant in the church and the balance of power between Judaism and Christianity shifted in favor of the latter."

Seeking a means of repair: Ford seeks alternative ways of reading Ephesians that might help repair its problematic legacy. He proposes a pragmatic approach:

> In Ochs's terms, I have identified "something burdensome in the plain sense" of Ephesians.[11] This now stimulates me to suggest what he calls a midrashic, or pragmatic interpretation. As he says, such a reading is to be judged by how well it resolves the given problem "for a given community of interpreters":[12] in my case, for the Society for Scriptural Reasoning at the end of a century marked by the Shoah. What might be the "non-evident meaning"[13] of Ephesians on this matter . . .? In this case, the problem is not mainly in what Ephesians says explicitly. It lies more in its "pragmatic meaning" in the millennia that followed—though in fact for many Christians the problematic reading has been read as the plain sense and has shaped their "common sense."

Resources for repair: Ford then proposes rereading the plain sense of Ephesians in ways that could resist supersessionist tendencies in the church: "The most obvious resistance comes in the ethics of Ephesians. It is an ethic

11. Ochs, *Peirce*, *Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture,* 6.

12. Ochs, *Peirce*, *Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture,* 7.

13. Ochs, *Peirce*, *Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture,* 6.

of non-coercive communication, of speaking the truth in love (4.15), of 'all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love' (4.2). If such speech and action were to characterise relations with those outside as well as inside the community then, whatever the beliefs about Jews in relation to God's *oikonomia*, there would be respect, communication and peace. The root of this resistance within Ephesians is in who Jesus Christ is believed to be." Ford seeks warrant for his rereading, first, in the plain sense of Ephesians, then in the plain sense of the New Testament canon more broadly, then in his estimate of the potential consequences of such rereading for challenging societal habits associated with the older, supersessionist readings. I will offer only a brief summary of his effort. His first step is to show how "Ephesians itself can be read as correcting and redefining the Pauline Christian tradition." Noting that Ephesians is customarily seen as dependent on the *Letter to the Colossians,* he recommends paying more attention to "where the two diverge": for example, where, "Ephesians develops the Colossians themes of the church as the body of Christ and of 'peace through the blood of his [Christ's] cross' into an explicit focus on peace between Jews and Gentiles in the church." Another example is the way Ephesians intensifies "Colossians theme of *pleroma* (the fullness of God dwelling in Christ 1.19, 2.9) . . . in its cosmic scope and its relation to Christian living . . . and to the church, and love in the community (3.14–21)." Citing my account of Peirce, Ford suggests that his reading of *pleroma* illustrates defining features of pragmatic reading. For example, his reading recognizes *pleroma* as an irremediably *vague sign*, which, "by the logic of pragmatism . . . 'reserves for some other sign or experience the function of completing [its] determination.'"[14] From this perspective, earlier supersessionist readings were overly precise, privileged as if they captured, once and for all, the one clear meaning Scripture has intended, rather than displaying meanings appropriate to the faiths of certain previous Christian communities but not necessarily to other Christian communities in the past, present, and future. Complementing a pragmatic approach to SR, Ford challenges presumptions that there is only one natural language meaning or equivalent to *pleroma* and that meaning is determined independently of the faithful community that is reading. He offers his revised meaning not as an eisegesis but as a recovery of the plain sense *for* the reparative context of reading that he identifies and that he now reports to the SR community.[15]

14. "Consequences of Critical Common-Sensism" (1905), CP 5.505.

15. For a reading of Ephesians that takes these verses as its hermeneutical key, see Ford, "Communicating God's Abundance." Readers may appreciate this excerpt:

"I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the

II. INSIDE SCRIPTURAL REASONING AND TEXTUAL REASONING

In its broadest meaning, SR includes two sub-practices: study-across-difference within a single scriptural tradition and study across the borders of different scriptural traditions. We publicly associate SR with the latter practice, which we might label "SR per se" or that which is typified in formational SR. But the former, which we label "Textual Reasoning" (or TR), also makes an irreplaceable contribution to the overall practice of SR. My main goal in this section is to introduce some of the primary similarities and differences between TR and SR (*per se*) and, thereby, to invite readers to begin to formulate their own opinions about what is really going on in each of these and in SR as a whole.

The Development of TR and SR: Through the 1990s and early 2000s, we (founding members of the Society for Scriptural Reasoning) applied the name *"Textual Reasoning"* to the kind of scriptural study we performed within the boundaries of any particular religious denomination, and we applied the name *"Scriptural Reasoning"* to our study of several scriptural traditions at the same time. We also used these terms, equivocally, to refer to several variations of each practice.

TR referred prototypically to the circles of strictly Muslim or Jewish or Christian textual study that many of us practiced before we began SR and which we continued to practice while we were also forming circles of SR

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breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. . . ." (Eph 3:18–20). God is the most important consideration of all in relation to *pleroma*. This prayer acknowledges that; it denies that Christians or others have an overview of the meaning of *pleroma*; and in Ochs's terms the text is "an ultimately vague sign of the God whose activities correct it and clarify its meaning" (Ochs, *Peirce*, 287). Ochs notes that, "By the logic of pragmatism, a vague sign 'reserves for some other sign or experience the function of completing [its] determination' (5.505)'. Therefore, if God is the object of an ultimately vague sign, then whatever defines this sign would also be vague, and only God would complete the determination of the sign of God." The meaning of "fullness" has to take into account the infinite dynamic abundance of a God of love, fulfilling prayers in ways we could never have imagined. But since these dynamics can, as those centuries demonstrate, also go so terribly wrong, it is salutary to try to learn disciplines of reading which encourage facing up to the burdens, failings, errors, sufferings, and remediable or irremediable vaguenesses occasioned by interpretations of scripture. One of the great strengths of Ochs's approach is that it encourages a tradition to find within itself the resources for its own correction and redefinition and also to "believe that, through the mediation of particular community members, communities of scriptural reading may themselves enter into dialogues that strengthen each community's practices of reading by complementing and clarifying them" (Ochs, *Peirce*, 314). The attempt to fulfill this double programme is at the heart of the Society for Scriptural Reasoning.

study. We adopted the label "*textual*" reasoning, because each circle tended to examine Scripture by way of traditional and modern *texts* of commentary on the Scripture, rather than studying Scripture by itself alone. We also applied the term TR, secondarily, to our efforts to devote some time to Muslim or Jewish or Christian TR during our week-long SR conferences. Sometimes we would separate into three separate groups to refresh our separate ways of practicing TR. Sometimes we would invite scholars of the other two religions to join a session devoted to a single tradition of TR. Finally, we observed that many interfaith groups favored a method of study we labeled "parallel TR": inviting representatives of one tradition at a time to introduce its Scripture to the other. In this approach, participants listen politely to one another's teachings about Scripture, asking questions without stepping over the borders of someone else's text tradition.

SR referred prototypically to formational SR, our best method for introducing participants to an interpersonal approach to study, where "reasoning" names a group activity rather than the province, alone, of the individual mind. We also applied the term SR, secondarily, to analogous forms of dialogic or relational study or inquiry. For example, some biblical scholars applied the term SR to their new, dialogic and inter-textual studies of the Bible; some historians of religion applied the term to their study of "dialogic encounters" between two religions (for example, missionary Catholicism and Chinese Confucianism); and some philosophers applied the term to the way they reason philosophically out of scriptural sources.

TR vs. Traditional Methods of Scriptural Study: Circles of TR differ from traditional circles of religious study. Both recognize that, when examined independently of a tradition of commentaries, a scriptural text (even a word or verse) may signify more than one possible meaning, usually several: that is, the texts may be *polysemic* or *multivalent* ("many-valued"). (Here, I employ the term *meaning* in a very general way, to include "significance," "sense," "reference," *and* "illocution" or "performative significance.") Traditional chains of commentary seek to reduce this broad range of possible meanings to very few, even to only one authorized meaning. Circles of TR—which welcome members of many denominations—try to avoid this kind of reduction, at least until participants have devoted significant time to discussing and debating a broad range of traditional interpretations. Even then, textual reasoners tend to argue that a given text bears a singular meaning only for a given context of interpretation.

It is difficult to nurture dialogue across the borders of different traditions of scriptural commentary. This is because each circle of traditional study tends to generate singular (or monovalent) readings of the scriptural commentaries, leaving little room for lively dialogue with other traditions

of scriptural study. Scholars from one tradition might introduce their read-
ings and interpretations to the other scholars, but they are rarely prepared
to invite these others to share in their process of study itself. TR introduces
difference into traditional patterns of study. Because they share a single
canon of scripture, participants in TR are stimulated to seek a common
understanding of Scripture. At the same time, because they belong to dif-
ferent sub-traditions of scriptural study, they are also stimulated to defend
conflicting understandings. *Unlike traditional circles of study, TR is designed
to push its individual participants to pursue contradictory goals and, thereby,
to experience either frustration or a desire to change the conditions of study.*
The hope of TR is that, in the pursuit of change, many participants will
stumble upon the pursuit of dialogue across difference as a new way to con-
duct ancient rituals of learning. *TR offers an environment where participants
may, against their expectations, fall into patterns of simultaneously reasoning
freely (individually) and cooperatively (interpersonally) and in ways that af-
firm each other's different sub-traditions. As we will see, this "fall" is the source
of both TR and SR's capacity to introduce something otherwise unachievable
within the hermeneutical and epistemological frameworks of the modern
university: a mode of reasoning that simultaneously serves the interests of
several different scriptural traditions and of the contemporary university.* The
individual participant in TR or SR falls into this mode of reasoning the way
one might fall asleep or "fall" into a dance step or a musical rhythm. Unlike
reasonings that are limited to an individual's neural system, this mode of
reasoning belongs, at once, to a circle of reasoners and to the dimensions of
their various traditions of belief and knowledge that are active during some
session of study. Each participant's reasoning is constrained by the interests,
rules, and relationships that characterize such a circle of study, but no more
or less than an individual is constrained by the settings and contexts of any
other tradition- or discipline-specific project of reasoning.

Distinctive Features of TR as a Mode of Interpreting Scriptural Sources

An initial hermeneutical rule of TR: a scriptural text displays its truth-values
only *to* some community of readers or hearers. I do not mean that there is
only one such community of readers (!), but that each historically specific
community must discern anew what Scripture signifies.

    A second hermeneutical rule of TR: I find it most helpful to identify
this rule through terms introduced by Judaism's rabbinic sages: The *plain
sense of scripture* [in Hebrew, the *peshat*] *displays the will of the Absolute but*

displays it indeterminately: in other words, no human readers can discern, once and for all, what truth-values are signified by the words of Scripture. Scripture displays its determinate meanings only by way of its interpretation and performance within some historically specific community of readers. These interpretive meanings [in Hebrew, the *derash*] have truth-values, but only for that time and place. Scripture must be examined and interpreted again to identify its determinate meaning for any other or subsequent time and place.

Interpretive meanings are usually examined by the academic sciences of reception history, ethnography (identifying cultural contexts of reading), ritual and poetic theory, and pragmatics (sciences of performed meaning, as recommended by Austin, Wittgenstein, Peirce, and others). *They are examined, as well, by all the traditional commentaries* (including legal interpretation, ethics, homiletics, theology).

TR seeks to transform contradictory interpretive tendencies into contrary interpretive tendencies. As a project in both peacemaking and textual understanding within any single Abrahamic religion, TR provides a way to transform conflict into constructive dialogue across difference. TR begins by recognizing non-constructive differences within a single tradition of study. In the 1980s, for example, founders of the Society for Jewish Textual Reasoning observed irresolvable competition among various sub-disciplines of Jewish Studies: text-historical vs. literary vs. philosophic studies, and all the academic studies vs. traditional or synagogue-based study. We labeled this a "competition among logical contradictories," and we designed TR as a way to preserve competitive differences while "transforming contradictories into contraries." By "contradictory," we meant a difference that is irresolvable because it assumes a "zero-sum (either/or) game." If, for example, text-historical and philosophic approaches are contradictory, then to affirm (undertake and fund) one approach is to deny the other one. Our goal was to provide an environment for transforming "either/or" differences of method into differences that often sharpened and deepened an overall inquiry. We concluded that the way to achieve this is *not* to ask each individual scholar to learn many differences (this approach reduces excellence and overemphasizes the study of broad generalities), but to supplement the university's individualized model of scholarship with an additional, team-work model. While maintaining our individualized research, we would also join circles of TR study, in which members of the various disciplines would study together (often adding traditional rabbinic scholars as well). Before each meeting we would all do preparatory studies in a given set of scriptural texts plus rabbinic and medieval commentaries. Before our meetings, we shared brief essays on these texts, each of us writing from the perspective

of our primary discipline. We then devoted our meetings entirely to group study of the scriptural and commentarial texts. We each spoke freely from out of our own intellectual perspectives, but we also listened with interest to all the other perspectives. We allowed heated argument as well as more gentle discussion, as we gradually learned new habits for achieving what previously seemed impossible: circles of study that allowed each individual person and discipline full self-expression while we also formed new bonds of interpersonal and interdisciplinary inquiry.

After a few years of this practice, we observed that, while we each maintained our different disciplines of study, we also practiced our disciplines in a somewhat new way. I began to write Jewish philosophy, for example, in a way that also prompted my readers to do supplementary work in historical and literary studies. I did not try to perform all these studies myself, but I began to consult regularly with scholars of history and literature when I plotted out my philosophic projects. In logical terms, my philosophic discipline differed from their disciplines, but not in contradictory ways.[16]

Characteristics of TR that Re-Appear in SR: During our first decade of work in the Society for Scriptural Reasoning (SSR), we observed that successful participants pursued two goals simultaneously during both TR and SR study: (a) they participated in our sessions for the joy of "study for its own sake," without worrying about the ultimate truth-or-falsity of participants' individual comments; (b) they articulated and tested their own truth-claims about individual words and verses of Scripture, but they did not worry if others interpreted those texts differently. We also observed that successful participants displayed virtues that were at times like and at times unlike the virtues most valued in the university and in traditional circles of study:

- TR and SR participants sought to understand the plain sense of each scriptural text as illumined by all available resources: from scientific studies of history and language to traditional commentaries to new hypotheses raised within the TR or SR study circle. They were prepared to discover that there might be only one convincing meaning of a given text or that the evidence pointed to a range of possible meanings. They were eager, moreover, to examine several dimensions of "meaning," both semantic and performative. They sought to extend

16. They differ as "contraries" (where $\sim (a \lor \sim a)$) or different members of a universe of many members $(a, b, c \ldots n)$, rather than "contradictories" or competing members of a universe that allows only one or the other $(a \lor \sim a)$.

their own understandings of the texts and to enjoy hearing the varieties of opinions and insights brought by the study circle.

• They valued the results of intense individual thought and of group dialogue.

• They studied with scholarly discipline and with a deep sense of humor: pursuing laughter as well as insight, celebrating the fruits of individual reflection while also acknowledging the finitude of each person's and each tradition's truth claims. They recognized that finitude is not a liability but a mark of all worldly truths. Just as the biblical prophet declares to God *hineni*, "Here I am," so too each verse of Scripture may declare to each reader at a given moment: "Here I am. This is my meaning here and now. This meaning is how I truly show myself to you at this moment. This truth is a mark of my intimate relationship with you here and now. But it is therefore also a reminder that I may, in another moment, appear to show myself differently to you or to another. This is how I retain my intimacy and thus my truth at each moment that I am carefully read."

The primary difference between SR and TR is that, in SR, there is plain sense and interpretive meaning, but no shared "truths." As discussed earlier, SR study focuses on scriptural texts, alone, without the commentarial texts that tend to determine the conditions of truth and falsity within each tradition of religious belief and practice. As in TR, SR study begins with discussion of the plain sense of a scriptural text. Participants then voice problematic or challenging aspects of the plain sense. These challenges stimulate efforts to reread or reinterpret the plain sense and, thereby, to propose interpretive meanings that might respond to what some of the disciplines found problematic in the plain sense. The indeterminacy of the plain sense is one source of the power of SR, enabling participants from one tradition to comment, without offense, on the sacred sources of another tradition. One can contradict (and thus "offend") a determinate meaning, which must be either A or not-A, but one cannot contradict a meaning that is not yet either one or the other. Another source of the power of SR is the freedom of each individual participant to propose ways of determining the meaning of any given text, even if these proposals serve the religious convictions of only that one participant. Unlike the plain sense, which participants tend to share, such proposals display the unique properties of an individual interpretation: one that displays the determinate meaning (a) of the plain sense (b) *for* a single interpreter (c). If another interpreter (d) proposes a different meaning (e),

this proposal would not contradict the first one, but simply differ from it.[17] According to the theory of SR, contradiction generates conflict across the borders of different traditions; mere difference ("contrariety") provides the occasion for lively but peaceful discussion and debate. This peace comes with one cost: unlike TR study, SR study is not about truth or falsity. For SR, truth or falsity is a characteristic only of determinate claims about the interpretive/performative meaning of Scripture, and such claims are available only within traditional circles of scriptural study or, in a moderated sense, within tradition-specific circles of TR. The Bible identifies a second species of "truth" that *can* apply to SR study. This is truth as *emet,* a Hebrew term derived from the root *amn*, connoting "faithfulness." SR is deeply concerned with this species of truth: the faithfulness that joins each SR reader to the plain sense of Scripture and that, we hope, joins each SR scholar to every other.

Distinctive Features of SR as a Mode of Interpreting Scriptural Sources

An initial hermeneutical rule of SR: SR is not a place where scriptural texts display their indigenous truth-values as they would be displayed, in TR, to a particular community devoted to a particular scriptural canon as rule of life. During a formal session of SR, the rule of SR is to suspend one's customary search for the true meaning of the scriptural texts, whether those of one's own tradition or of another's. The rule of SR is, instead, to search after the really possible meanings of each text and, where appropriate, each verse, each phrase, each set of texts. From a historical perspective, the set of really possible meanings includes all those proposed within the reception history of any text (including traditional, legal, academic commentaries, and so on). From a semantic and logical perspective, this set includes any meaning that is permitted by the letters, words, and grammar of a text. Each SR group sets its own goals and guidelines and displays its own tolerance for how much to include or exclude from the set. Our only general counsel is not to exclude too much (for example, by including only what a given tradition appears to favor or what academic scholarship appears to tolerate) and not to include too much (for example, by setting too low a threshold for what the text might permit). The scriptural texts cannot fully provide guidelines for the practice of SR, since there is no reason to assume these texts were canonized

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17. In semiotic terms, the two proposals may be diagrammed as abc and ade: logical contraries but not contradictories. This distinction is central to the success of SR in inviting non-conflictual discussion and disagreement across difference.

with the expectation that members of other canonical communities would join in the reading, let alone join in for the sake of something like SR. SR is something unimagined by the texts but pursued, nonetheless, within their individual tolerances.

A second hermeneutical rule of SR: Around the table of SR study, Scripture is read for its own sake but also for a set of purposes specific to each SR gathering. While we do not prescribe what these purposes must be, I have over the years observed that SR groups tend to read best when they read for reasons like these: for the joy of reading Scripture; out of a passion to discover everything that may be immanent in the various texts of Scripture; for the sake of friendship with fellow readers; to listen "over the borders" of the scriptural canons (to hear what these related but different canons have to say); to seek ways of repairing today's troubled relations among the scriptural communities; to hear God's word more fully (which may include hearing it speak in unexpected ways). I have also observed that SR groups do not read well when they are overly focused on only one or two of these purposes. If, for example, they read only for "the sake of peace" or only "for friendship," they may fail to read carefully enough to allow Scripture to set its own terms for peace and for friendship; if they read only to expand and explore the limits of what scriptural words and verses may mean, they may fail to hear its performative meanings (or hear when it commands, teaches wisdom, or sets limits rather than only loosening them).

Reading on behalf of the various disciplines of the academy. Various academic sciences of literature and text-historical reading enrich the work of SR as well as TR.[18] They may, however, play a somewhat greater role in TR, where they provide resources for balancing the authoritative voices of sub-traditions of reading, whenever these traditions threaten to de-legitimate other sub-traditions. Within SR, ironically, the academic sciences may at times receive more from the SR study fellowship than they give. For one, one may at times hear a greater variety of interpretive voices around the SR study table than one hears around the table of academic study. In this case, SR study may expand the fields of what count as "data" and what count as "legitimate sources of explanatory hypotheses" for some disciplines of contemporary academic study. For two, members of some SR study groups may, over time, find themselves engaging in patterns of reasoning that they have not previously encountered in their traditions of study or their disciplines of academic inquiry. In this case, the results of SR challenge

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18. See Quash, "Heavenly Semantics." Also see Weiss, "Scriptural Reasoning and the Academy."

the academic disciplines to recognize and examine previously overlooked forms of reasoning.

"Deep reasonings" for peace and for repair. Nicholas Adams characterizes Scriptural Reasoning as a source of both "deep reasonings" and "reparative reasonings."[19] The reasonings that appear to arise uniquely out of SR study are, I believe, stimulated uniquely by a "deep" dimension of scriptural literature. Since this is a dimension that, in Charles Peirce's terms, is known "only by its fruits,"[20] I am led to speculate that SR study may at times provide occasions for displaying this fruit. Some contributing factors may be the context of crisis that informs some SR study sessions and also the depth of scriptural reading (when it occurs), the reparative movement of study across deep differences among the scriptural canons, and the capacity of some study groups to remain intensely focused over prolonged stretches of time.[21]

More Detailed Illustrations of the Primary Characteristics of SR and TR

What, in sum, are the characteristics of SR practice? Despite their periodic efforts over thirty years, members of the Society for Scriptural Reasoning (SSR) have not succeeded in capturing a reliable written record of what goes on during an SR study session.[22] It appears that, like a sand painting, the singularity of SR belongs to time-and-space-specific oral events and cannot be accurately preserved or reproduced. Because SR is not an event of conventional language use, its singular character cannot be captured within the language conventions we employ when offering reports or even audio and visual recordings of what took place. Why? The theory I share publicly concerns the relationship between conventional discourse and its frames or transcendental conditions. SR invites participants in apparently incommensurable religious language games and conventions to converse together about different, but in varying ways consanguineal, foundational texts. The activity and its settings generate a variable range of emotive as well as

19. Adams, "Reparative Reasoning"; and Adams, "Making Deep Reasonings Pub- lic." For related essays, see James, "Pairs"; Rashkover, "Hegel"; and Harris, "Improving the Quality."

20. Peirce claimed that his pragmatism was "only an application of the sole prin- ciple of logic which was recommended by Jesus, 'Ye may know them by their fruits'" [Matt. 7:16] and it is very intimately allied with the ideas of the gospel": Peirce, "Search for a Method," (1893) CP 5.402n2.

21. On the ethical implications of SR, see Gibbs, "Reading with Others."

22. The best effort is Higton and Muers, *Text in Play*.

cognitive and religious/valuational responses. Early in the process, partici-
pants may display seemingly contradictory expressions of, on the one hand,
discomfort, anxiety, and detachment—perhaps about the interreligious
and inter-textual setting—and, on the other hand, muted excitement about
the interpersonal setting and of more micro-displays of warmth about the
familiar texts of sacred Scripture set immediately before them. I theorize
that these apparently contradictory expressions are symptoms of what ap-
pears, within the terms of conventional language use, to be SR's impossible
goal: to invite speakers of, say, three conflicting language conventions to
converse about their deepest thoughts and beliefs. SR's goal would not be
impossible, however, if communication were achieved beyond the limits of
those language conventions: not through translation (or through the errant
presumption that some general or even universal language convention were
in the offing), but through the non-conventional communication that SR
may foster. To experience this kind of communication, readers would need
to experience several sessions of formational SR study. To remain within the
bounds of this book, I offer a second-best option: detailed excerpts from a
journal issue devoted to an extended session of SR study. To appreciate the
features of SR study, however, one must also appreciate the features of TR
study. In the college classroom, I offer training and reflection on TR first, SR
second, because SR enacts and responds to the dramatic tension that both
binds together and separates readers from different traditions of scriptural
study and commentary. To conclude this chapter, I therefore offer detailed
illustrations of tradition-based practices of study that are comparable to TR.

Healing Words: The Song of Songs and the Path of Love

"Healing Words" is an issue of *The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* (JSR)
that celebrates a 2002 session of SR Study that took place alongside the An-
nual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion.[23] Before the SR session,
participants studied three reflections that were composed for the occasion.
During the session, participants briefly discussed the reflections and then
turned to intensive around-the-table SR text study of "Song of Songs" and
"Path of Love." The JSR issue includes the three framing essays, overviews
of the session, and ten response papers composed after the session. Such
excerpts would not enable readers to experience the communicative activity
of SR, but they should, nonetheless, offer readers indirect evidence about
the leading characteristics of that activity.

23. Nelkin, *Healing*.

Illustration #1: Introducing the Overall Shape of the Study Session.

As noted by Guest Editor Dov Nelkin, the JSR issue "considers the potency and problematics of the language of sexuality and desire as a mode of describing, either directly or by way of metaphor, the encounter with God."[24] The issue juxtaposes three essays that take contrasting approaches to the overall theme. Jewish scholar Alon Goshen-Gottstein and Christian theologian Ellen Davis both address the *Song of Songs* as a canonical text. For Goshen-Gottstein, it is a uniquely problematic text because it acquires scriptural status only through glosses offered by its long chain of interpreters. For Ellen Davis, the *Song* is intrinsically canonical, because it offers a source of repairing ruptured relationships displayed in the antecedent scriptural texts. Muslim scholar Omid Safi is forced to take a different approach, because the Qur'anic canon includes neither a version of the *Song of Songs* nor a parallel. He chooses to examine commentarial texts that "incorporate the lush language of love and sexuality in a manner immediately familiar to interpreters of the Song."[25]

Illustration #2: Reading from Affliction to Healing.

General Editor Willie Young observes a parallel between the reparative reading enacted in both the sources and the interpretive practices of SR participants. The three authors show how their communities of scriptural interpretation read the sacred texts as if the texts may suffer affliction and as if caring readers could help them heal: "In each case, the scripture allows itself to be stretched, or even broken, so that the community can find new life within it. . . . Intertextual reading repairs scripture so as to repair and heal communities. As this pattern emerges, we may begin to see how the brokenness of scripture is not a change in God, but rather leads to a change within us."[26] Young illustrates several features of this pattern of reading, which I label "*hermeneutical healing*":

- *Sensitivity to multiple levels of meaning (polysemy)*
- *Respect for the plain sense of a Scriptural text (or its elementary narrative or assertion). The reader returns to the plain sense after each "deeper" level reading.*

24. Dov Nelkin, "Editor's Introduction to the Articles," in *Healing*.

25. Omid Safi, "On the 'Path of Love' Towards the Divine: A Journey with Muslim Mystics," in Nelkin, *Healing*.

26. Young, "The Song of Songs."

- *Claims that, on deeper levels of reading, scriptural texts address specific afflictions within the reading community.*

- *Hopes that such readings also open pathways toward healing these afflictions.*

- *At the same time, Young illustrates how patterns of hermeneutical healing may also introduce instruments of affliction into scriptural commentary. Seeking values that may heal communal affliction, a reader could, knowingly or unknowingly, affirm values that prove to be sources of suffering for others.* On Young's reading, Bernard of Clairvaux's allegorical commentary on of the *Song of Songs* illustrates features of this phenomenon:

- *Multiple levels of meaning; responding to afflictions in the reader's community:* "Bernard's willingness to shift between levels of meaning, identifying his audience with various figures in the Song, resembles Davis's multiple interpretations of the harmony or unity signified by the Song. . . . It can be read in multiple ways that respond to and repair issues and divisions in the community."[27]

- *Readings as potential sources of affliction:* "As Davis suggests . . ., the one thing the Song doesn't represent for Bernard is precisely what it says—human, erotic love. The ongoing polemic in his writings between the "fleshly" and spiritual interpretations must have been quite useful in disciplining a monastic community, but given its association with anti-Jewish polemics, its value in the context of Scriptural Reasoning is dubious. This is one of the points at which I find myself challenged and troubled by his work, in spite of its wondrous beauty."[28]

Young introduces Franz Rosenzweig's reading of *Song of Songs* as a prototype for hermeneutical healing. Rosenzweig shows how the Song "epitomizes an I-Thou relation, rather than an objective, third-person description. Lyricism, as a self-sacrifice to the moment, cannot simply be recorded, but is only manifest from inside the event—in this case, the event of love, in which the speakers emerge from concealment toward one another."[29] For Young, the SR essays illustrate two of the ways in which scriptural commentaries may seek to serve as agents for such love: *by integrating fragments into new wholes, and by uncovering where, in the human heart, God's attributes of love can be retrieved:*

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27. Young, "The Song of Songs."
28. Young, "The Song of Songs."
29. Paraphrasing Franz Rosenzweig, *Star*, 194.

• *Integrating fragments into new wholes:* For Davis, "the Song itself is largely composed from fragments from other books in scripture."[30] For Goshen-Gottstein, rabbinic commentaries imitate the Song's integrative performance by collecting disparate fragments from the Song and reintegrating them in ways that display otherwise inevident instructions for healing. This process of hermeneutical healing trains the rabbis' readers to attend to human suffering the way the rabbis' commentaries attend to afflictions in the Scriptural text.

• *Uncovering divine attributes of love:* Safi's reading of "Divine Love" discloses an experiential/conceptual rather than hermeneutical instrument for instruction in divine healing. In Sufi discourse, "God takes on a range of humanizing attributes. . ., including characteristics most often associated with human love. As God takes on these attributes, the beloved is brought more intimately into God's presence. . . . The path of love is iconographic; in that it lets us see through our words to the living God whom they represent."[31]

Illustration #3: Study across Difference, Study that Affirms Difference.

Neither the study session nor the journal issue sought to unify different readings of the same texts, different theologies, different hermeneutical preferences, different ways of understanding affliction and healing. In many ways, SR *was* the co-presence of these differences through discussion and writings, and SR was the performance through which presence-through-difference retained its edge and dynamism. In other words, difference is not a source of affliction for SR; the co-presence of difference is SR's source of joy. In Young's words, "Editing this issue of the *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* has been a joy, as the issue has borne far greater fruit than any of us could have anticipated at the outset. Confronted with the bounty of love, from the *Song of Songs* and the Sufi *Path of Love*, I feel like John Cusack's playwright character in *Bullets Over Broadway*—with much to say, yet also hearing the words, 'Don't speak! Don't speak!' Rather, I will let love speak for itself, as the authors and respondents think with their scriptures and traditions, and with one another."[32]

30. Davis, "Reading the Song Iconographically," in *Healing*.
31. Paraphrased by Young, "The Song of Songs."
32. Young, "The Hope-Fulness of Scriptural Reasoning," in *Healing*.

A More Detailed Illustration of the Primary Characteristics of TR

As noted earlier in this chapter, SR emerged historically out of TR, and, to understand SR's practice of inter-canonical study, one should first experience and reflect on prototypical features of TR's tradition-specific study practices. Having previously introduced a series of these features above, (app. 38–41), I conclude with a more detailed illustration, drawn from a single type of TR-like study: classical rabbinic midrash, as illustrated in the fourth-century midrash collection *Sifre Devarim* (*Sifre Deuteronomy*) and as introduced by a single contemporary rabbinic scholar, Steven Fraade. The following account should help readers appreciate the primary directions of TR study, even if the features of classic rabbinic commentary are not identical to the features of other traditions of TR study.

Fraade offers a helpful overview of traditional scriptural commentary:

> Ancient scriptural commentaries—even as they closely scrutinize the particles of the text to which they attend—are always about the text as a *whole*. By this I mean that they not only seek the text to be held in high regard by its interpretive community, but for the interpretive community to regard *itself* in relation to that text as mediated by its commentary. . . . Such a commentary is [therefore] not simply a series of declarative assertions about the meaning of words in the text but an attempt to *effect* a relationship between that text overall and those for whom it is 'scripture', predicated on the assumption not only that the text needs and deserves to be interpreted, but that the community for whom it needs to be interpreted itself needs to be engaged in the activity of interpretation to understand itself and *transform* itself into what it ought to be. Ancient scriptural commentaries are not simply constative conduits of meaning.[33]

In sum, Fraade characterizes ancient scriptural commentaries as (a) *scriptural texts* that engage their (b) *interpreter* (or interpretive community) in (c) a *relationship* mediated by scriptural commentary. Through this relationship, the interpretive community is "transformed into what it ought to be." Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the "dialogic work of literature," Fraade refers to the scriptural commentary's "double-dialogue," as it shuttles

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33. Fraade, *From Tradition*, 13–14. As sources of his notion of double-dialogue, Fraade cites, among others, McGann, *Social Values*, 19–31; and Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally*, 57–67; with antecedent sources in John Searle, J. L. Austin, and Mikhail Bakhtin.

back and forth between "the text that it interprets and the society of 'readers' for whom and with whom it interprets."[34]

By way of illustration, here is an excerpt from *Sifre Deuteronomy*, followed by Fraade's commentary on prototypical features of the Sifre's "double-dialogue." *Sifre* is commenting on Deuteronomy 32:7, from the song Moses delivered before his death:

> Remember the days of old (*olam*)
>
> Consider the years of each and every generation;
>
> Ask your father and he will inform you,
>   Your elders and they will tell you.

"The Sifre divides the verse in order to explicate its parts and does so twice."[35] Here are excerpts from the first set:

> [A] "Remember the days of old": [God said to them:] Take heed of what I did to the earliest generations: what I did to the people of the generation of the Flood, and what I did to the people of the generation of the Dispersion [the Tower of Babel], and what I did to the people of Sodom.
>
> [B] "Consider the years of each and every generation": You can find no generation without people like those of the generation of the Flood, and you can find no Generation without people like those of the generation of the Dispersion and like those of Sodom, but each and every individual is judged according to his deeds.
>
> [C] "Ask your father and he will inform you": These are the prophets as it says, "When Elisha beheld it, he cried out [to Elijah], 'Father, father' " (2 Kgs. 2:12).
>
> [D] "Your elders and they will tell you": These are the elders, as it is said, "Gather for Me seventy men of the elders of Israel" (Num. 11:16).

And here are primary features of the *Sifre's* practice of text interpretation, which I have excerpted from Fraade's account and re-labeled within my own vocabulary:

1. *Commentaries are dialogic-and-vague ("doubly dialogic" in Fraade's terms).* For Fraade, "commentary" refers to "a systematic series of explanations or interpretations" (from *Webster*'s). The commentary atomizes an extended "base-text" (such as Deut 32:7 in its plain sense)

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34. Fraade, *From Tradition*, 13–14.
35. Fraade, *From Tradition,* 75.

into successive subunits, attaching interpretive comments to each sub-unit.[36] Clearly distinguishing commentary from each sub-unit of base-text, the *Sifre* returns, "sooner or later," to add new comments on the same sub-unit. Fraade applies the term *dialogue* to this process of reading and return, explaining that he employs the term "somewhat fictively, as we do not simply have in commentary two voices equally present and responsive to one another. Rather I intend the term to denote the dynamic, interrelational ways in which commentary creates and communicates meaning. Such meaning is not simply inherent in the text being interpreted and brought to the surface by the commentary, nor is it simply produced by the commentary and conveyed . . . to its readers, nor is it simply produced by their reading of the commentary. Rather, it is to be found in all three, and especially in the . . . socially situated discursive universe that the commentary progressively constructs by inter-responsively drawing together and engaging the polyphonic world of Scripture with that of its students."[37]

2. *Commentaries that are dialogic-and-vague are interactive and (to varying degrees) relationally binding.* For Fraade, "interactive" commentaries display the mutual influences of both textual and interpretive contexts of signification. Neither text nor interpretation wholly determines meaning; each influences the other. Fraade explains that the plurality of [*Sifre's*] students advance [the commentary's] unfinished work by filling-out, but never finally, the anonymous narrative voice which is only partially present in the text itself . . . As [they] . . . work through the commentary, the commentary works through them.[38] These students are therefore *bound* to Scripture as unending source of new information about itself in relation to them.

3. *Commentaries that are dialogic-and-vague engage Scripture as vague but made definite through the time and relational context of interpretation. Scripture's meaning therefore varies with respect to variations in context.* To say that Scripture's words and verses are vague is to say that their meanings are not disclosed through any binary relation (such as of "sign to object") and that they may be disclosed through triadic relations that identify the specific time, context, or mode of interpretive relation through which specific meanings appear. Even with respect to a given context, relations between text and meaning are not formulaic; the interpretive relation between Scripture and commentator must be

36. Fraade, *From Tradition,* 1–2.
37. Fraade, *From Tradition,* 14.
38. Fraade, *From Tradition*, 19.

renewed on each occasion of interpretation. Examining sub-units C and D of the commentary on Deuteronomy 32:7, Fraade explains that:

> In the *Sifre*, as in other rabbinic collections, the rabbinic sages view themselves as the extension of [the] biblical class of lay elders, especially in their appointment to positions of judicial and administrative responsibility over the larger Jewish community. The commentary's juxtaposition of "prophets" and "elders" may also serve subtly to associate the two. . . . Thus, according to the rabbinic "chain of tradition," Joshua transmitted the Torah to the elders, who passed it on to the prophets, who . . . passed it on to the proto-rabbinic elders of Second Temple times.[39]

According to this reading, the sign "elders" displays its meaning in the context of the prophets' work, then again in the context of the work of the Second Temple elders, then again in the context of the rabbinic sages' commentary, then again, we may assume, in their students' commentary, and so on.

4. *Commentaries that are dialogic-and-vague identify Scripture as multivocal/polysemic. Multivocal* or *polysemic* means "having more than one probable meaning." In a weaker sense, this is a direct implication of the fact that meaning varies with respect to context. In a stronger sense, this means that, even with respect to a given context, one cannot discount the possibility that a text may allow more than one meaning. As a vivid illustration, Fraade lists *Sifre's* thirteen different readings of the initial words of Deuteronomy 32.1. In a more recent essay, he observes "that the most elementary reader of early rabbinic midrash would recognize that on virtually every 'page' of the tannaitic midrashim . . . we find multiple interpretations of single scriptural words or phrases."[40]

5. *Commentaries that are dialogic-and-vague tend to display self-reference.* Acknowledging their status *as* commentary, such commentaries signal that their words are not literal windows to divine intention or to *the* meaning of Scripture. We may thereby draw a distinction between commentaries whose contexts of meaning (or "interpretants")[41] *we analysts* may identify even if the commentators do not and commentaries whose self-reference does this work for us. In the former case, a commentary may appear *clear*, displaying a binary relation between

39. Fraade, *From Tradition*, 70.

40. Fraade, "Response," 342. Fraade refers to his "treatment of *Sifrei Devarim Ha'azinu*, pis. 306, to Deuteronomy 32:1 (ed. Finkelstein, *Sifre,* 308–35), 123–62.

41. See below, p. 68.

commentary and Scriptural object. In the latter case, a commentary signifies its vagueness and some manner of its context-specificity. Fraade comments that the *Sifre* "portrays the broader class of rabbinic authors *as* among the *objects* of its commentary— as, for example, anti-types of the biblical 'elders'—so that subsequent readers will be bound to re-interpret these objects as they re-read the scriptural base- texts of Sifre's commentary."[42] Sifre's dialogic-and-vague commentar- ies are ribbed by layers of reflection, including and extending beyond self-reference.

In sum, I have devoted Chapter 2 to reviewing the primary hermeneu- tical activity that characterizes SR. This is a movement "from deep to deep": moving from challenges or "problems" in the plain sense of each scriptural text to the interpretive and reparative reasonings that draw each SR study group into a fellowship of reasoning across canonical borders. I have de- voted most of this chapter to examining the reparative purposes of SR and the different ways that SR is performed in its two sub-projects of Textual Reasoning and of Scriptural Reasoning *per se.* In chapter 3, I turn to more philosophic questions: From the perspectives of academe, what species of reasoning are these? And how did SR come to integrate scriptural study and philosophic-like reasoning?