

Word Workers:
The Rabbinate and the Protestant Pastoral Office
in Dialogue

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1. Word Workers or: The Appeal of Dialogue and the Danger of
the Idealization and Instrumentalization of the Counterpart

Judaism is fascinating. The Jewish tradition of exegesis of the Torah can be spellbinding, as can the hermeneutical interplay of oral and written Torah, the perception of a history as continuous interpretation, the shaping of daily life through *mitzvoth*, a centuries-old philosophy, and much more. But, exactly this fascination is also a problem for the conversation between Jews and Christians.

I do not speak here of those sometimes also quite indiscriminately so-called “philo-Semites” – with all the problems of their secondary identification (and over-identification) with the victims in a society of the perpetrators, of bigotry, and of renewed intolerance. I speak much more of academic Practical Theology and its treatment of Judaism and of its tradition.

First of all, it does not appear to me to be a shame when scholars, too, are fascinated people. Concretely and in reference to the theme of this conference: It cannot be harmful if male and female Christian practical theologians regard the rabbinate, past and present, with some fascination. But for them a double danger exists: the danger of uncritical idealization on the one hand and monopolizing instrumentalization on the other.

(1) *The uncritical idealization*: In dialogue it can happen that suddenly “the” rabbinate appears as an ideal over against which “the” Protestant pastoral office is juxtaposed. What occurs is the singularization of the counterpart. In dialogue, it then may seem as if there is an intact, unequivocal, convincing image of the rabbi *there*, but here – on the Christian/Protestant side – a diffuse, ambiguous, not very inviting image of the pastor. The ideal of the counterpart is placed in relationship to problematic reality – without at the same time noticing that the depiction of the

ideal image itself threatens to become nothing other than a highly individualized projection of one's own yearnings, conceptions, and ideas. An uncritical idealization helps no one – and it is for this reason salutary and necessary to destroy the dream visions and delusions involved in these idealizing projections, for which concrete dialogue is still the best means.

(2) The *monopolizing instrumentalization*: The monopolizing instrumentalization lies on a somewhat different level, although it can touch upon tendencies inherent in uncritical idealization. In this case, the issue is the function of the (supposedly) dialogic view of Judaism. This view, namely, is taken over as an argument for one's own discourse and instrumentalized in order to affirm one's own position.

An example: About 15 years ago (1997), Stefan Fritsch submitted his doctoral dissertation with the title "Hassidic Pastoral Care: Pastoral-Psychological Aspects and Impulses for Therapeutic Work".¹ The work is engagingly designed and reads well – alone because of the many Hassidic texts and stories cited. On the other hand, it does not always evade the danger of romanticizing and idealizing the Hassidic movement. The Hassidic world is quite simplistically described as that world that overcomes the specific dangers of the modern age, such as the "excessiveness of intellectualism".² At the same time, Fritsch discovers aspects in Hassidic spiritual care (and confirmed by it) that he, on the basis of his own pastoral-psychological knowledge, holds to be decisive. The selection of Hassidic texts already stands under a governing principle that is prescribed by pastoral psychology – and thus the result is a recursive cycle of corroboration of one's own notions, in which the counterpart loses his own voice, his potentially provocative foreignness.

Whoever sits in a glass house should not throw stones ... I am not sure whether, in my own dissertation, in which I attempted to conduct a homiletic-hermeneutical dialogue with Jewish voices, I always and on every page evaded this danger, as much as I was at pains methodologically to do so.³

In both cases, in idealization and in instrumentalization, that which is "foreign", or the counterpart, is transformed into an ostensible argument

1 Stefan Fritsch, *Die chassidische Seelsorge: Pastoralpsychologische Aspekte und Impulse für die therapeutische Arbeit*, ErTh 29 (Frankfurt/Main et al.: Lang, 1997).

2 Ibid., 12.

3 Cf. Alexander Deeg, *Predigt und Derascha: Homiletische Textekture im Dialog mit dem Judentum*, APTLH 48 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

in the (controversial) discourse about one's own views. Thereby, a *pre-modern* Jewish tradition is willingly brought into juxtaposition to the precarious developments of the modern and post-modern ages in the Christian context. In such cases, idealization combines with a romanticization of what is supposed to be Jewish that does not do justice to the pluralism that likewise is to be found there. And worse: Such a romanticization obstructs access to dialogues that, on the basis of comparable current problematic situations, could bring Jewish and Christian aspects together into play and could be conducted as a dialogue with a living counterpart (and not with a romanticized ideal image).

The first insight that becomes clear against this background is the following: There is and there was "the" rabbinate no more than there might ever have been "the" Protestant pastoral office. This statement is evident in the pluralized religious circumstances in the present – in the face of the diversity of cultural contexts, theological and personal differences, the differences in gender, and so on. But it is also valid for the rabbinate and the Protestant pastoral office of the past.⁴ And every person who all too carelessly speaks of *the* pastoral office or *the* rabbinate thereby – in spite of every necessity to simplify what is complex – always makes a mistake.

How, then, can a dialogue take place? For the last several years, a metaphor has appeared to me to be helpful that the cultural scholar Homi K. Bhabha introduced in the post-colonial discourse and that since then has gone through several careers. Bhabha speaks of the "Third Room" as a site for the encounter of cultures.⁵ I take up this metaphor as the topography for the Christian-Jewish encounter – and maintain that a dialogue then succeeds when it leads to a movement into, and encounter in, the Third Room.⁶ This means that both partners in a discussion – both coming from their very own sphere – leave this behind and

4 Cf. here only Julius Carlebach, ed., *Das aschkenasische Rabbinat: Studien über Glaube und Schicksal* (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 1995), and Jacob-Rader Marcus and Abraham J. Peck, eds., *The American Rabbinate: A Century of Continuity and Chance: 1883–1983* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1985) (with articles on the development of the orthodox, conservative, and reform rabbinates in the one hundred years since the first ordination at the HUC in Cincinnati).

5 Cf. Homi K. Bhabha, "Das theoretische Engagement," in idem, ed., *Die Verortung der Kultur*, trans. Michael Schiffmann and Jürgen Freudl, Stauffenburg Discussion 5 (Tübingen: Stauffenburg-Verlag, 2000), 29–58.

6 Cf. on this also Deeg, *Predigt und Derascha*, 368–369. A comparable topography of encounter also appears in Jean-François Lyotard, "Von einem Bindestrich (D'un trait d'union)," in idem and Eberhard Gruber, eds., *Ein Bindestrich: Zwischen "Jüdischem" und "Christlichem"* (Düsseldorf et al.: Parerga, 1995), 27–51.

involve themselves anew in the encounter. This does not take place along the secure pathways and in the well-known realms of one's own personal constructions, but rather on terrain unknown *to both*, in a Third Room. And something will occur in the conversation there that then has a transforming and altering effect on what is one's own. No one leaves the room as the same person he or she was upon entering it.

Thereby, there ought to be a good reason, a sufficient motivation, for both to set out for the promising, but also demanding and strenuous Third Room. When, three years ago, a conference took place that certainly can be compared with ours, this motivation was clearly present. In the conference organized by Bernd Schröder, Harry Harun Behr, and Daniel Krochmalnik titled "Was ist ein guter Religionslehrer?" (What is a Good Teacher of Religion?) the issue was a Jewish-Muslim-Christian dialogue (or triologue) on questions of religious education.⁷ At issue was an understanding in the face of numerous common challenges and problems as shown, for example, in the vehement discussions around the introduction of a confessional instruction in religion in Berlin ("ProReli"). At the same time, it had to do with quite practical questions of the organization of the training of teachers of religion at state universities and concerning the corresponding qualifications.

The motivation for a dialogue between rabbinate and pastoral office does not appear to me to be as clear. The chance for a dialogue, however, is in my opinion outstanding at present, since for the last several years rabbis once again are being trained and ordained in Germany. The question about how this occurs, how learning on the path to the rabbinate takes shape, can be posed for the first time again in a long time in direct dialogue with those who bear responsibility here among us for training. Above and beyond this, both professional groups appear to me to stand before thoroughly comparable demands that exist not least of all because of their increasingly unclear professional role.

Both are, after all, "*word workers*" – and a conversation appears obvious for this reason alone. "Word worker": I have coined this phrase and believe that I therewith have found a point of comparison and have named the "Third Room" that connects us – male and female rabbis on the one hand and male and female Protestant pastors on the other. The

7 Cf. Bernd Schröder, Harry Harun Behr and Daniel Krochmalnik, eds., *Was ist ein guter Religionslehrer? Antworten von Juden, Christen und Muslimen, Religionspädagogische Gespräche zwischen Juden, Christen und Muslimen 1* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2009).

Protestant church, so one can say following Luther, is *creatura verbi*, a creation of the Word. Luther himself spoke of the church as “*creatura Evangelii*”⁸ – and once said, “*Ecclesia enim est filia, nata ex verbo, non est mater verbi.*”⁹ This insight was radical 500 years ago because it answered the question about authority in a way completely different than was possible in the Roman church, with its institutionalism and its recourse to the mediation of what was ecclesiastically and institutionally secured. At the same time, though, the “word workers”, the Protestant pastors, received with this a completely new, first and foremost homiletically and hermeneutically determined role. Their task was to care for the communication of this “word” – to take care that, in the interplay of biblical Word and current preaching, the Word of the Gospel itself can become an event that is always new.¹⁰

Protestant pastors are, for this reason, word workers, and male and female rabbis, too, are word workers in a specific sense. It would not be wrong, I think, to speak of Judaism as *בריאת התורה* (*b’riat haTorah*), as a creation of the Torah – and of the rabbis as those who again and again have to assume the never-ending task of the communication of the Torah.

2. Discoveries in Dialogue, or: Five Courses of Discussion Between Word Workers

In the following I suggest in five courses of discussion where I recognize especially interesting and challenging points suitable for a Christian-Jewish or, more exactly, a Protestant-Jewish dialogue among word workers. For there are perhaps, after all, much greater proximities to be seen between the rabbinate and the Protestant pastoral office than between the Catholic priesthood and the rabbinate (and here I allude not least of all only to celibacy and the radically different, that is, the ontologically habitual instead of relevant-dynamic understanding of ordination!).

8 WA 2, 430.

9 WA 42, 334; cf. Jan Hermelink, *Kirchliche Organisation und das Jenseits des Glaubens: Eine praktisch-theologische Theorie der evangelischen Kirche* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2011), 33–34; Christian Grethlein, *Pfarrer – ein theologischer Beruf!* (Frankfurt/Main: edition chrismon, 2009), 11–12.

10 Cf. the figure of the threefold form of the Word of God, as formulated, for example, by Karl Barth in KD I/1.

Five offers of conversation, five incipient dialogues – the continuation of which is still pending. We are concerned here with – to use a particular image – five overtures. The actual works themselves can originate only in dialogue, in direct conversation, in remark and reply. The lecture in the form of the monologue is the worst of all conceivable forms for this purpose, as, for example, Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber knew nearly a hundred years ago.¹¹

2.1 A First Course of Discussion: Reform Rabbinate and Protestant Pastoral Office in Search of “Identity” and Profile

A certain feeling of unease has been spreading in the Protestant context over the last several years. Both male and female pastors ask, “Who are we really?” And the variety of (in the narrow sense) pastoral theological literature that has appeared in the past years¹² as well as the intensity of the discourse that is conducted in the leading organs, such as the *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt*, hint at this unease. Isolde Karle¹³, for example, states, “The pastor’s profession no longer appears to understand itself anymore”, and speaks of a “crisis” in this profession.¹⁴ Of course, this crisis of a diffusion of the pastoral profession does not appear in any way to be so new: Already 20 years ago Manfred Josuttis saw the pastor alternating characteristically between scholar, priest, prophet, administrative of-

11 Cf. Daniel Krochmalnik, “Der ‘Lerner’ und der Lehrer: Geschichte eines ungleichen Paares,” in Bernd Schröder et al., *Was ist ein guter Religionslehrer?*, 57–90, here 82–87.

12 Cf. only Ulrike Wagner-Rau, *Auf der Schwelle. Das Pfarramt im Prozess kirchlichen Wandels* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009); Christian Grethlein, *Pfarrer – ein theologischer Beruf!*, esp. 83–103.

13 Isolde Karle, “Deprofessionalisierung durch Professionalisierung? Konsequenzen der Kirchenreform für den Pfarrberuf,” *ZGP* 21 (2003): 50–51, here 50; as well as Isolde Karle, “Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer in der Spannung zwischen Professionalisierung und Professionalität,” *DtPfrBl* 103 (2003): 629–634, here 629.

14 Isolde Karle, *Der Pfarrberuf als Profession: Eine Berufstheorie im Kontext der modernen Gesellschaft*, PThK 3 (Gütersloh: Christian Kaiser, 2001), 11–14. Cf. also Eberhard Winkler, “Pfarrer II: Evangelisch,” in *TRE* 26 (1996), 360–374, here 369; and Christian Grethlein, “Die Bedeutung der Predigt für den Pfarrberuf: Eine Analyse zweier pastoraltheologischer Konzepte,” in Wilfried Engemann, ed., *Theologie der Predigt. Grundlagen – Modelle – Konsequenzen*, APTh 21 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001), 337–352, here 337.

ficer, and leisure-time activities director.¹⁵ Nothing has changed fundamentally in this situation; it is rather so that new job profiles have been supplemented: male and female pastors (furnished with the corresponding competencies) as advertising strategists, publicists, communications specialists, systems theorists, managers (recently also occasionally as quality-control managers), or artists – the list could be extended still further. The pastor's profession offers the opportunity for multi-perspective activity that promises little boredom and many possibilities for personal development. But on the basis of the uncertainty connected with it and the manifold expectations resulting from it, it faces the problem of dissatisfaction and over-expectation up to the point of pastoral burn-out (a phenomenon that, likewise, has been observed only for about the last ten years, but in the meantime has been taken seriously by many churches).¹⁶

In the last several years models for the pastoral office have been developed and discussed at many locations. The most prominent was developed within the Association of Societies of Female and Male Protestant Pastors in Germany nearly ten years ago. In 2002, the *Model for Female and Male Pastors in the Congregation*¹⁷ appeared in a sixteen-page color brochure. A model is intended to concentrate and focus ideas, arouse fanciful and critical stimulation, move, and provoke.¹⁸ Does the text presented by the Association do this? Even if Klaus Weber, the chairman of the Association, emphasizes in his foreword that the text is intended to offer the "impetus to reflect upon the center of our work"¹⁹, the model comes

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- 15 Cf. Manfred Josuttis, *Der Pfarrer ist anders. Aspekte einer zeitgenössischen Pastoraltheologie* (München: Christian Kaiser, 1982), 9; cf. also Dietrich Stollberg, "Der Pfarrberuf zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit," *PTh* 89 (2000): 498–507, here 499; Volker Drehsen, "Vom Amt zur Person: Wandlungen in der Amtsstruktur der protestantischen Volkskirche. Eine Standortbestimmung des Pfarrberufs aus praktisch-theologischer Sicht," *IJPT* 2 (1998): 263–280, here 263–265, 277.
- 16 Cf. the study by Andreas von Heyl, *Zwischen Burnout und spiritueller Erneuerung: Studien zum Beruf des evangelischen Pfarrers und der evangelischen Pfarrerin* (Frankfurt/Main et al.: Peter Lang, 2003); cf. also Christian Möller, *Der heilsame Riss: Impulse reformatorischer Spiritualität* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 2003), 80.
- 17 *Leitbild Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer in der Gemeinde: Leitbild mit Erläuterungen und Konsequenzen*, Verband der Vereine Evangelischer Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer in Deutschland, ed., (n.p., 2002).
- 18 Cf., on the utopian-critical function of a model, Michael Klessmann, *Pfarrbilder im Wandel: Ein Beruf im Umbruch* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001), 27.
- 19 *Leitbild Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer in der Gemeinde*, 3.

across rather like the *sum* of many correct and important insights and reflections. The individual areas of official pastoral activity are listed one after the other without any weighting and in each case are outlined in sentences worthy of further thought: the sermon, accompaniment in life's phases and pastoral care, pedagogical activity, social work and the missionary assignment, supra-congregational tasks, congregational direction and administration. Added to these then are the two fields of tension of the person and the office on the one hand and of the pastoral office and the other offices and tasks in the congregation on the other.²⁰ That is a lot. And thus Manfred Josuttis remarks critically about the model that it would, "if one takes the statements reasonably seriously, have a depressing effect on those concerned and a deterrent effect on interested high school graduates".²¹

The search for identity is presently very important. Of course, it does not, in fact, appear to me to be so new. Perhaps every generation of pastors (and every person, man or woman) – for many years and probably also decades – has to struggle with defining a profession that in earlier times (apparently) still understood itself as a matter of course (or is this, too, an idealizing and romanticizing interpretation?). Earlier, one was a pastor – and that was at the same time a way of life as well as a profession. One lived in the parsonage, had a pastor's family (and, correspondingly, a wife who took care of the house and the children and, at the same time, involved herself in the congregation – and thereby, so to say, shared with her husband the profession of pastor as "Mrs. Pastor"!), and the profession was so established socially that the office was in the position of being able to stabilize the profession. The pastor had a status that was granted to him from the outside and that led to a corresponding social prestige. This identity has been broken for many years. Being a pastor now disintegrates into many different functions, all of which have to do with one's own *person*.²² If, in earlier times, the office could carry the person, then female and male pastors now learn (in the different areas of their activity) that the person must carry the office.²³ What is traditionally a matter of course disappears just like financial resources, a cir-

20 Cf. *ibid.*, 6–8.

21 Manfred Josuttis, *Wirklichkeiten der Kirche: Zwanzig Predigten und ein Protest* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003), 145.

22 Cf. Isolde Karle, *Kirche im Reformstress* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2010), 193–196.

23 Cf. above all Drehsen, "Vom Amt zur Person".

cumstance that intensifies the pressure upon the pastoral office still further. For, as the “key profession” of the church, as which, for example, the influential EKD text *Church of Freedom* correctly sees it, it bears responsibility in a special way for the welfare and woe of the church.²⁴

At present – and this appears evident to me – the signs point to a concentration, to a re-opening of the question of the identity of the pastoral office. This is sought in part – so my apprehension – too quickly in organizational theory, that is, the pastoral office, for example, is given responsibility for direction of the volunteer workers and, in order to ease the strain, withdraws more and more from “primary care”. This certainly is not wrong, but a focus and orientation on content is lacking here.²⁵

At this point I betake myself into the Third Room for the first time – and dare a reference to the development of the rabbinate in the past years.²⁶ There, namely – so I conclude, for example, from the discussion in the *CCAR Journal* – a comparable diffusion and lack of clarity in regard to the image of the rabbi was discerned, with quite comparable indications of overload of male and female rabbis. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, for example, describes the problem in a rather humorous way.²⁷ In an article from 1995 he recognizes that the present-day rabbinate has become a strenuous, multi-functional job promising little rest, in which social contacts, above all, play a decisive role. The problem arises at the point where this rabbinate is placed in relationship to the traditional role of the rabbi as Torah sage, scholar, *chacham*. How do the two fit together? Not at all, says Cohn-Sherbok, who then attempts to dissolve the tension by taking a look at the person of the rabbi. *Both* types of rabbi exist: the ones who happily plunge into the diversity of social contacts and into the various fields of responsibility in congregational life; and the others who prefer the quiet existence of the Torah scholar at his desk. *Both* exist: the “dog rabbis”, wagging their tails in a friendly manner at every new encounter, and the “cat rabbis”, thankful for every moment of withdrawal. Of course, only the “dog rabbis” are really suitable for congregational

24 Cf. Rat der EKD, *Kirche der Freiheit: Perspektiven für die evangelische Kirche im 21. Jahrhundert. Ein Impulspapier des Rates der EKD* (Hannover, 2006).

25 Similar is also Karle, *Kirche im Reformstress*, esp. 191–225 [Der Pfarrberuf im Sog der Ökonomisierung].

26 Cf. also on the following my reflections in: Alexander Deeg, “Pastor legens: Das Rabbinat als Impulsgeber für ein Leitbild evangelischen Pfarramts,” *PTH* 93 (2004): 411–427.

27 Cf. on the following: Dan Cohn-Sherbok, “Dog Rabbis and Cat Rabbis,” *CCAR Journal* 167 (1995): 21–23.

service; “cat rabbis” – like the author of the article himself – must look for other work (Cohn-Sherbok found a position as university professor).

Cohn-Sherbok’s humorous but pointed portrayal provoked inquiries and criticism and numerous letters to the editor. Cat lovers as well as dog lovers refused to accept the black-white depiction by the author and pointed to the possibility and necessity of the integration of *both* types in the life of the congregation.²⁸ Therewith, they certainly came nearer to the combination of Torah, life, and teaching that can be grasped in rabbinical Judaism than Cohn-Sherbok’s stylization of a lonely scholar’s existence characteristic of the “cat rabbi”. But the main problem in Cohn-Sherbok’s humorous solution lies, in my opinion, in the individual psychological reduction of the problem of the fundamental diffusion of rabbinical activity. There are, naturally, different human types; but can the question about the goal and task of the rabbinate be answered by stating that some just seem more and others less suitable for the demands of the multi-functional profession of a congregational communicator?

On the basis of the perception of a problematic diffusion of rabbinical activity, others attempted to redefine the *center* of this activity. In the diversity of the answers from the past decades, *one* center crystallizes repeatedly, a center that interestingly seeks reconciliation with the tradition of the sage of the rabbinical period. It characterizes the rabbi, one can roughly say, as a *reading teacher*.²⁹

With this, I end the first course of discussion – and use this key phrase as a transition to my second overture to dialogue.

28 Cf. here, for example: Rosalind A. Gold, “Dog Rabbis and Cat Rabbis: A Response,” *CCAR Journal* 167 (1995): 25; A. Stanley Dreyfus, “Are We Yelpers or Yowlers? A Response to Dog Rabbis and Cat Rabbis,” *CCAR Journal* 167 (1995): 27–29; Constance A. Golden, “Some Cats are Friendly,” *CCAR Journal* 167 (1995): 31–32.

29 Cf. already Louis M. Levitsky, “The Rabbi Is a Teacher of Judaism,” *CCAR Journal* 18 (1957): 23–26; and Meir Ben-Horin, “Toward a New Generation of American Rabbis,” *Reconstructionist* 35 (September 1969): 7–14.

2.2 A Second Course of Discussion: Creative Word Workers – Rabbis and Pastors and Their Effort on Behalf of the Religiously Determined Cultural Memory

As early as 1998, the practical theologian Albrecht Grözinger, from Basel, offered an orientation for the pastoral office that had become unsure of itself. He writes: “Imagine that the Protestant pastoral office of the future will be in its structure similar to the rabbinate in the Jewish congregation.”³⁰ Grözinger recommends the *role model rabbi* and specifies the potential of this model briefly in two respects: (1) The pastoral office, in the paradigmatic look to the rabbinate, could be renewed as an “office of remembrance” in “doctrine and pastoral care”, as an “intellectual office”.³¹ Precisely in the face of the “chances *and* shallows” on the way from the modern to the post-modern age, this office, so Grözinger, is of decisive significance.³² (2) The role model rabbi also is combined with a practical point: No congregational rabbi works at the same time as a member of the synagogue board. In view of the, in any case too numerous, demands made of the pastoral office, and in view of the lack of training in this respect, female and male pastors also should be relieved radically of the burden of the leadership of congregational organization.

The second aspect mentioned by Grözinger is quite decisive for the question of ecclesiastical organization. And in many regional churches it is also being tried out (finally!) in an intensive manner – where, for example (as in Braunschweig), the organization of a trustee service is being considered (cf. www.gemeindekurator.de). For the practical-theological discussion in the Third Room of the image of both of the professions of rabbi and pastor, though, Grözinger’s first point appears to me to be more interesting. Grözinger dreams of the pastoral office as an intellectual office – and combines this with the great discourses of the post-modern age on the one hand and with Assmann’s concept of the cultural memory on the other.³³

30 Albrecht Grözinger, *Die Kirche – ist sie noch zu retten? Anstiftungen für das Christentum in postmoderner Gesellschaft*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 141 (see esp. 134–141: “Das Amt der Erinnerung – Überlegungen zum künftigen Profil des Berufs der Pfarrerinnen und Pfarrer”).

31 Grözinger, *Die Kirche*, 141. Grözinger sees the rabbinate as related “in a peculiar mixture of teaching and spiritual care” to the nurture of the “tradition”.

32 Cf. Grözinger, *Die Kirche*, 48 [emphasis AD].

33 Cf. Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, 6th ed. (München: Beck, 2007).

I use Grözinger's point in order, in late modern or post-modern times, to take a look at the pre-modern rabbinate, more exactly at the tradition of the *Chachamim*.³⁴ Of course, one cannot speak of a "rabbinate" in this period, since this institution has its origin in the High Middle Ages. Nevertheless, it sees itself within the tradition of the Torah sages from the rabbinical period who bore the title *rav* or *rabbi* and understood the terms quite differently.³⁵ "Only in the High Middle Ages did one begin in the Jewish congregations of Christian Europe [...] to speak of *rabbanut*, that is, of rabbinate in the conceptual and institutional sense of a congregational rabbinate and of the office of *rabbi*."³⁶ In addition, I also draw upon the (in recent times once again more intensively considered) Mishnah tractate *Pirke Avot* (Sayings of the Fathers)³⁷, which I read primarily as a compendium of the life of the *chacham*, that is, of that human being who lets his life be determined by the learning and teaching of the Torah.³⁸

Rabban Yohanan Ben Zakkai formulates very fundamentally in *Pirke Avot* why reading and learning have an eminent significance: "If you have learned much Torah, then do not be proud of that fact, for you were cre-

34 Cf. Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, TSAJ 66 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 132 (see esp. 130–137); on the institution and on the background of the rabbinical movement in this time, cf. also Simon Schwarzfuchs, *A Concise History of the Rabbinate* (Oxford, UK – Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 1–12.

35 Cf. Mordechai Breuer, "Tausend Jahre aschkenasisches Rabbinat: Der Werdegang einer Institution," in Carlebach, *Das aschkenasische Rabbinat*, 15–23, here 15.

36 Ibid.; in a similar sense cf. also Simon Schwarzfuchs, "The Making of the Rabbi," in idem, *A Concise History*, 133–140.

37 Cf., for example, the new editions in the German-speaking realm: *Pirke Avot: Sprüche der Väter*, trans. Annette Böckler, JVB Klassiker 1 (Berlin: Jüdische Verlagsanstalt Berlin, 2001); cf. also Rami M. Shapiro, *Die Worte der Weisen sind glühende Kohlen: Das kleine Buch der jüdischen Weisheit* (Frankfurt/Main: Krüger, 1998). For the English-speaking area, I refer to: Leonard Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitzky, *Pirke Avot: A Modern Commentary on Jewish Ethics* (New York: UAHC Press, 1993).

38 On the significance of reading and learning in Judaism after 70 CE, cf. also my essay: "Opfer als 'Nahung': Ein jüdisch-christliches Gespräch zur Spiritualität des Opfers," in Werner H. Ritter, ed., *Erlösung ohne Opfer?*, BTS 22 (Göttingen, 2003), 113–145, esp. 131–133.

ated to this purpose" (mAvot 2:7³⁹). Reading and learning the Torah as the calling of every creature! But, even if this be true, it does not appear to be very easy. Reading and learning require effort; the rabbis in the Sayings of the Fathers cherish no illusions at all about this. "So is the path of Torah [of the study of Torah, AD]: You shall eat bread with salt and drink only little water. You shall sleep upon the earth and lead a life of privation [...]" (mAvot 6:3⁴⁰). The Torah demands, so numerous sayings emphasize, attention, devotion, and concentration. And it demands so much of these that excessive conversation with a woman already could be too great a distraction from it (cf. mAvot 1:5). One can say with some exaggeration that the sage's first love will be given to the Torah. And, really, it cannot be otherwise, for the Torah has its direct source in God's love, which He gives to Israel as an exquisite gift (cf. mAvot 3:14). This love relativizes the effort. At the same time it opens an approach to the Torah, to which a certain lack of intentionality belongs *ideally*: One studies the Torah not because a particular content is to be treated, summarized, or even learned, but rather out of love and because God has given it in love.⁴¹

Even if, therefore, the study of the Torah does not proceed in a strictly goal-oriented way, still it is so that a reward is promised to the one who turns to the Torah in love and without intention: "Ben He He says: So the effort, so the reward" (mAvot 5:23).⁴² The learning person will recognize and discover that it is worthwhile to contemplate the Torah again and

39 Here, and in the following, the citations refer to the Hebrew edition of the Mishnah: *The Mishna: Seder Nezikin* (Jerusalem – Tel Aviv, 1988); translation by Annette Böckler, *Pirke Avot*, there 2:9.

40 Mishnah Avot 6, the "encomium upon the Law", was inserted after the redaction of the Mishnah; cf. Günter Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch* (München: Beck, 1992), 120.

41 The Kabbala thought further and composed poetry in the context of the image of love in a daring manner: It characterized the "Torah as a bride, princess, mother, sister [...], [...] as a female presence, in a more specific sense as a female body. [...] To encounter the Torah face to face and, so to speak, to disrobe the princess, is the yearning of the Jewish scholar [...]" (Almut Sh. Bruckstein, *Die Maske des Moses: Studien zur jüdischen Hermeneutik* [Berlin – Wien: Philo Verlagsanstalt, 2001], 110–111). The Zohar tells how the Torah-learner daily circles around the gate of the house in which the princess stays. And, occasionally, "she waves to him, [but, AD] returns immediately to her place and hides herself" (*ibid.*, 116).

42 In the context of 5:22, I interpret this frank saying as applying also to the way the Torah is used.

again, "because everything is contained in it"⁴³ – everything, all of life, the whole world. At the same time the learner will discover that God is present in all the effort of learning: "When two sit together and exchange words of the Torah with each other, then the *Shekinah* [the divine indwelling, AD] is with them" (mAvot 3:2). Being together, the communion of learning and teaching, plays in general a decisive role. Thus, mAvot 6:5–6 asks: How is the Torah acquired? And one of the forty-eight answers to this question reads: "from the one who learns in order to teach".⁴⁴ It cannot at all be otherwise than that the one who learns and invests energy, but also receives a reward and makes discoveries passes on something of this and infects others. In this way it will occur that learning and teaching take place in mutual interplay. The roles of the teacher and of the student are not fixed. That is the reason why making "his rabbi or teacher wise" also is one of the forty-eight ways to acquire the Torah. And, at another place in the traditional rabbinical literature, it is emphasized that even God Himself belongs permanently among these learners. He devotes three hours daily to learning the Torah, as is said in bAvodaZara 3b!⁴⁵

If the study of the Torah is not the means to any end, but rather resembles a marriage-like love relationship for the long term, then one never will be finished with it: "It is not for you to end the work, but you also are not free to relieve yourself of it" (mAvot 2:16). Reading and learning the Torah becomes a permanent way of life.⁴⁶ For this reason Shammai also says, "Make your Torah fast [...]" (mAvot 1:15). And one can translate this more freely, as does Annette Böckler: "Make your study of the Torah into a firm habit."⁴⁷ Learning must and will put its stamp on life. It can be said extremely concisely: "Without flour no Torah; without Torah no flour" (mAvot 3:17). Life is tied together with the Torah in the most elementary way: The Torah becomes the bread of life; the bread becomes the word of life. For this reason, the sage can never lead the life of the scholar withdrawn into the *Lehrhaus*. But

43 Cf. mAvot 5:22: "Turn it over, and turn it over again, for everything is in it."

44 In Hebrew the two elements appear more closely interlocked with each other through the *one* root *lamad* in q. und. pi.: *ha-lomed al-menat le-lammed*.

45 Cf. Krochmalnik, "Der 'Lerner'," in Schröder et al., *Was ist ein guter Religionslehrer?*, 62.

46 Cf. Yeschiahu Leibowitz, *Vorträge über die Sprüche der Väter: Auf den Spuren des Maimonides*, trans. Grete Leibowitz (Obertshausen: Context-Verlag, 1984), 28 [cf. esp. the section: "Tora-Studium und Berufsleben", 27–60].

47 Böckler, *Pirke Awot*, 40.

apparently there existed at least the danger that many could consider this to be wisdom. Thus, Shimon, the son of Gamaliel, warns: "It is not the *midrash* [the searching, questioning work in the text, AD] that is the main thing, but rather the act" (mAvot 1:17).⁴⁸ On the basis of the close connection between learning and living, it stands to reason that in rabbinical Judaism it was demanded that none should make a living from Torah scholarship but rather in any case should pursue another form of gainful employment.⁴⁹ Only in this way can the rabbi, with his own life, make clear to others the inviting paths of the lived relationship to the Torah and can encourage others to attempt an "*imitatio rabbini*" (Kirschner).⁵⁰ Learning, living, teaching, and loving – all of this is connected with reading the Torah; the impressions from Mishnah Avot can be summarized with this sentence. They do not actually outline the contours of the profession of the rabbi, which exists in this sense for the first time in the Jewish Middle Ages, but rather much more a *way of life* characterized by the reading of the Torah.

It would be problematic now to employ these impressions taken from a Mishnah tractate and from the rabbinical tradition as an image for the rabbinate – and perhaps to hold it up as a shining example for a Protestant pastoral office of the present with its dispersal of its efforts in organization and administration. This would accurately be the idealization and instrumentalization that I have described at the beginning of this paper as a methodological problem. For this reason, we need to take a brief look at the transformations on the path into the present: A *new* rabbinate developed in the 19th century first of all in Germany and then emanated from there to the rest of Europe and to the United States.⁵¹ The "modern rabbinate" originated in the context of emancipation and acculturation.

48 Cf. also the repeated emphasis that the love for the Torah always also must imply love for the neighbor; e.g. mAvot 5:12; 6:1; 6:5 f.

49 Cf. Lawrence E. Frizzell, "Rab/Rabbi/Rabban/Rabbiner," in *TRE* 28 (1997), 80–82, here 81. See also mAvot 2:2: "Learning the Torah in combination with a worldly occupation is beautiful."

50 Cf. Robert Kirschner, "Imitatio Rabbini," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 17 (1986): 70–79.

51 Already in the Middle Ages – in contrast to the period of the Mishnah – a significant change asserted itself: The rabbinate had become a congregational rabbinate and, thus, a paid profession; congregations hired a "rabbi" (only now did the rabbinate become a profession!) and supported him financially (cf. Frizzell, "Rab", 81).

In the medieval congregations, the rabbis were primarily Torah scholars who made decisions in questions of religious law (*posekim*).⁵² In the synagogal worship service, however, they played mostly only a minor role; in Ashkenazic Judaism the lecture held by the rabbi during the worship service (*darasha*) was customary only twice a year.⁵³ But, in the course of the social changes in Germany at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, a new paradigm became decisive: the Protestant pastor. The rabbis modeled themselves on their Protestant "colleagues" and so developed into preachers and pastoral counselors.⁵⁴ If they formerly were active above all in the *Lehrhaus*, then the synagogue now became the crucial scene of their activity. If the rabbis formerly were to be distinguished from the pastor in respect of their clothing, their hairstyle, and their beards, then now the black cassock and the accompanying biretta standardized the dress regulations of both, and the beards of many a rabbi disappeared. If the rabbis of earlier days received their education above all in the yeshiva, which concentrated upon Talmud studies, then now they graduated from the university and were, as a rule, doctors.⁵⁵ Academic scholarship, with its models of criticism and conceptual abstraction, led to an increasingly critical questioning and scrutiny of the Torah and, above all, of the Jewish religious law, the halakhah. The rabbi becomes a critical theologian, preacher, and pastor – literarily ac-

52 Cf. here the designation of the rabbi as "Kauscherwächter" (responsible for the declaration of food and drink as kosher). This designation, which Ruben Gumpertz, for example, used in 1820, gives a negative connotation to the traditional image of the rabbi in the course of the re-orientation in the 19th century. Cf. Ismar Schorsch, "The Modern Rabbinate – Then and Now," *Conservative Judaism* 43/2 (1990/91): 12–20, here 14.

53 Cf. on this also Schwarzfuchs, *A Concise History*, 50–63. This is valid to the present for numerous traditional congregations (above all in Israel).

54 Cf. Alexander Altmann, "The German Rabbi: 1910–1939," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 19 (1974): 31–49, here 32, 44; Andrea Bieler, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem verlorenen Himmel: Jüdische und christliche Reflexionen zu Gottesdienstreform und Predigtkultur im 19. Jahrhundert*, PThE 65 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 125–130 ["Der Rabbiner als Prediger"]. The "Preaching Movement" in the first half of the 19th century, in which preaching in the local national language in the synagogal worship service was introduced gradually nearly everywhere, is not conceivable without the change in the role of the rabbi – and also conversely!

55 Cf. Altmann, "The German Rabbi", 31.

cessible in the 20th century in Noah Gordon's novel *The Rabbi*⁵⁶ or Harry Kemelman's many detective novels.

Two images of the rabbinate collide: the rabbi in the period before acculturation and the "modern rabbi". In his novel *Tohuwabohu*, Sammy Gronemann⁵⁷ confronts these two images with each other in his description of Jewish life in the Berlin of the early 20th century: Jossel has migrated from Russia to Berlin and is surprised at the Berlin rabbis, quite especially at their many "speeches in the worship service". Kaiser, a rabbinical student, characterizes this speaking, on the other hand, as *the* business of the rabbi. Jossel is confused; not even the word "preaching" is familiar to him. Kaiser – now also surprised – asks in return, "Doesn't anyone do any preaching then among you in the temple on the Sabbath?" "Among us? – No! – What for? – The Torah is read to us." "That's done among us, too." "Can the preacher say anything better than Moses?" "Yeah, but what then does the rabbi do for you?" "He doesn't have any time for something like that! – He learns and instructs – he decides disputes – he gives advice – he cares for the poor – and a thousand other things! – But, maybe it is good to preach, and I just don't understand that yet [...]"⁵⁸

The clock cannot be turned back. The "modern" rabbi, born of the combination of Jewish tradition, emancipatory Enlightenment thought, *and* a dependence upon the paradigm of the Protestant pastoral office, is reality. But what could be helpful in the present question about identity in the pastoral office and in the rabbinate would be the memory about what "word work" can mean: the determination of pastoral and rabbinical identity through the processes of reading and learning. In an article from 2004, I have suggested the image of a "pastor legens" as a possible model for the Protestant pastoral office of the present. In the exchange with the rabbinate this image would offer the possibility of distinguishing an office that is at the same time *intellectual* and *spiritual*.

Both appear to me to be important. Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, the systematic theologian from Munich, has gone too far with his polemic, but definitely is right in the matter: The Protestant pastoral office is threat-

56 Cf. Noah Gordon, *Der Rabbi* (Berlin: Goldmann, 2000) [first German edition 1967; American original: *The Rabbi*, New York 1965].

57 Sammy Gronemann, *Tohuwabohu*, 1st ed. (Berlin, 1920), 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Reclam, 2001).

58 Gronemann, *Tohuwabohu*, 101.

ened, above all, with a loss of intellectuality.⁵⁹ Already several years ago Maurice N. Eisendraht opposed in a similarly resolute manner an anti-intellectualism spreading through American Judaism. Nothing, he wrote, is worse than “happy rabbis preaching happy sermons before happy people with happy problems.”⁶⁰

2.3 A Third Course of Discussion: Pastoral/Rabbinical Authority and Its Restriction

Since the Reformation the Protestant pastor has held a key position in the context of the congregation and the ecclesiastical system. In contrast to the priest he is no longer the sacramental mediator, but he nevertheless remains essential in his function as “servant of the Word of God” and, thereby, above all as preacher and as dispenser of the sacraments when God’s Word and the church as *creatura verbi Evangelii* are at issue. Of course, it was important to the Reformers to emphasize that this central position is *not* connected with the requirement that the pastor as a *person* had to be outstanding. The *Confessio Augustana* reflects explicitly upon the Donatist problem – the problem, that is, of binding the validity of the sacraments to the personal dignity of the clergyman. And it comes to the conclusion that the *office* is decisive, but not the *person* (cf. CA VIII, De ecclesia).

On the path to the present, the central position of the pastoral office has survived – in spite of all attempts to shift the “priesthood of all the baptized” more prominently to the center. Precisely in the perception of the church from the outside, the female and male pastors are the decisive points of reference. But, because the pastoral office at the same time is legitimated much more through the *person* than through the *office*, a thoroughly problematic and encumbering shift thereby has occurred. Whether I find the church to be good or not, whether it means anything to me or not, is decided by whether I find the pastor to be personable or whether I like her. As much as this shift will please narcissistically inclined souls, it is experienced just as much as a form of pressure and as

59 Cf. Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, *Kirchendämmerung: Wie die Kirchen unser Vertrauen verspielen*, 2nd ed. (München: Beck, 2011), esp. 49–64 [where he speaks of a “Second Vice: Disdain of Education”].

60 Maurice N. Eisendraht, “The Authority of the Rabbi I,” *CCAR Journal* 39 (1962): 3, 7, here 7.

a problem. It is just that in any case theologically. For the task of the pastoral office in the Reformation sense is to *point away from itself* and to point to the Gospel, to the good news of Jesus Christ as encountered in the Word and sacrament.

At this point, once again, there is the opening of a possible dialogue in the Third Room. If I consider Judaism to a certain extent in an idealized manner, then I recognize the structure of a rabbinate that is, to be sure, important, but is in no way so central for the functioning of the congregation as is the case in many Protestant congregations. A rabbi is not absolutely necessary for prayer on the Sabbath. One in principle can do without the sermon in the local national language, as much as it has had its place in many congregations for the last 200 years. The organizational direction of the congregation does not lie (or at least not compellingly) in the hands of the rabbi. If we want to connect all the functions that a male Protestant pastor or a female Protestant pastor has with their counterparts in Judaism, then we must include additional professional groups: the cantor (as leader of the worship service or as congregational educator), teaching staff / teachers of religion, congregational director ... All these aspects magnify for me the question whether we on the Protestant side have not hopelessly overtaxed the pastoral office with tasks that originally and in essence do not belong to it. The expansion of the concept of proclamation to encompass the "communication of the Gospel", which is so nebulous that virtually all the acts of congregational and daily life are included in it, certainly has contributed to losing concentration upon the "core acts".

Along with these organizational questions an additional question appears to me to be central: the question, namely, of how we as word workers deal with the Word entrusted to us, with the tradition entrusted to us. In the Jewish discussion about the rabbinate, I have come across a concept at this point that, in my opinion, helps us further. Meir Ben-Horin describes rabbinical authority as the authority of a "search leader", of one, that is, who sets out with others into terrain that, in the final analysis, is unknown and mysterious terrain – ready to make discoveries.⁶¹ *Search leaders* could be rabbis, says Ben-Horin, but I gladly make this metaphor my own. The image of the *search leader* is probably anchored in Jewish hermeneutics. The Torah, in its interplay between *written* and *oral Torah*, leads to a *perpetuum hermeneuticum* that has no end on earth.

61 Cf. Meir Ben-Horin, "The Post-Synagogue Synagogue II: Sermons and the Search," *CCAR Journal* 89 (1975): 56–59, here 58.

The written word proves to be the word of the Torah only in its always new oral continuation. The anti-systematizing tendency that results from this protects (at least *idealiter*) the exegesis from coming to a conclusive result that then, quasi dogmatically, would become fixed and would have to remain unquestioned. Christian exegesis was in no way always immune to this, as is known. Here, one can observe a comparable hermeneutical accent already in Paul, the first “theologian” of the church, who still at the same time was completely at home in Judaism. Paul knows that he is permanently en route, that he is chasing after the “proposed goal”, but that he has not nearly attained it (Phil 3:11–12), that he – just as the entire church – sees “now in a mirror dimly” (1Cor 13:12) and only one day will understand completely. Until then, we as *pastors* remain at best *search leaders*, people who lead the way on a lifelong search and, it is hoped, again and again delightedly discover how others already long since have discovered this and that aspect before them and without them. Meir Ben-Horin also can clothe that which a *search leader* does in an image that helps us further along theologically: in the image of Jacob’s ladder, which now is not climbed by one person in order, somehow, to bring the Word of God down from heaven, but rather which is climbed by all. He writes, “All Israel are ordained to join the climb”.⁶² This aspect leads me further to a fourth initiation of a discussion.

2.4 A Fourth Course of Discussion: Pastors and Rabbis in Search of the Word Beyond the Words

Whether we, in fact, live in a time that can be described as a phase in the “return of religion” or in a “new yearning for spirituality” is an assertion that has been discussed contentiously.⁶³ I attempted recently to qualify the divergent phenomena that are described in this context as the new search for *astonishment*. In literary studies, for example, this is experienced in the weariness felt in regard to a hermeneutics that helplessly surrenders the works of literature to the “understanding” clutches of the interpreters.⁶⁴ In cultural studies presence is in demand, and the desire

62 Cf. *ibid.*, 59.

63 Cf. Ulrich H. J. Körtner, *Wiederkehr der Religion? Das Christentum zwischen neuer Spiritualität und Gottvergessenheit* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006).

64 Cf. Deeg, *Predigt und Derascha*, 271–275.

for presence is described as a path “this side of hermeneutics”.⁶⁵ And, recently, a volume appeared in the renowned series “suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft” with the title *Miracles: The Poetics and Politics of Astonishment in the Twentieth Century*.⁶⁶ In addition, there are the phenomena of astonishment in art and daily life, in advertising and entertainment. We live in a time in which the yearning for a transcendence of daily life is tangible (whether more clearly tangible than in previous decades is something that I cannot and need not decide here): In this time, I see both of us, rabbis and pastors – and I gladly include Catholic priests here, too – engaged in a particular assignment. We are experts in a certain form of transcending everyday life.

The Protestant worship service, so Martin Luther once said, lives from the fact “that God speaks with us through His holy Word and we, in turn, speak with Him through prayer and songs of praise.”⁶⁷ These words, spoken at the consecration of the Castle Church at Torgau in 1544, are so often quoted that they were termed the “Torgau Formula” and that – and this is weightier – their provocative content is hardly noticed any more. A worship service, so Luther says, is nothing other than an exchange of words between God and the human being. That is not a minor thing! Moses, after all, had to remove his shoes when he approached his God speaking to him from out of the burning bush (Ex 3), and only Moses alone was permitted to tread the mountain of God’s revelation (cf. Ex 19–24). We Protestants expect this form of communication in every worship service (if we expect it at all; this specific religious expectation of the worship service probably has moved rather into other forms of spirituality).

I am not sure whether Luther’s definition of the Protestant worship service in Torgau also could become a definition for the Jewish prayer service on Shabbat or in daily life. The Catholic Church, in any case, has followed this Word-bound definition of the liturgical act in the Second Vatican Council and formulated the following (almost as a direct citation from Luther, but naturally not identified as such): “[I]n the liturgy,

65 Cf. Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Diesseits der Hermeneutik: Die Produktion von Präsenz* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).

66 Alexander C. T. Geppert and Till Kössler, eds., *Wunder: Poetik und Politik des Staunens im 20. Jahrhundert*, stw 1984 (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011).

67 Luther says more exactly: Nothing else should occur in the worship service “than that our dear Lord Himself may speak with us through His holy Word, and we, in turn, with Him through prayer and songs of praise” (WA 49, 588).

God speaks to His people; in it, Christ still proclaims the Good News. But the people answer in song and in prayer" (SC 33).

The issue is a specific transcendence of daily life, a transcendence through the exchange of words between God and the human being. Perhaps this is, I dare to say, the core task of the word workers. And perhaps this task also can become a common challenge for both, for Jews and Christians. How can it occur that language and the manifold "language games"⁶⁸ of this world be opened successfully to and for God? How do we succeed in experiencing salutary interruptions that surprise us, that call us out, and that challenge us anew again and again?

2.5 A Fifth Course of Discussion: Of the Word That Leads to Action, and Is Recognized in Action

Here, I only hint at the fifth, and last, course of discussion. It is a point that perhaps one must articulate anew again and again precisely to the Protestant word workers: The human being does not live from bread alone, but also not from the Word alone, but always also from action!

Since the rabbinical period, the three religious acts of *learning and teaching the Torah*, *prayer*, and *doing the mitzvot* have been held together. They are considered already in the early rabbinical tradition as the three modes of conduct that, after the destruction of the Temple, take the place of the sacrifice in the Temple.⁶⁹ Word work is not only desk work. But word work also in no way comprises only all of those moments in which we enter conversation with others in written or oral form, directly or made possible through the media. Word work also comprises – and I learn this from female and male Jews – the doing of the Word. Spirituality is not first of all the yearning for great, out-of-the-ordinary experiences, but rather simply a special way of being-in-the-world.⁷⁰

68 Cf. on this concept, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), §23.

69 Cf. Deeg, "Opfer als 'Nahrung'", 113–145.

70 Cf. Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, "Holiness, Justice, and the Rabbinate," *Cross Currents* 42/2 (1992): 212–214, – with reference to Rosenzweig, who – unlike Buber – rediscovered Jewish law for a generation of non-Orthodox Jews. Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer pleads for the image of a rabbinate in which holiness and righteousness become interconnected, and female and male rabbis become important, above all, for the organization of social care in the congregation.

Perhaps we Protestants have let the Letter to James with its clear exhortation to “Be doers of the word and not merely hearers!” (Jas 1:22) recede too far into the background because of Luther’s polemic and our unbelievable fear of “works righteousness”. Jean-Luc Nancy recently has presented a re-reading of the Letter to James in his book *Deconstruction of Christianity*, which is at the same time daring, path-breaking, and not easy to understand. In it, he writes, “*Pistis* is the *praxis* that has place in the *poiesis* of the *erga* and also as such.”⁷¹ Nancy formulates in a pointed and complex way what was clear to the evangelist Matthew in his Sermon of the Mount, just as it was to the rabbis who knew about the significance of the *mitzvot* and to Abraham Joshua Heschel, for example, who was able to formulate such insights far more poetically and concretely than Jean-Luc Nancy. Heschel writes, “Without the Torah, we have only acts that dream of God; with the Torah, we have *mitzvot* that God brings to expression in acts.”⁷² To practice this interplay between God, the Torah, and *mitzvot*, between word workers and doers of the word together appears to me to be not the least task for Jews and Christians. It would be possible thereby not only to interrupt anew and to transcend our speech, but also to interrupt anew and to transcend our action. It would be possible to find ways out of the deadly routines in which we all too often are caught up, out of what is apparently inescapable, and to tread new paths that already construct God’s new world. The goal of halakhah, so says Joseph Soloveitchik, for example, is nothing other than this.⁷³ The goal of the practice of good works, so said Martin Luther, is nothing other than this.⁷⁴

71 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dekonstruktion des Christentums*, trans. Esther von der Osten (Zürich – Berlin: Diaphanes, 2008), 84 (see esp. 69–96: Das Jüdisch-Christliche).

72 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Gott sucht den Menschen: Eine Philosophie des Judentums*, 5th ed. (Berlin: Jüdische Verlagsanstalt, 2000), 271.

73 Cf. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983) [Hebrew original: New York, 1944].

74 Cf. Hans G. Ulrich, *Wie Geschöpfe leben. Konturen evangelischer Ethik*, EThD 2 (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005).

3. The Common Future of the Word Workers

These five dialogues have only been broached and wait upon a dialogic continuation. It has become easier to do this here in Germany, too. In the past 20 years, Jewish life has experienced a turning point and an upswing that many no longer thought possible. There are more and more female and male rabbis in the Jewish congregations in Germany with whom one can speak about word work in common. There exists more and more easily the possibility of bringing female and male theologians already during the process of their education into conversation with future female and male rabbis and thus of continuing the intimated dialogues not only literarily, but also locally, in direct conversation.

In the process, we will discover differences and, it is hoped, in precisely this way learn mutually from each other. We will recognize that not all paths lead in the same direction and will find this to be an enrichment. We will identify challenges that we are able to tackle best in common. I name here as a quite essential point the fundamentalist constriction of what is religious. Word workers together will oppose all too simple solutions, will make clear to the fundamentalists of whatever religion how enriching thinking in pluralist terms and an approval of diversity can be. And how the lifelong and never-ending search for the Word in the words leads to a calm and confident way of life that is at the same time full of expectations.