

Embodying Peace

BOOKS BY TED GRIMSRUD

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Embodying Peace

COLLECTED PACIFIST WRITINGS

*VOLUME FOUR: HISTORICAL AND
SOCIAL ETHICAL ESSAYS*

TED GRIMSRUD

PEACE THEOLOGY BOOKS

Harrisonburg, Virginia

EMBODYING PEACE: Collected Pacifist Writings, Volume Four: Historical
and Social Ethical Essays

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*To my Eastern Mennonite University colleague Christian Early, in gratitude
for many hours of terrific conversation about the ways of peace.*

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PREFACE

When I became a Christian at the age of 17, my main motivation was wanting to know the truth as much as I could. I came to the conclusion that making a Christian commitment was the best way I could pursue that task. Several years later, I still felt the same desire. And it was out my desire to know the truth that I came to embrace Christian pacifism.

In the decades since, this motivation has been sustained, and I believe more than ever that my pacifist commitment follows from and reinforces the commitment to seek the truth. The essays in this book, as well as the writings that make up volumes 1–3 of my *Collected Pacifist Writings*, have been expressions of these commitments.

In this volume I share reflections dating back nearly thirty years on Christian pacifism in history, on how pacifism might shape how we think in our contemporary world, and on ethical issues such as child discipline and criminal justice.

I am grateful for the various settings where I have found communities that have been hospitable to my interests—from my time in graduate school in Berkeley, California, to my various pastoral assignments in Oregon, Arizona, and South Dakota, down to my time in Virginia on the faculty at Eastern Mennonite University.

Slightly more than half of these essays have been written in the time since 1996 when I began at EMU. I have found many conversation partners here, and I hesitate to begin naming any of them because I know I will leave out some I shouldn't. Yet, among all the faculty colleagues, students, fellow church members, and other friends to whom I owe so much, there are several I feel I have to name as especially important.

Ray Gingerich was instrumental in my being hired at EMU to begin with and as a next door office neighbor and partner in numerous projects helped my think in more ways than I could say. I especially remember fondly our collaborating to bring Walter Wink to speak at EMU, the context for my writing the essay that is included as chapter 12 in this volume.

Howard Zehr began at EMU the same semester I did. We have talked long and often about many things, one of them the theological underpinnings for restorative justice. One fruit of our conversations was the essay we wrote together that concludes this book.

Earl Zimmerman and Mark Thiessen Nation cannot be linked with any specific essays here, but they both lurk in the background of several. They both have helped me a great deal in my continued appropriation of

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insights from my most important theological mentor, John Howard Yoder, about whom those two know more than just about anyone else.

Over the past 13 years, only my wife Kathleen Temple has talked with me as often and as profoundly about the life of the mind as has Christian Early. I have happy memories going back to first meeting Christian at the American Academy of Religion annual meeting in Denver in 2001 when he was a candidate for our new position at EMU in philosophy.

I have often thought that helping to bring Christian to EMU is clearly the best contribution I have made to the well-being of this institution. I am happy to dedicate this collection to him, knowing that if we talked long enough about the ideas it contains we would almost certainly come to realize that even those he thinks he disagrees with actually will turn out to be shared convictions.

Ted Grimsrud
Harrisonburg, Virginia
March 13, 2015

SECTION ONE: Historical Essays

1. A Christian pacifist perspective on war and peace

[Paper presented to a conference on World Religions and Peace, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, April 11, 2005]

As a pacifist Christian theologian, I find it more than a little ironic that many Christians in the United States compare Christianity to other religions, especially Islam and Judaism, and assert that Christianity is more peaceful. They presumably base such a claim on the teachings of Jesus, who they affirm as central to their faith. However, looking at the message of Jesus only underscores how much blood we Christians actually have on our hands over the past two millennia and how far most Christians over most of Christianity's history have moved from our namesake's words such as "love your enemies," "turn the other cheek," and "Father, forgive them" when it comes to issues of war and peace.

I recognize just how tiny a minority within the Christian tradition I represent. Most Christians are not pacifists; only a few have ever been, at least in the years since 300 CE. However, I do believe that pacifism has strong grounding in the basic storyline of the Christian Bible, that pacifism is in fact the original (or default) position of Christianity, that pacifism has always existed as an option for Christian believers, and that following the 20th century, the century of total war, Christian pacifism has more relevance (and more adherents) than ever before.¹

I need to start with some definitions before outlining the biblical grounding for Christian pacifism. The most common definitions of "pacifism" focus on what pacifism rejects, characterizing pacifism as the in-principled rejection of participation in warfare. Some pacifists would

¹ For a classic introduction to the diverse expressions of Christian pacifism, see John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless: The Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992). See also a short ecumenical statement of the central tenants of Christian pacifism, Douglas Gwyn, George Hunsinger, Eugene F. Roop, and John Howard Yoder, *A Declaration of Peace: In God's People the World's Renewal Has Begun* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991).

say that all war is wrong, others simply that they themselves will never fight. Focusing on what pacifism *affirms*, I define pacifism as the conviction that nothing matters as much as love, kindness, respect, seeking wholeness. Hence, nothing that would justify violence matters enough to override the commitment to love. In my understanding, pacifism is a worldview, a way of looking at reality;² there is a pacifist way of knowing, a pacifist way of perceiving, of discerning, of negotiating life.

The term “nonviolence” has emerged as a near-synonym for pacifism. I use the terms interchangeably, though if we try to be truly precise, we could find nuances that might make us want to differentiate between the two terms.³ My definition of pacifism more in positive, worldview terms links more closely with the logic of the biblical story than simply defining pacifism as the rejection of warfare. The Bible, famously, does not overtly reject warfare for believers; in fact, in certain notorious cases the Bible actually commends, even commands, God’s people fighting.⁴

However, Christian pacifists—believing that Jesus’ life and teaching are the Bible’s center point, the angle for reading the rest—see in Jesus sharp clarity about the supremacy of love, peacableness, compassion. That is, Jesus embodies a broad and deep vision of life that is thoroughly pacifist, even if he did not explicitly address participation in warfare.⁵

² See Ted Grimsrud, “A Pacifist Way of Knowing: Postmodern Sensibilities and Peace Theology,” *Mennonite Life* 56.1 (March 2001), and “Pacifism and Knowing: ‘Truth’ in the Theological Ethics of John Howard Yoder,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 77.3 (July 2003): 403-415.

³ Walter Wink, a proponent of Christian nonviolence, explicitly rejects the term “pacifism” for his work, affirming instead the term “nonviolence” (“Can Love Save the World,” *Yes!* #20 [Winter 2002]). He appears to be averse to the association of “pacifism” with “passivity.” I will be using “pacifism” in a decidedly *non-passive* sense.

⁴ These cases of violence in the Bible have led an important advocate for Christian nonviolence strongly to emphasize the need overtly to reject the pro-violence portions of the Bible while affirming Jesus’ message as radically (and normatively, for Christians) nonviolent. See Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Jesus Against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001). I sympathize greatly with Nelson-Pallmeyer’s critique of biblical violence and his affirmation of Jesus’ nonviolence. However, I fear he gives the violent elements of the biblical story too much power by reading them in isolation from the whole, and that his excising of many parts of the Bible distances him more than necessary from the mainstream of Christian theology.

⁵ In what follows, my approach to Jesus is shaped above all by John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994). Yoder’s theological writing drew me into the Mennonite Church over thirty years ago.

I will mention four basic biblical themes that find clarity in Jesus, but in numerous ways emerge throughout the biblical story. These provide the foundational theological rationale for Christian pacifism. They include first and most basic, the love command that Jesus gave as a summary of the biblical message. The second theme is Jesus' vision for love-oriented politics in contrast to the tyranny of the world's empires. The third theme is Jesus' optimism about the human potential for living in love. And the fourth theme is the model of Jesus' cross that embodies self-suffering love and exposes the nature of the structures of human culture as God's rivals for the trust of human beings.

Jesus' love command

In one of Jesus' most famous sayings he is asked, which is the greatest of the commandments. He responds: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt 22:34-40).

Mark and Luke also report this assertion (though Luke puts the actual words in the mouth of Jesus' questioner), as does Paul, in a modified form (Rom 13:8-10). I see three key points being made here that are crucial for our concerns. First, love is at the heart of everything for the believer in God. Second, love of God and love of neighbor are tied inextricably together. In Jesus' own life and teaching, we clearly see that he understood the "neighbor" to be the person in need, the person that one is able to show love to in concrete ways (not to be an insider over against non-neighbors who are "other" and whom we are not expected to love). The third point is that Jesus understood his words to be a summary of the Bible—that is, what Christians now call the Old Testament. The Law and Prophets were the entirety of Jesus' Bible. In his view, their message may be summarized by this love command. He quotes Deuteronomy and Leviticus directly in making his statement.

In his call to love, Jesus directly links human beings loving even their enemies with God loving all people. "I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven: for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Matt 5:44-45). These words of Jesus are part of his manifesto on faithful living known as the Sermon on the Mount. Near the beginning of this manifesto, he makes it clear again that his message of peace follows directly from the Bible (what Christians call the Old Testament). "Do not

think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matt 5:17).

Just as the double love command comes directly from the law and prophets, so too the call to imitate God’s love for all people (with its implication, as Jesus asserts, of loving even enemies) comes from the law and prophets. Of course, the Old Testament gives a wide variety of impressions of God’s attitude toward the Hebrews’ enemies. However, Jesus’ message has deep grounding throughout the biblical story, and he provides a hermeneutic for understanding the peace message (*shalom*) as the core message of the Bible.

From the start, the Bible presents God as willing peace for humanity. Crucially, God’s means for this love for “all the families of the earth” to be channeled through a community formed through God’s election of them as a people of the promise.⁶ The story presents this election as pure mercy. God’s persevering love for God’s elect is itself an expression of God’s love for enemies. Time after time, the story makes clear, the people turn from God. Yet, as the prophet Hosea reports, God ultimately does not respond with violence and wrath, but with healing love.

The original calling of Abraham and Sarah and the gift to them of descendants in spite of their barrenness, the saving work of God to bring the Hebrew people together and to free them from slavery, the gift of Torah to guide their lives as people of the promise (a priestly kingdom mediating God’s love to the entire world), and more, including the gift of new life even after the fall of the Hebrew territorial kingdom (a fall that Hebrew prophets attributed directly to the people’s unfaithfulness)—all of these gifts clearly portray God’s love as unearned, even undeserved.

The basic guidance that Jesus draws from the story of God with God’s people, the story that he stood within, may be summarized in his words as reported by Luke: “Love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:35-36).

In articulating the centrality of love in this way, Jesus makes clear how he reads the Bible. The love command summarizes the law and prophets and provides the fundamental way that his followers should orient their lives in the world. That is to say, if we understand pacifism as the placing of the highest priority on love, Jesus provides here Christians’ central grounding for pacifism.

⁶ See Ted Grimsrud, *God’s Healing Strategy: An Introduction to the Bible’s Main Themes*, 2nd edition (Telford, PA: Pandora Press US, 2011), for a discussion of the Genesis 12:1-3 calling of Abraham and Sarah as the interpretive key for reading the entire Bible.

Following Jesus, others in the New Testament give a parallel portrayal of the centrality of love, even for enemies, as a reflection of the way God loves. I will only mention Paul's letter to the Romans. In chapter five, Paul writes of God's immense love for us that reaches out to us in Jesus' life and death, "while we were still sinners," "while we were enemies" (Rom 5:8,10). A little later, Paul (who understood himself as, like Jesus, capturing the core message of the Old Testament) echoes Jesus' summary of the core message of Torah: "The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13:9-10).

So, the first and most basic biblical theme grounding Christian pacifism, finding clarity in Jesus but reflecting the biblical story as a whole, is the centrality of the love command. The love command provides the central building block for Christian pacifism—both in the positive sense of establishing love as the highest ethical standard that can never be secondary to some other possibly violence-justifying ethical value and in the negative sense of providing the basis for rejecting the participation in war as a morally acceptable choice.

An alternative politics

Our second biblical theme complements the love command. Jesus sharply critiqued power politics and sought to create a counter-cultural community independent of nation states in their dependence upon the sword.⁷ Jesus indeed *was* political—he was confessed to be a king (which is what Messiah/Christ, meant). The Empire executed him as a political criminal. However, Jesus' politics were upside-down politics.⁸ Jesus expressed his political philosophy in a nutshell when he responded to his

⁷ Three biblical theologies that center on the motif of "community" and, at least to some extent, highlight this motif of the biblical community as counter-culture include: Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986); Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); and Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church? Toward a Theology of the People of God* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999).

⁸ For Jesus and politics, see along with Yoder, *Politics*, also N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress Press, 1996); William Herzog, *Jesus, Justice, and the Reign of God: A Ministry of Liberation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); and Alan Storkey, *Jesus and Politics: Confronting the Powers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

disciples' angling for status. "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant" (Mark 10:42-43).

In making this contrast between the politics of the "Gentile nations" (such as the Roman Empire, the one Gentile nation Jesus knew well) and the politics of the followers of God, Jesus was not comparing apples and oranges. He was not saying these represent two totally different realms of life. He was, to the contrary, saying these are competing visions for the ordering of social life among human beings.

When Jesus accepted the title "Messiah," when Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God as present and normative for his followers, when Jesus organized his followers around twelve disciples (thus echoing the way the ancient nation of Israel was organized), he established a movement centered around the love command, focused on supporting people living transformed lives in the here and now, and witnessed to the entire world the ways of God, the ways meant to be the norm for all human beings.

Jesus, however, directly rejected the notion that this new movement he initiated would seek to imitate, even replace, Rome as the dominating Kingdom (Empire) based on its military might. He rejected Satan's offer at the beginning of his ministry to spearhead such a dominating kingdom. Various times he turned from temptations to galvanize his growing following into a direct rival to Rome based, as Jesus alluded to at the end, on his ability to call down legions of angels to do battle for him.

Rather, Jesus spearheaded a movement meant to operate within the nations and empires of the world as an independent society operating according to the word of God rather than the rule of the sword. The community Jesus founded actually modeled itself after the pattern established as long ago as during the ministry of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah's words may have served to help the ancient Israelites survive as a distinct people. He encouraged people of the covenant to seek the well-being of whatever society they were part of while at the same time maintaining their distinct identity as people of Torah.⁹

In light of Jesus' message, and how that message lifts up Jeremiah's prophetic word, the entire Old Testament may be read as a cautionary tale. This tale concerns the failure of nation-state-centered, sword-

⁹ John Howard Yoder first argued for the significance of Jeremiah for thinking of how counter-cultural, pacifist communities might live faithfully in his essay, "See How They Go with Their Face to the Sun," in *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 51-78. This argument is greatly expanded in his posthumous book, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, Michael Cartwright, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

oriented politics to be a viable vehicle for sustaining the people of God as people who will bless all the families of the earth. The call to be a blessing, first given to Abraham, was later reiterated when both Micah and Isaiah foresaw a time when the nations of the world would come to Zion to learn the ways of peace, turning their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. In light of Jeremiah and Jesus, one can see this prophecy of the spread of peace being carried out not through the violence of the standard nation state, but through the peaceable witness of counter-cultures scattered throughout the world in various nation states—counter-cultures that center their lives on the consistent embodiment of the double command to love God and neighbor.

Read this way, the Old Testament tells how the people's original calling—articulated to Abraham and Sarah—to be a distinct community and to bless all the families of the earth ultimately headed down a dead end. When the elders of the people of God choose to structure their common life in imitation of “the nations,” they undermined the intended blessing. The story told in 1 Samuel 8 of the movement toward kingship reflects the ambivalence within the tradition concerning this choice. The great prophet, Samuel, speaking for God, warns the elders that if they choose kingship their society might well be transformed from a Torah-shaped society toward an Egypt-shaped society. Samuel warned that the king would take and take, build weapons of war, centralize his power, and leave the people once again crying out in their sorrow and suffering—just as they had generations earlier amidst their slavery in Egypt.

What follows is an account of the Israelite kingdom heading precisely in that direction. The prophets offer critique after critique: Elijah challenges the land grab of King Ahab; Amos emphasizes Israel's departure from Torah in its unjust treatment of vulnerable people; Hosea challenges Israel's descent into violence. Finally, Jeremiah actually accompanies some of the Israelite defeated leaders into Egypt (Jer 42–44), a symbol that Samuel's warnings of Israel's fate was vindicated.

The story does not end, though. The survival of the people of the promise did not require the assumed pillars of identity, the king's palace and the temple. These pillars lay in ruins, the kingdom fell, crushed by Babylon. But the peoplehood, the promise to Abraham and Sarah, the call to bless all the families of the earth, *remained*, even after the Israelite kingdom bit the dust. Through this failure, the true nature of God's promise became more clear to prophets such as Jeremiah, with his exhortation to the people to seek the peace of the city wherein they were living. This was actually a call for the people to embrace their existence in diaspora—an existence that did indeed continue for generation upon generation separate from any kind of Israelite nation-state.

So, Jesus actually followed in close continuity with the Old Testament story with his message calling upon his hearers to embrace once again their vocation to spread the message of God’s love, making “disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19), a vocation decidedly not dependent upon the centralized, coercive political power of a state. The power of the sword-wielding state proved not only to be unnecessary to carry out this promise; it actually almost corrupted the promise beyond recognition.

A couple of generations after Jesus, another prophet, John of Patmos, reiterated this message juxtaposing and contrasting the ways of empires with the ways of God’s politics. As a central theme, Revelation poses Babylon and the New Jerusalem as competing alternatives for followers of Jesus. In this way, Revelation echoes the choice Jesus presented his followers—join uncritically in the social order wherein rulers lord it over their subjects, or join in an alternative social order wherein greatness is manifested in servanthood. From start to finish in Revelation, the pattern of Jesus (the king of kings—a *political* leader) is presented as one of suffering love followed by martyrdom followed by God’s vindication.¹⁰

The final section of Revelation directly compares and contrasts the two cities (or empires or kingdoms). First the angel shows John Babylon, then Jerusalem. One is the way of power politics (and death); the other is the way of suffering servanthood (and life). And these two alternatives are not about life in the hereafter, they are about life in the here and now. “Choose *this day* whom you will serve.”

So, we have two foundational themes at the heart of Jesus’ message that catch up enduring elements of the Old Testament story and find resonance in later New Testament writings. These themes provide the theological heart of Christian pacifism: the double command to love God and neighbor combined with the vision for an upside-down politics, an alternative to the sword-based politics of the nations and empires of the world. The critique of the nations’ politics frees followers of the Way to commit themselves to the love command as their highest commitment, even if that means being “disloyal” to whatever nation-state wherein they happen to reside.

These two themes of love and alternative politics assert a disjunction between God’s ways of working among human beings, on the one hand,

¹⁰ Two books that, in parallel ways, argue for Revelation’s core commitment of a Jesus-centered nonviolence: Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Carlisle, U.K. and Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2003) and Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen, Ger.: Mohr Siebeck, 2003; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014). For a more popular-level discussion, see Ted Grimsrud, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987).

and power politics on the other. The king, the emperor, the president are not likely to be God's agents. More likely, they rebel against God when they persecute, even put to death God's genuine prophets. Christian pacifism rests upon a disillusionment toward the powers *and* a commitment to giving a higher loyalty to the community of faith and its counter-cultural politics.

Optimism about the potential for human faithfulness

The third theme from Jesus' life and teaching that undergirds pacifism may be seen in his approach to ethical exhortation. Jesus displayed a profound optimism about the potential his listeners had to follow his directives for life. Certainly, Jesus spoke to human sinfulness, the corruptions of selfishness, blind ambition, domination, and deception. However, when he said "follow me," he clearly expected people to do so here and now, effectively, consistently, fruitfully.

Jesus' most famous extended set of teachings, what we have come to call the Sermon on the Mount, begins with a series of straightforward affirmations: you are genuinely humble, you genuinely seek justice, you genuinely make peace, you genuinely walk the path of faithfulness even to the point of suffering severe persecution as a consequence. So, when Jesus calls upon his followers to love their neighbors, to reject the tyrannical patterns of leadership among the kings of the earth, to share generously with those in need, to offer forgiveness seventy times seven times, he actually expected that this could be done.¹¹

Jesus' optimism about human possibilities reflects a central theme throughout the Bible that sometimes is not noticed amidst the continual litany of human failures and disappointments in relation to living out of Torah. The human dynamic in the Bible does reflect alienation. But the Bible makes clear God's patience and mercy in responding to wayward human beings. Nonetheless, at the heart of Torah and at the heart of the prophets' exhortations we see the assumption that indeed human beings *are* capable of walking in the paths of justice and shalom.

The biblical problem is not so much that human beings are incapable of following God's will for their lives. The biblical problem is that in spite of their capabilities for faithfulness, human beings nonetheless all too often turn away. And in turning away, in worshiping idols, human beings find themselves in bondage to social dynamics of oppression, greed, and

¹¹ Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), develop their lengthy portrayal of Christian ethics as centered at its core on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which they see as a practical manifesto for present-day life.

violence. However, from the start, the remedy is always at hand: Simply turn back, repent and trust in God. Faithfulness may then follow.

So, again, Jesus offers not radical innovation when he begins his ministry with these words: “Repent and believe in the good news. The kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15). Everything that he then said presupposed that repentance (that is, simply turning back to God) is all that it takes for people to enter into fellowship with God and live as people of humility, people who hunger and thirst for justice and peace, people who persevere even in the face of persecution and suffering.

When Jesus called his followers to make kindness and love, even for enemies, the kind of priority that can never be overridden by some other value (that is, when Jesus established the basis for pacifism), he expected that this indeed would be possible.

The model of the cross

The fourth theme from Jesus that undergirds Christian pacifism may be seen in his willingness to persevere in the path of love even when that brought him suffering and death. Jesus’ cross serves as a model for his followers.¹² At the heart of his teaching stands the often repeated saying, “Take up your cross and follow me.” He insisted that just as he was persecuted for his way of life, so will his followers be as well.

The powers that be, the religious and political institutions, the spiritual and human authorities, responded to Jesus’ inclusive, barrier-shattering compassion and generosity with violence. At its heart, Jesus’ cross may be seen as embodied pacifism, a refusal to turn from the ways of peace even when they are costly. So his call to his followers to share in his cross is also a call to his followers to embody pacifism.

Jesus’ cross certainly puts the lie to the idea that consistent, lived-out pacifism is passive, safe, and withdrawn. Jesus’ way of peace led to conflict—not conflict stemming from his own belligerence, but conflict stemming from deeply entrenched characteristics in the structures of human society that resist freedom and compassion. Jesus’ cross besides pointing to pacifism in terms of his style of life, also points away from

¹² John Howard Yoder, in *Politics*: “There is no *general* concept of living like Jesus in the New Testament (e.g., celibacy, type of work, rural life, way of teaching)...There is but one realm where the concept of imitation holds—but there it holds in every strand of the New Testament literature and all the more strikingly by virtue of the absence of parallels in other realms. This is at the point of the concrete social meaning of the cross in its relation to enmity and power. Servanthood replaces dominion, forgiveness absorbs hostility. Thus—and only thus—are we bound by the New Testament to ‘be like Jesus’” (130-31).

trusting in the swords and spears of empires and institutional religion. These are the very structures of human social life that killed Jesus.

Again, we can see foreshadowings of Jesus' path in the earlier story. The first empire we learn about there, Egypt, embodies structural violence in its enslavement of the Hebrew people. Egypt shows empire's pattern of response to resistance in its hostility toward Moses and toward the fruit of Moses' work of empowering the Hebrews. Tragically, the nation-state ultimately formed by the descendants of Moses in time imitated Egypt both in its injustices and its violent hostility toward those prophets who dared to speak out against the state's structural injustices. The prophets' message endured, though, even though they did not have coercive force to use to protect it or to impose it on their society.

After Jesus, we see his suffering servanthood lifted up as the basic pattern for faithfulness in the Book of Revelation. The basic pattern of Jesus is stated at the beginning of the book: "the faithful witness (the Greek word is *martyrs*), the first born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev 1:5). Jesus is portrayed as *simultaneously* the one who suffers violence without retaliation, the one whom God honors and exalts, and the one who serves as the true ruler of the world.

Jesus' pattern is held up as the model for his followers—the ones who are healed by God are the ones who "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (Rev 14:4), the ones who refuse to kill with the sword (Rev 13:10). Those who "conquer" in God's way in Revelation, conquer with suffering love. Those who "conquer" in the Beast's way, conquer with violence.

As we come to the end of the biblical period, we may see this fourfold basis for pacifism: the love command, the calling to give loyalty to the counter-cultural community of God's people over loyalty to the Empire, the belief that faithful human beings can be empowered to follow Jesus in the here and now, and the model of the pattern of Jesus as suffering love even to the point of death with the promise of God's vindication.

The persistence of Christian pacifism

For a number of generations following the time of Jesus, those who followed him indeed did generally express a commitment to pacifism. The pacifism of the early Christians shows that those closest in history to Jesus did indeed understand his message calling them both to radical love that precluded violence and to resistance to the domination system centered in the Empire's call to give it their highest loyalty.¹³

¹³ Historians debate the meaning of the non-participation of early Christians in the military. The general consensus seems to accept that a principled pacifism

We may, thus, call pacifism Christianity's original or default position. Jesus was killed around 30 CE. The first evidence of Christians serving in the Roman military date around 170 CE. This evidence does indicate that pacifism was not the absolute norm for all Christians by that time. Nonetheless, the only reason we know about this incident is because of church leaders speaking against military involvement. In fact, it is not until after the beginning of the 4th century that church leaders openly articulate an acceptance Christians in the military.

When this change from pacifism to acceptance of military involvement came, it did come decisively. The way had been prepared over time. Probably the most central factor then, and in the generations down to our present day, in Christians turning away from their default pacifist position was a rejection of the distinction between loyalty to the community of faith and loyalty to the nation-state. When Christians merge these two loyalties, the community of faith and the state seen as being in harmony, they understand themselves to appropriately accept the state's call to take up arms. If, at the beginning of the 4th century, no Christians leaders were affirming involvement in the military, by the end of the fourth century, Christian leaders affirmed such involvement to the extent that only Christians were allowed in the Roman army.

Christian pacifism survived, but at the margins, the conviction of a tiny minority of Christians. As a rule, Christian pacifism surfaced among small groups that in some sense may be seen as restorationist movements, groups that tried to restore a more Jesus-oriented, Gospels-based approach to faith. A few of these groups managed to stay in good standing with the Catholic Church—monastic movements such as the Benedictines and Franciscans valued a Gospels-oriented spirituality. A

played a significant role. See Jean-Michel Hornus, *It is Not Lawful for Me to Fight: Early Christian Attitudes Toward War, Violence, and the State* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990); Louis Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983); and Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). However, John Helgeland, Robert J. Daly, and J. Patout Burns, *Christians and the Military: The Early Experience* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), argue that the early Christians were not necessarily pacifists, but rather opposed participation in the military strictly on grounds of the close association of such participation with idolatry.

For comprehensive surveys of Christians and the issues of war and peace over the past 2,000 years, see: Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960); John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes To War, Peace, and Revolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009); Marlin E. Miller and Barbara Nelson Gingerich, eds., *The Church's Peace Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994); and Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and the Just War Theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

number of other pacifist groups were considered heretical: the Waldensians in northern Italy in the 12th century, the Czech Brethren in the 15th century, the Anabaptists in the 16th century. The Waldensians and Czech Brethren in time gave up their pacifism, but the Anabaptist movement spawned several direct successors, Hutterites, Mennonites, and Amish, that have remained pacifist down to the present.¹⁴

All of these pacifist groups advocated the four themes I mentioned above: understanding Jesus' love command as the center of their ethics, privileging their faith communities over the state, believing that present-day faithfulness is possible, and understanding persecution and suffering to be the expected response of the wider world to their convictions.

A bit more than one hundred years after the beginning of the Anabaptist movement, a British radical named George Fox led a movement in England that sought to apply Christian pacifism more widely. Members of the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, not only shared the Anabaptist view of the genuine possibility of the Christian to follow Jesus' love command in present life, they also had a sense of optimism about the possibilities of responsiveness to the love command in the wider world.¹⁵ For the first time, pacifism entered into the world of government with the establishment of colonial Pennsylvania, the "holy experiment" founded by the Quaker William Penn.

Pennsylvania pioneered many practices shaped by Quaker pacifism—such as religious toleration and attempts to live peaceably with Native Americans. After a couple of generations, Quakers became a smaller and smaller minority within the colony, and ultimately under pressure due to what was called the French and Indian War of 1756, Quakers withdrew from leadership in Pennsylvania. Their influence in United States history has been incalculable, however.¹⁶ Not coincidentally, it has been in North America that Christian pacifism has taken hold the strongest.

¹⁴ For an introduction to these "peace sects" see two books by Peter Brock: *Pacifism in Europe to 1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972) and *Freedom From Violence: Sectarian Nonresistance from the Middle Ages to the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991). Specifically concerning the Anabaptists see: James Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 2nd edition (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1976) and J. Denny Weaver, *Becoming Anabaptist: The Origin and Significance of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987).

¹⁵ See Peter Brock, *The Quaker Peace Testimony 1660-1914* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

¹⁶ For Quakers in colonial America, see Peter Brock, *Pioneers of the Peaceable Kingdom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968) and Meredith Baldwin Weddle, *Walking in the Way of Peace: Quaker Pacifism in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Pacifism expands

The gradual emergence of pacifism beyond the peace churches, Mennonites, Quakers, and Church of the Brethren, may be dated to the first half of the 19th century with the formation of several peace societies in the United States, a few which became linked with the movement to end slavery.¹⁷ William Lloyd Garrison, an important abolitionist, remained deeply committed to pacifism as the best philosophy for fostering genuine social change—though when the efforts to end slavery ultimately led to the American Civil War, Garrison more or less remained silent, implicitly accepting that the abolition of slavery took priority over pure pacifism.

In the 20th century, massive violence and oppression, two world wars, nuclear weapons, colonialism and continual militarism brought forth a great expansion of the efforts of pacifists. By mid-century, two of the world's most famous figures, Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell, joined to author a manifesto that voiced the convictions of an increasing number of people: "Shall we put an end to the human race or shall we put an end to war?" It is our choice, one or the other.

Pacifist opposition to the 20th-century's first "Great War," what tragically became known as only the *first* of two world wars, was muted, at least as measured by the small number of draftees who claimed conscientious objector status. Opposition to the war in the United States, which was quite widespread, tended to be framed in political terms; as the title of a famous post-war book termed it, when Christians were faced with how to respond to the Great War, preachers presented arms.¹⁸ A peace church, the General Conference Mennonite Church, decided to withdraw from the newly formed Federal Council of Churches because of the strong support for the war expressed by the Council.

However, great disaffection came to be articulated about the Great War in the years after it ended. A widespread, if somewhat shallow, peace movement emerged in the 1930s. Ironically, though, when World War II began, most of the churches of North America again expressed strong support. To illustrate, in the late 1930s, the Methodist Church in the United States issued an official statement vowing never again to

¹⁷ Again, Peter Brock's scholarship is essential. See *Freedom from War: Nonsectarian Pacifism, 1814-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) and his much larger earlier volume, *Pacifism in the United States: From the Colonial Era to the First World War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

¹⁸ Ray Abrams, *Preachers Present Arms: The Role of the American Churches and Clergy in World Wars I and II* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969; 1st ed. 1933).

support war. Only a few years later, following Pearl Harbor, that same body pledged its full support for the American war effort.

Because of the clarity of political support the US military actions had, pacifists remained marginal and quiet during the war years. However, whereas in World War I, just about 4,000 men served as conscientious objectors in the US, almost all from the peace churches, during World War II about 12,000 COs performed alternative service, only about one-half from the peace churches.¹⁹

It took an Indian Hindu, Mohandas Gandhi, to demonstrate the potential of nonviolent action for effecting social change. Gandhi drew deep inspiration from the life and teaching of Jesus—and, in turn, inspired 20th-century Christians to take more seriously the confluence between the quest for social change and pacifism.²⁰ Following World War II, an increasing number of concerned people began to explore the application of Gandhian approaches to the need for racial justice in the United States. A number of Christian pacifists who had been COs during World War II—such as Bayard Rustin, Dave Dellinger, and A.J. Muste—worked at this application. However, it took a younger Baptist preacher, who actually did not enter the Civil Rights movement as a committed pacifist, to establish the linkage between civil rights activism and nonviolence in a way that captured the imagination of millions. Martin Luther King, Jr., did end his all too short life espousing a principled pacifism, but it was forged through on-the-ground experience more than a beginning point based on theology or philosophy.²¹

The 20th century saw tremendous expansion of Christian pacifism; surely a much higher percentage of Christians came to understand themselves as pacifists than had ever since the fourth century.

Along with simply the growing horror of total war, the belief that we must end war or perish as a species, and besides the unprecedented

¹⁹ On World War II conscientious objection, see: Mulford Q. Sibley and Philip Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience: The American State and the Conscientious Objector, 1940-1947* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1952); Theodore Grimsrud, “Saying No to the ‘Good War’: An Ethical Analysis to Conscientious Objection in World War II (Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 1988); and Richard C. Anderson, *Peace Was In Their Hearts: Conscientious Objectors in World War II* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996).

²⁰ For Gandhi’s relationship with and influence on Christianity see Robert Ellsberg, ed., *Gandhi and Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

²¹ For the development of King’s thinking concerning nonviolence, see Taylor Branch’s volumes: *Parting of the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998); and *At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

awareness of the usefulness of nonviolence as a strategy for social change, the 20th century also saw a flowering of intellectually sophisticated writing on pacifism by Christian theologians—from mainstream Protestants, from Quakers, from Mennonites—but also, amazingly given Christian history, from Roman Catholics. A huge factor in the growth of pacifism among Roman Catholics was the life and testimony of Dorothy Day, founder and spiritual heart of the Catholic Worker movement and its hospitality houses and newspaper.²²

Day is credited by many as the person most responsible for the growth of pacifism among American Catholics—a growth reflected in the fact that during World War I, it is known that there was one Roman Catholic CO, during World War II there were a few more than 100, and during the Vietnam War, there were more Roman Catholic COs than from any other Christian group—tens of thousands out of the total of around 180,000 US COs during that conflict.²³ Inspired by Day, and then inspiring others, radical pacifist priests Daniel and Philip Berrigan gained wide notoriety as opponents to the Vietnam War and then as intense activists resisting the nuclear arms race. Another important Catholic pacifist who, like the Berrigans, both wrote important theological treatises and put his life on the line as an activist, was James Douglass.²⁴

In the early years of the 21st century, Christian pacifism continues to expand. The basically nonviolent ending of apartheid and of Communist totalitarianism in Eastern Europe have inspired pacifists to continue to imagine how nonviolence can serve as an alternative to violent revolution. As well, the influence of nonviolent theologians such as John

²² On Dorothy Day and the Catholic pacifism, see Gordon Zahn, *Another Part of the War: The Camp Simon Story* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979); James Forest and Thomas Cornell, eds., *A Penny a Copy: Readings from the Catholic Worker* (New York: Macmillan, 1968); and William D. Miller, *Dorothy Day: A Biography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982). For the longer context of Catholics and peace see Ronald Musto, *The Catholic Peace Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986) and Thomas Massaro, and Thomas Shannon, *Catholic Perspectives on Peace and War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

²³ On conscientious objection to the Vietnam War, see James W. Tollefson, *The Strength Not to Fight: An Oral History of Conscientious Objectors of the Vietnam War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993).

²⁴ See Arthur J. Laffin and Anne Montgomery, eds., *Swords into Plowshares: Nonviolent Direct Action for Disarmament, Peace, Social Justice* (Marion, SD: Fortkamp Press, 1996). James Douglass has written numerous books, among them, *The Nonviolent Cross: A Theology of Revolution and Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1968); *Lightning East to West: Jesus, Gandhi, and the Nuclear Age* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); and *The Nonviolent Coming of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and Walter Wink²⁵ reaches wider and wider, among mainline Protestants, Catholics, and evangelicals.²⁶

The “blank check” and critical just war thought

Of course, pacifists still remain a small minority among Christians throughout the world and in the United States. The growth in influence of pacifist convictions surely has been dwarfed by the militaristic and nationalistic “Christianity” of the “Christian right.” According to surveys, being self-identified as a Christian makes an American *more* likely than a non-Christian to support capital punishment or the war on Iraq. We remain a long way from the default position of Christianity’s pacifism.

The decisive move away from the default position, of course, came many, many years ago. Today’s militaristic and nationalistic Christians are in many ways closer to the actual Christian tradition than pacifists. The emergence of Constantine as the supreme leader of the Roman Empire at the turn of the 4th century often is seen as the key symbol of the end of pacifism as the characteristic position of Christianity.

Each of the fourfold bases for pacifism in the Bible discussed above were transformed. The love command became more about attitude than overt ethical concern. The church as counter-culture in contrast to the Empire became the state-church. Christianity became more pessimistic about human possibilities in this life. The cross came to symbolize Jesus’ death as a sacrifice for sin rather than a model for politically dangerous compassion and dissent. The 4th century provides us with the key symbols that provide a framework for understanding the general philosophy of Christianity toward warfare. Constantine the Emperor at the beginning of the century and Augustine the Bishop at the end of the century reflect two poles within post-pacifist Christianity.

If pacifism was Christianity’s default position, then the move to accept warfare required some kind of justification. What were bases for making this change? We have no evidence of a careful debate presenting reasons

²⁵ Key books from Hauerwas include *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) and *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985). Wink’s central volume is *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). See also, Ray C. Gingerich and Ted Grimsrud, eds., *Transforming the Powers: Peace, Justice, and the Domination System* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

²⁶ For a glimpse of various pacifist responses to the events of the 20th century, see Walter Wink, ed., *Peace is the Way: Writings on Nonviolence from the Fellowship of Reconciliation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000).

for this change in the 4th century. The justification for acceptance of warfare seems to have emerged by osmosis. The view was simply that it is the responsibility of the Christian citizen to defer to the judgment of the king and give him a “blank check.” Constantine symbolizes Christians accepting the role of national leaders in determining the justifiability of war. In deferring to national leaders concerning warfare, the large majority of Christians have essentially uncritically understood it to be their responsibility simply to obey their government when it calls upon them to fight, to give the government a blank check.²⁷

The other pole of the post-pacifist context concerning Christians and war may be called the “critical just war” approach. Augustine symbolizes this approach as he considered the father of the just war tradition. We do find in Augustine’s writings many scattered comments alluding to criteria for just wars, both just causes and just tactics in war. These criteria provide material for a critical approach to warfare, bases for criticizing rationales for war and for saying no to unjust tactics. However, Augustine never articulated a formal just war philosophy with organized, systematic lists of criteria that could practically function as a critical resource. He was at most ad hoc and suggestive in what he wrote. His actual approach in practice was much closer to the blank check—as seen in his core assertion that the ordinary Christian has no responsibility for discerning justifiable rationales or tactics. The ordinary Christian is to defer to one’s leaders, to recognize that the *leaders* are accountable to God; ordinary Christians are accountable only to their human leaders.²⁸

It is not until the 16th century that we have a systematic delineation of the just war criteria as a formal statement—and even that statement had no official status with any church or governmental body. Only in the 20th century did the critical just war pole among post-pacifist Christianity begin to play a genuinely critical role. For most of the past seventeen centuries, the fundamental approach to warfare among the vast majority

²⁷ I am largely following John Howard Yoder’s discussion in *Christian Attitudes* here—see pages 57-74, “The Meaning of the Constantinian Shift.” See also his essay, “The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics” in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 135-47. Yoder describes the “blank check” type in this way: “Rulers may be able to explain to themselves their reasons, which may be principled, even idealistic, or simply selfish, but the rest of us (the citizen, the journalist, the diplomat, the moralist) cannot call them to account” (*Christian Attitudes*, 28-29).

²⁸ For Augustine’s just war thought see Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963) and William R. Stevenson, *Christian Love and Just War: Moral Paradox in St. Augustine and His Modern Interpreters* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987).

of Christians has been the blank check. The basic Christian responsibility has been simply to follow the dictates of their government. Only in this way could so many Christians take up arms against other Christians.

Still, just as the century of total war stimulated an unprecedented expansion of the numbers of Christian pacifists and the creative application of pacifist convictions to a wide range of issues, so also did the 20th century lead to an enlivening of the critical just war approach.

Enlivening of critical just war thought

During World War II, American Catholic moral theologian John C. Ford articulated an unusual critique of the Allies' use of saturation bombing as going beyond the what the principle of just means in warfare would allow. Ford's critique was unusual as was expressed while the war was still going on—though he was also careful to make clear that he was not questioning the overall moral legitimacy of the Allied war effort.²⁹

The events of August 1945 changed application of just war principles forever. The use of nuclear weapons galvanized an outpouring of horror at the incredible level of destruction visited by those weapons. Eventually a position called “nuclear pacifism” emerged—a view based on just war criteria that says, *ahead of time*, that a nuclear war could never be justifiable. So, here, just war criteria actually become a basis for opposing actual wars (and, implicitly, for opposing one's government's policies). “Nuclear pacifism” among Christians received a tremendous boost with the 1983 pastoral letter from the United States Roman Catholic bishops that pointed strongly toward nuclear pacifism.³⁰

Also as a consequence of World War II, a challenge to the blank check's assumption that citizen's must simply obey their governments (and leave moral accountability to governmental and military leaders) was articulated amidst the war crimes trials of Nazis. The so-called Nuremberg principles asserted that each soldier has the responsibility to say no to unjust orders. This responsibility could be seen as a personalization of the critical just war approach, where each person in a

²⁹ First published in 1944, Ford's article has been reprinted as, John C. Ford, S.J., “The Morality of Obliteration Bombing,” in Richard B. Miller, ed., *War in the Twentieth Century: Sources in Theological Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 138-77.

³⁰ On the Catholic bishops' letter, “The Challenge of Peace,” see Philip J. Murnion, ed., *Catholics and Nuclear War: A Commentary on “The Challenge of Peace”* (New York: Crossroad, 1983). For an argument for nuclear pacifism see David Hollenbach, S.J., *Nuclear Ethics: A Christian Moral Argument* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983).

sense becomes a judge of justifiability—and accountable for how he or she behaves in relation to what is understood to be unjust behavior.

In the 1960s, the United States engaged in an extended war that did not meet with overwhelming public support. During the Vietnam War, a new category emerged, “selective conscientious objection.” This category included people who objected to participation in this particular war—not because they were pacifists but because they believed that that particular war was unjust. Selective conscientious objection was never accepted as a legitimate basis to gain legal conscientious objector status. Surely though many of the unprecedentedly large number of COs during that war were selective COs who convinced their draft boards to classify them as COs.

Just war thought served a critical function in fostering a refusal to participate in what was seen as an unjust war. Just war thought served, as well, as a resource for those who actively opposed a war as it was being fought and not only after the fact.

Finally, in the run up to the US war on Iraq, opposition erupted in massive demonstrations and articulations of dissent to government policies. Even among pacifists, the arguments expressed in public were framed, as a rule, in just war terms—this was not a last resort, there was no legitimate authority (that is, the UN) favoring war, it was a war of aggression not self-defense. Never before in American history has such an outpouring of opposition been expressed in *advance* of military action.³¹

So, what has emerged over the past sixty years with the Nuremberg principles, nuclear pacifism, selective conscientious objection, and pre-war opposition to military action, has been a revitalized just war tradition. Christian pacifists should warmly welcome these developments among those who have used just war thinking in critical ways in recent years. We may be seeing a confluence among Christian pacifists who have learned from Gandhi and King that nonviolence can be a force for social change and critical just war people who have learned from the events of the past century that we must find ways to end war or it will end us.³²

I believe that Christian *pacifism*, nonetheless, still remains grounded in central *theological* affirmations, not simply a commonsense awareness of

³¹ Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003), declares himself a *non*-pacifist but presents a powerful argument for the moral obsolescence of just about any conceivable contemporary war—largely on critical just war-type grounds (even though he does not overtly appropriate formal just war language).

³² Walter Wink describes and affirms emerging points of confluence between just war thought and active nonviolence in *Engaging the Powers*, chapter 11: “Beyond Just War and Pacifism,” 209-29.

the folly of modern warfare. Christian pacifism follows from the confession that love for all people (love, even, for our enemies) is our highest, never to be overridden, ethical commitment. Such love forbids the use of violence. For Christian pacifists, this confession of the supremacy of love is inextricably linked with our belief in Jesus as the normative revelation of the God who created the universe. Jesus reveals God to be a God of love—and Jesus reveals the harmony with this God requires that we, in turn, be people of love.

2. The early church and war and peace

[Previously unpublished. Comprehensive examination research paper, Graduate Theological Union, 1986.]

It has often been noticed that a quick reading of the New Testament leaves the reader with a sense that the first followers of Jesus must have opposed violence and, implicitly, warfare, much more than most Christians have since then.¹ People who want to build a case for pacifism (which I define here as the principled rejection of all warfare) will find much more in the New Testament to support their case than they are apt to find in a textbook of church history.

Obviously something changed to prevent the pacifistic spirit of the New Testament from defining the position of the church as a whole concerning war and military service. The purpose of this chapter is to deal with the question of why this happened. Judging by the writings of major church leaders, by the 5th century the just war perspective was firmly dominant, as it has been down to the present.

I will look at *the* decisive period in the development of Christian ethics of war and peace by focusing primarily on the thought of several key leaders of the early church. This was a time when just war thought (that has affirmed the morally permissibility of Christians fighting in wars that are morally justifiable) decisively won the day and pushed Christian pacifism from the mainstream of the church to the margins. It has only been in the 20th century that this situation has come to be questioned by more than a very few.

I will use the term “just war” thought for those people who attempted to reason morally about warfare and who assumed that only wars that met certain criteria were justifiable and therefore morally supportable. Many people, however, tended to drift into less nuanced ways of

¹Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), 53-54; Arthur F. Holmes, ed., *War and Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), 7; Louis J. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier Books, 1983), 17.

thinking. I will suggest that just war theories were rarely significantly operative in a critical way. In theory, it was said that some wars are justifiable and some are not. In practice, for people such as Ambrose and Augustine, it would seem that each particular war their state fought was “just” (i.e., *assumed* to be morally good and not evaluated ahead of time or even while in progress according to the just war criteria).

To some degree, to speak of the early church as “pacifist” depends on extrapolating certain viewpoints regarding violent coercion and the like from the material and applying these to the issue of warfare. However, there is enough material of an overt pacifist nature to keep this process from becoming totally extrapolation.

Any discussion of early Christians’ perspectives on war and peace is somewhat speculative. Many gaps in the evidence exist. Problems of perspective on the part of present day interpreters, only exacerbated by the fragmentary nature of the evidence, also complicate matters. Is early Christianity’s general overall perspective in the time prior to Constantine to be defined by the few who wrote on the subject (and who almost universally wrote in a pacifist vein) or by the few of whom we have a record of being in the military? Is the general silence on the part of most Christians to be interpreted as implicit support or implicit rejection of pacifism? When there is little hard evidence to go on, most modern interpreters seem to draw conclusions consistent with their own present-day views and accuse those drawing opposite conclusions of bias.²

To anticipate a little, I will conclude that this move from pacifism to the just war was largely due to a process of cultural accommodation, not to debate and the emergence of a clear moral argument in favor of the change. It was due to the gradual accommodation of the church to the wider society and concurrent gradual assimilation of classical philosophy and acceptance of warfare as a morally supportable activity on the part of Christian people. If the shift was not due to the force of argument, then one could say that the “debate” between these two perspectives was never really resolved but only, in effect, adjourned. The weight of tradition is certainly on the side of the just war perspective. But if the foundations for Christian just war thought lay more on gradual cultural accommodation than clear moral argument, then to challenge that tradition and call to continue this ancient, unresolved debate would certainly be legitimate.

²Cf. the anti-pacifist perspective of John Helgeland, Robert J. Daly, and J. Patout Burns, *Christians and the Military: The Early Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 1-2 and the pro-pacifist perspective of Gerard E. Caspary, *Politics and Exegesis: Origen and the Two Swords* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1979), 93 n. 137 and 128 n. 6.

New Testament themes

The New Testament has been the arena for much debate concerning its perspective on war and peace from the time of the first controversies in the church over this issue. A large part of the reason for the debate, which continues unabated, is that the New Testament does not overtly address the question of war and Christians' involvement in it. Neither Jesus nor Paul made flat commands stating that no Christians may fight in wars, nor is there any articulation of a just war theory. No direct statements, either pro or con, are made by any of the writers. Thus, any conclusions that can be drawn regarding the New Testament teaching by necessity must be based on inference. This reality lends itself to a diversity of interpretations.

There was, however, little diversity among the interpretations of leaders in the early church up to the time of Constantine. There was essential agreement, at least according to the extant materials, that the basic thrust of the New Testament message was pacifistic.

It is clearly no coincidence that by the time of Augustine the rejection of pacifism is accompanied by a different perspective of several broader themes. Jesus' love command gets interiorized and is said to speak more of attitudes than actions; only a spiritual elite in monasteries needs to seek to obey Jesus' teachings consistently. Also, grace comes to be seen more as pardon for sin than as empowerment to overcome sin. And those who try to hold on to New Testament emphases, the Donatists and especially the Pelagians, become "heretics."

It would have been inconceivable, it seems, for first-century Christians who shared the perspective of Jesus, the Gospel writers, Paul, and other New Testament people to have been anything but pacifists had that particular issue been a live one. The church started out as a small, separated group seeking, by adhering to Jesus' teaching and example, to manifest God's love in an unloving environment. It was characterized by a strong sense of separation from the "world."³ This dualism should not be overstated. What was rejected was not culture en masse, but particular manifestations of culture that the Christians perceived to be evil. Christians still lived in the world, worked, played, and so on. But they said no to things that contradicted their understanding of the gospel ethics. In particular, they were suspicious of coercive political power and any kind of quest for wealth and social prestige.

³Hans von Campenhausen, *Tradition and Life in the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 29; John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes Toward War, Peace, and Revolution* (Elkhart, IN: Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, 1983), 24.

The first Christians, like many other Jews, were suspicious of and maintained a distance from the power and wealth of the Roman Empire. They would not have conceived of fighting *for* Rome. But that their scruples were more than merely social alienation from Rome is seen in that they also did not conceive of joining with Jewish revolutionaries in fighting *against* Rome. John the Baptist perhaps represents those who were disappointed that Jesus did not raise the sword to overthrow the Roman tyranny—cf. Luke 18:35, where it appears that John expected behavior in Jesus more in keeping with leadership in a holy war.⁴

They assumed that the way to deal with interhuman conflict is through the way of suffering love and forgiveness like Jesus and not through an eye-for-an-eye “justice.” This was personalistic more than geopolitical thinking. As long as Christians thought in these terms and not in terms of how to manage the empire, it was inevitable that they would be pacifists. And, when they began to think in terms of managing the empire, it was inevitable that they would drop the pacifism.

The silence prior to 170 CE

During the first several decades of the church, very little was written explicitly dealing with warfare and military service and Christians' attitudes toward those things. It was not until about 170 CE that the silence was broken. The breaking of the silence was in reference to the first known instances of Christians being in the military, and the message was totally negative about such service. A safe generalization would be to affirm that Christians simply were not involved in the military during the first 130 years of the church's existence.

Christian involvement in warfare was a non-issue. The relative stability of the Roman empire during this time meant that there was little need for new military recruits. There would have been little pressure on Christians to join. There was no general conscription of Roman citizens, so no one worried about being called up involuntarily. Besides, until at least the middle part of the second century most Christians were likely ineligible for military duty since very few were Roman citizens.⁵ The pacifist intentions of the early church were rarely put to the test.

So, the attitudes of the first Christians were somewhat ambiguous. They were not forced to deal with the issue. The indirect evidence points

⁴J. Massyngbearde Ford, *My Enemy is My Guest: Jesus and Violence in Luke* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 44; also John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1971), 13-51.

⁵K. W. Ruyter, “Pacifism and Military Service in the Early Church” *Cross Currents* 32 (1982), 57.

in various ways. On the one hand, in practice early Christianity was far from being a subversive cult consciously undermining Roman security. It was mostly urban; its adherents accepted the benefits of Greco-Roman society.⁶ Christians preached loyalty to the state that had little or nothing to do with their views on military service but that indicated a generally positive view toward the peaceful activities of Roman government.⁷ At least some Christians reflected a sense that wars in the world were inevitable and they therefore saw no reason to condemn warfare for non-Christians.⁸ It would seem, therefore, that the early church did not advocate a vision of transforming the empire into a pacifist state.

On the other hand, the church itself knew no war. The military organizations of the world were not necessary on the church's account.⁹ The ideal of Christians living peaceably in harmony with Christ's teaching was often mentioned by people such as Justin (died ca. 165) and Athenagoras (died second half of second century). The latter wrote:

We have learned not to return blow for blow or to take to court those who rob and plunder us. What is more, if they strike us abusively on one side of the head, we have learned to offer the other as well and to give our cloak to anyone who takes our tunic.¹⁰

The idea of Christians living, at least partially, in the age of peace foretold by Isaiah and Micah was a popular one reflected in writings such as Justin's *First Apology*:

The Prophetic Spirit speaks and foretells the future ... "The Law shall come out of Zion and the Lord's word from Jerusalem. And he will judge the Gentiles and reproach many people, and they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. And nation will not raise its sword against nation, and they will no longer learn the arts of war." You can believe that this prophecy, too, was fulfilled. For twelve men, ignorant and unskilled in speaking as they were, went out from Jerusalem to the world, and with the help of God announced to every race of men that they had been sent by Christ to teach the word of God to everyone, and we who formerly killed one another not only refuse to make war on our enemies but in order to avoid lying to our interrogators or deceiving them, we freely go to our deaths confessing Christ.¹¹

⁶W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 132.

⁷Swift, *Early*, 36.

⁸von Campenhausen, *Tradition*, 161.

⁹von Campenhausen, *Tradition*, 161.

¹⁰Athenagoras, *Plea for Christians*, 1.4; quoted in Swift, *Early*, 35-36.

¹¹Quoted in Swift, *Early*.

Christians understood themselves explicitly to be commanded not to respond to violent persecution in kind in imitation of Jesus and the Apostles. The early church may have used military imagery frequently, but it always contrasted its type of spiritual warfare with real-life military warfare; Christians' was "non-violent" war. The church took the basic tone of distance between itself and the world. At its best, the world allowed the church to do its work peaceably. But the world was a realm of darkness, to be held suspect. There was nothing remotely approaching the close identification with the empire's welfare that came later and that made it inevitable that Christians use the sword to further the empire's interests (interests by then seen to be identical to the church's).

In general, the early church focused on its internal life. There was a sense of realized eschatology, the kingdom of God as to some degree present. But Christians meant this in reference to the church and not to the empire (unlike the 4th century with Eusebius of Caesarea). The early church do not speak to what non-Christians ought or ought not to do, nor had it any intention of changing the social order of this passing world to a Christian society. What the early church put forward in the way of concrete directions and demands was meant only for Christians.

The basic impetus of the early church was in a pacifist direction. For one thing, even when the issue of warfare and military service did surface following 170, the spokesmen of the church were uniformly pacifist for nearly 150 years. They did not create that perspective out of thin air. When they allowed for the validity, for Caesar, of Caesar's wars, however, some early Christians left the door open for later change. Once Caesar himself became a Christian, then the acceptance of the validity of his fellow-Christians fighting for him seemingly became inevitable.

A key development was that after about 100 CE, Christians tended less and less to be Israel and more tended to contrast Christianity with Judaism as separate religions. This made it much easier for the church to assimilate Greek and Roman influences and helped pave the way for an eventual rapprochement between the church and Caesar.

The pacifist fathers

The rise of Christian involvement in the military elicited increased response on the part of major church theologians. These uniformly opposed that practice until after the Emperor Constantine became a Christian early in the 4th century. It would be wrong to see this as indicative of total unity on the part of the entire church. If that were the case, the theologians obviously would not have had to write about it. Neither is the writers' unity on this issue insignificant. The first self-

conscious expression of Christian attitudes toward warfare and military service was totally negative and explicitly pacifist.

The first person to address the issue that we know of was Marcion (died ca. 160). He did not respond to external concerns such as Christians joining the military, but rather to internal concerns, i.e., the violence of the Old Testament. He combined a high view of Christian love with a Gnostic repudiation of the physical to draw a strong distinction between the warrior God of the Old Testament and the loving, pacifistic God of Jesus.¹² He solved this tension in a way most Christians rejected. He repudiated the Old Testament altogether. Pacifist theologians such as Tertullian and Origen offered ways to reconcile the Old Testament with the New without jettisoning the former. But the tension remained.

One of the most articulate of the early pacifists was Tertullian (ca. 160-ca. 220), a church leader in Northern Africa who uncompromisingly rejected Christian involvement in the military. He lived within the early Christian polarity between church and empire. For him, the Christian was to follow the non-resistance of Jesus and under all circumstances reject involvement in any kind of bloodshed:

For albeit soldiers had come to John, and had received the formula of their rule; albeit, likewise, a centurion had believed; still the Lord afterward, in disarming Peter, unbelted every soldier. No dress is lawful among us, if assigned to any unlawful action.¹³

Tertullian saw the Roman Empire to have a providential and even eschatological role to play, but he saw the its militant opposition to the church as a major manifestation of the cosmic struggle between forces of good and evil.¹⁴ He was not concerned with the implications for the wider society of Christians refusing to take life or to take political responsibility. For him, the Christian was to obey Christ and leave to Christ the outcome of that obedience. Tertullian boldly stated that Christians should pray for the emperor, not because they cared so much what he did, but because he was the greatest of their enemies:

Do you, then, who think that we care nothing for the welfare of Caesar, look into God's revelations, examine our sacred books, which we do not keep in hiding, and which many accidents put into the hands of those who are not of us. Learn from them that a large benevolence is enjoined

¹²Bainton, *Christian*, 81-82.

¹³Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, ch. 19, in S.L. Greenslade, ed., *Early Latin Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 105.

¹⁴Caspary, *Politics*, 136.

upon us, even so far as to supplicate God for our enemies, and to beseech blessings on our persecutors. Who, then, are greater enemies and persecutors of Christians than the very parties with treason against whom we are charged.¹⁵

Nonetheless, Tertullian did not envision a hopeless dualism in which the church was always doomed to be a marginal sect at enmity with the rest of the world. He anticipated Christ as Lord of a world purged of idolatry. His view of history allowed for revolutionary change. He did not advocate escape from the world but rather its transformation from a place that hates Jesus and his way of peace to one that would recognize that the slain Lamb was nevertheless king of kings and lord of lords.¹⁶

Hippolytus (died in 236) also reflected the early Christian polarity. For him, the empire imitated the church in its growth, but this imitation was that of the Antichrist attempting to simulate Christ. The empire was not only a pale and imperfect echo of, and an unwitting instrument of, the church. It was the “anti-church.”¹⁷ In the *Apostolic Tradition* (written around 210), he asserted that common soldiers were not required to desert the army as long as they avoided bloodshed. The prohibition against taking human life was so absolute, however, that it would even require direct disobedience to a direct command from a superior:

A soldier in the lower ranks shall kill no one. If ordered to do so, he shall not obey, and he shall not take an oath. If he does not want to comply with this directive, let him be dismissed from the church. If any one exercises the power of the sword or is a civil magistrate who wears the purple, let him give up the office or be dismissed. A catechumen or a member of the faithful who wants to join the army should be dismissed because he has shown contempt for God.¹⁸

Origen (185-254) was perhaps the most influential theologian of the church in the eastern part of the Roman Empire during this time and was a thoroughgoing pacifist. He felt that the pacifism of Christians as a people was their most noticeable quality. To shed blood, either in self-defense or in the military, was a “sacrilege and an abomination.”¹⁹ Christians must be peaceable even with those who hate peace; thus, they

¹⁵Tertullian, *Apology*, 36.1-4, in *Apologetical Works* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1950), 94.

¹⁶George W. Forell, *History of Christian Ethics, Volume 1: From the New Testament to Augustine* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1979), 60.

¹⁷Caspary, *Politics*, 138.

¹⁸Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, Canon 16, quoted in Swift, *Early*, 47.

¹⁹Quoted in Caspary, *Politics*, 91.

may use the sword against no one whatsoever. In Origen's view, because Christians were priestly worshipers of the Most High, those who share the eternal priesthood of Christ, they formed the entering wedge of God's kingdom in this world. As such, they beat their swords into plowshares, and they no longer use the carnal weapons of the old dispensation.²⁰

Origen's attitude toward the Empire was somewhat less antagonistic than Tertullian's. He saw the existence of the empire and its *Pax Romana* that it had been able to enforce to mean that the spread of a fellowship of such radical pacifists as the Christians could become a social possibility.²¹ For Origen, the church had a positive function to play in the life of the empire. The two organizations were not only at odds with one another. By their prayers and disciplined lives, Christians were of more service to the empire than soldiers with their swords could possibly be:

At appropriate times we render to the emperors divine help ... by taking up even the whole armor of God. And this we do in obedience to the apostolic utterance which says: "I exhort you, therefore, first to make prayers, supplications, intercessions, and thanksgivings for all people, for emperors, and all that are in authority." Indeed, the more pious a person is, the more effective he is in helping the emperors—more so than the soldiers who go out into the lines and kill all the enemy troops they can.²²

Origen, more than Tertullian, had a vision of the world becoming ever more Christian and dissension and strife being proportionately eradicated. But for the present, Origen affirmed that the empire could fight legitimate wars. Christians themselves were not to fight with swords, though in some sense they fought with their prayers.²³ The differences between Origen and Tertullian reflect the different political realities in the eastern empire compared to North Africa. However, the differences also reflect the gradual growth in positive Christian feelings toward the empire. These followed not from the empire being transformed, but from gradual transformation of Christian attitudes toward the empire.

Origen is also interesting in how he attempted to deal with the problem of the wars in the Old Testament. Tertullian had responded to Marcion's total rejection of the Old Testament with a nuanced view that tried to hold on to it but ended up asserting that the old law had been superseded by the new law of evangelical peace. For him, the bellicosity

²⁰Caspary, *Politics*, 127.

²¹Caspary, *Politics*, 132.

²² Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 8.73 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 509.

²³Caspary, *Politics*, 127-28.

of the old dispensation was no longer normative.²⁴ Origen also saw the Old Testament as no longer being normative. He resorted to an allegorical treatment of Old Testament warfare that saw its present-day relevance in terms of spiritual warfare:

Unless those carnal wars of the Old Testament were a symbol of spiritual wars, I do not think that the Jewish historical books would ever have been passed down by the Apostles to be read by Christ's followers in the churches....The Apostle, being aware that physical wars are no longer to be waged by us but that our struggles are to be only battles of the soul against spiritual adversaries, gives orders to the soldiers of Christ like a military commander when he says, "Put on the armor of God so as to be able to hold your ground against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:11)."²⁵

On the one hand, these acts of warfare (though they were recognized as actual facts of history by Origen) must be rejected as being in any way literally normative for Christians. On the other hand, even for Christians, the advent of Truth had by no means put a stop to warfare; it had only intensified that warfare by transposing it to a higher and ultimately more real plane, that of spiritual warfare.

Origen was one of the best apologists for pacifism in the early church. His influence on later people, though, was probably at least as significant for its greater acceptance of non-Christian modes of thought and his more positive view of the Roman Empire than it was for its overt pacifism. There was a certain subtlety to how he allegorized and spiritualized violence that works intellectually, but that could not survive in the rarefied air of a reality of continual accommodation to Rome and therefore Rome's political policies.

Tertullian's successor in radical North Africa, Cyprian (ca. 200-258), held on to his strong emphasis on strict discipleship and distance from the empire. Like Hippolytus, Cyprian practiced what he preached to the extent of suffering martyrdom for not bending the knee to Caesar's demands. Cyprian condemned bloodshed and reinforced traditional ideas about the peaceful character of Christianity, but at the same time he acknowledged that the empire could not survive without military force.²⁶ He wrote little that overtly dealt with the issue, but his basically antagonistic attitude toward the empire meant his acknowledgement did not imply that Christians had responsibility to contribute to that military

²⁴Stephen Gero, "Miles Gloriosus: The Christian and Military Service According to Tertullian," *Church History* 39 (1970), 286.

²⁵Origen, *Homilies on Joshua*, 15.1, quoted in Swift, *Early*, 59.

²⁶Swift, *Early*, 50.

force. Cyprian by and large continued the Tertullian tradition and did much to lay the groundwork for the later Donatist movement that remained the last major holdout for a church independent of the empire.

A final pacifist “preacher,” who actually became a transitional figure with the emergence of Constantine as a Christian emperor, was Lactantius (ca. 240–ca. 320). He wrote the first systematic Latin account of the Christian life, the *Divine Institutes*, composed between 304 and 311. In this work that precedes Constantine’s rapprochement with the church, Lactantius had nothing but harsh words for any form of bloodshed:

When God forbids killing, he not only orders us to avoid armed robbery, which is contrary even to public law, but He forbids what men regard as ethical. Thus, it is not right for a just man to serve in the army since justice itself is his form of service. Nor is it right for a just man to charge someone with a capital crime. It does not matter whether you kill a man with the sword or with a word since it is killing itself which is prohibited. And so there must be no exception to this command of God. Killing a human being whom God willed to be inviolable is always wrong.²⁷

Later, after Constantine’s conversion to Christianity, Lactantius seemed less certain about pacifism and in *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* even praises Constantine for his military prowess.

That all the major theologians who touched on the issue of warfare and Christianity were pacifists seems clear. It is also true, however, that once the emperor embraced the church, this changed drastically and immediately. This is seen clearly in the case of Lactantius. The sentiments of Tertullian and Origen gave way to those of Eusebius of Caesarea, Ambrose, and Augustine. Though the shift in many ways appears dramatic, the signals are there to indicate that it was only a matter of time before the church teaching would change.

Gradual accommodation

The time around 170 is important because this is the earliest record we have of Christians in the Roman army. We know of this only from the side of those who condemned this reality. In fact, during this entire period up to 313 there is very little material supportive of the existence of Christians in the military. Something was changing, however; not everyone saw an unbridgeable polarity between being in the church and at the same time serving Caesar with the sword.

²⁷Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 6.20.15-17 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1964), 452.

Even those who would not necessarily support Christians fighting in wars noted that the empire and church had positive roles to play with regard to one another. About 170, Meliton, bishop of Sardis, wrote that only as the empire protected and permitted Christianity to develop freely could it maintain its vitality and power—a desirable outcome.²⁸

This highlights a basic tension of this period. With the advent of the first Christian emperor, the tension was resolved in favor of identification with Caesar. On the one hand, Christians saw the state as an institution ordained by God in order to restrain, by means of coercion and penalty, the grosser forms of human sin. Increasingly, with the infrequent occasions of persecution against Christians as exceptions, Rome was seen to fulfill this function quite well and deserved church support. But the other side of the tension was that Christians were seen never to be justified in inflicting an injury on the neighbor, no matter how wicked. This tension meant that the church was, for all intents and purposes, advocating a vocational pacifism—one meant only for a few, for specially called people. Such a pacifism could not possibly survive as a norm once, for whatever reasons, membership in the church was no longer seen to be only for the few who were willing to obey Christ's teachings literally,

The withering away of Christian pacifism took time. The first half of this period from 170 to 313 actually saw the first overtly articulated case made for Christian pacifism. This showed, though, that pacifism was in trouble. The case would not have had to have been argued had there not been people challenging the norm of pacifism for all Christians.

The surviving writings from 170 to 250 witness to the righteousness of peace and the guiltiness of bloodshed. Still, even in this period signs indicate a weakening in the church's distance from the state. That one such as Tertullian did apologetics indicates an identification with wider culture. You do not reason thus unless you assume a common sense of what is reasonable and moral. Also, increasingly, Christians prayed for peace as prosperity for the empire over against its enemies with a concomitant acceptance of the cultural boundaries of the empire as the boundaries of the world. This is a step on the path leading to viewing the empire's enemies as virtual sub-humans worthy of being killed in war.

The period between 250 and 313 saw a continuation of the process of interpretation, whereby Christianity came to embrace an ever-increasing number of people belonging to the upper and governing classes. Christians prayed not only for the emperor's soldiers' spiritual salvation but also for their efficacy and success as maintainers of the peace and as

²⁸C.J. Cadoux, *The Early Church and the World: A History of the Christian Attitude to Pagan Society and the State Down to the Time of Constantine* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1925), 267.

protection against the attacks of enemies. It would perhaps even be accurate to say that had not the Empire periodically continued to persecute Christians, a rapprochement between the church and empire would have been likely long before the days of Constantine.

However, the empire at times tried to crush Christianity, generally when the empire itself experienced its greatest internal stress. In 248, the Emperor Decius organized the first empire-wide persecution of Christians. All people were ordered to perform sacrifices and eat the sacrificial meat. In every large center for which we have evidence, the vast majority of Christians gave immediate obedience to the emperor's orders. Christians' penitential and disciplinary system that had been built over the years fell apart as multitudes disregarded legislation against idolatry. The system of imposing individual penance and maintaining at all costs the integrity of the elect that was the church on earth was no longer possible.²⁹ The implications of this for Christian involvement in warfare were apparent. If anything, it is surprising that it took until Constantine more than sixty years later for them to be fully worked out.

The church outlasted Decius, however. He died in 251. The church/empire polarity became a church/emperor polarity. When the emperor chose to end that polarity, the church and the rest of society were ready. With Constantine the rapprochement became official. Likely, the radical edge to the Christian writing during the 3rd century by Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen, and Cyprian did not speak for workaday Christians, except perhaps in North Africa (not coincidentally the home of Tertullian and Cyprian). The bulk of Roman Christians, regardless of what some of the great preachers and apologists said about the pagans as "nations" outside God's community, conformed to society.³⁰

The final major persecution came in 303. This essentially proved to be the last gasp of anti-Christian Rome. Out of the ferment Constantine arose to give the church its greatest "victory." On the eve of this great persecution, Christians percolated into the upper ranks of society. They became provincial governors, and were even found occupying high positions at the imperial court. As Christian exclusivism lessened, so did pagan prejudice. In these last few persecutions, the government was the moving force. The public seems to have been apathetic, even on occasion disgusted with the violence of the authorities.³¹ The stage was set for Christianity to move from the margins to the center of imperial life.

²⁹Frend, *Rise*, 319-22.

³⁰Frend, *Rise*, 419.

³¹A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 46.

The Constantinian shift

Even though the period after 170 CE saw gradual mutual acceptance between the church and the wider Roman society, it was nevertheless of decisive importance that the emperor became identified with Christianity. This happened when Constantine embraced Christianity and emerged as the Roman emperor. The church, as a whole, was prepared for this in that all it took for the church to embrace the empire was for the empire to want it to. Once this happened, there was no chance of the church remaining pacifist.

Likely Constantine made his commitment to Christianity more for political than personal religious reasons. Little evidence exists suggesting that he literally experienced a “conversion.”³² Constantine probably thought having the 10-15% of the population that was Christian firmly on his side would help in his struggle to become emperor. Probably even more importantly, being a man of his times and therefore a believer in supernatural powers, he wished to enlist on his side a very powerful divinity; one who had, he believed, given him a sign.³³

To Constantine, by 313 in the midst of his battles with other would-be emperors, the worship offered by the Christian church to the divinity was of vital importance to the empire; the persecution of the church had brought the empire into peril and the church’s restoration and support would bring the empire good fortune. Constantine knew and cared little for the metaphysical and ethical teaching of Christianity when he became a devotee of the Christian God.³⁴ He worshipped an all-powerful God who gave kings military victories; not a suffering, enemy-loving, crucified-by-the-empire Jesus Christ. Constantine’s priority was always on his vocation as emperor, not on the implications of being a follower of Jesus. For example, he was not baptized until his deathbed, perhaps owing to his doubts as to how far his duties as emperor would conflict with being a full Christian.

Of course, no matter the sincerity of Constantine’s personal faith, Christianity had moved from the margins to the center of the empire. It was a matter of time before Christianity became *the* empire-religion and *only* Christians were allowed into the military. This new allegiance was fully cemented within a few generations. Constantine’s pragmatic approach, with his priority on what was best for the empire (or at least what was best for his control over the empire) over what it meant to

³²Alistair Kee, *Constantine Versus Christ: The Triumph of Ideology* (London: SCM, 1982) presents the case for the lack of a genuine conversion.

³³Jones, *Constantine*, 90.

³⁴Jones, *Constantine*, 90.

follow the gospel, indicates that there was no sense here in which the Christian faith was transforming the empire, only the opposite was true.

Even if the changes bringing the church to this point were gradual, once Constantine made them formal, there were some major immediate effects:

1) Originally, at least, the emperor's will, however absolute, had been seen as emanating from the people. By the mid-fourth century, the emperor's political power had come to be viewed as descending directly from God, and therefore, in some sense even more absolute.

2) With the establishment of Christianity as the state religion, Christians now saw the responsibility for justice and peace as passing from the church to the state. Their understanding of those concepts also underwent a corresponding redefinition.

3) Christianity became an effective tool for providing social cement and facilitating national unity. By 338, Christianity under the emperor proved itself to be the common factor that linked all classes together in defense of the empire against external attack.³⁵

4) It took Constantine little time to assert his authority over internal church concerns. In the course of the initial Donatist struggle (ca. 320), Constantine claimed, and the church admitted without resistance, his right as emperor to adjudicate ecclesiastical disputes, whether through councils of bishops, summoned at his behest, or his own person.

5) The priority on the church being unified so the empire would remain unified, thereby making it easier to rule, can be seen when Constantine called the Council of Nicea and opened the Council with a speech that deplored the church's internal strife as a greater disaster than war or invasion. He urged that bishops to win the favor of God and earn the emperor's gratitude by resolving all discord and achieving harmony.

6) Constantine's war against Licinius (320ff.) took on the characteristics of a Christian crusade.³⁶ Constantine rallied Christian support for his campaigns by equating God's cause with his cause.

7) Constantine considered that the best form of propaganda among the barbarians was not displays of love and compassion, but rather it was to demonstrate by military victories the power of the Mighty One who had caused him to prevail over all his enemies.³⁷

It seems evident that a genuine change, to the detriment of the laity, came after the organization of the church after Constantine. Not very much remained of the "royal priesthood" shared by all members of the people of God of the first three centuries. Only among the Donatists do

³⁵Frend, *Rise*, 533.

³⁶Jones, *Constantine*, 112.

³⁷Jones, *Constantine*, 169.

we find explicit solidarity between the clergy and the people. Elsewhere, unity of the church and the world emphasized the sacraments and their impersonal dispensers as the guarantors of salvation.³⁸

The effect of the Constantine shift on the church may be summarized thus: “Before, you knew as a fact of experience that there was a church, and you had to take it on faith that God was governing history. Now you know for a fact that God is governing history since Constantine is one of us, but you have to take it on faith that there is a church.”³⁹ The ultimate effect of this new reality was a deep reorientation in the perceived meaning of history. It was now seen, due to Constantine’s victory, that the God of Moses was on the side of those who are triumphant in history. This was a turnabout for a people who saw God on the side of the martyrs, the weak, and the sufferers. Now ethics was to be derived from the imperative to make history come out right through one’s actions.

The time from the beginning of Constantine’s reign to the end of the 4th century saw the gradual consolidation of the union between empire and church. This did not happen as an even progression, and in this era the union was never total. Two church leaders figure as central players in this drama: Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260-ca. 340), the great church historian and apologist for the Constantian shift, and Ambrose of Milan (295-373), the great bishop and founder of Christian just war thought.

The emperor’s apologist—Eusebius

Eusebius, typical of theologians who supported Constantine, saw God directly at work for the good of humankind in the history of the empire. The empire pacified the world, established universal communication, and made possible the proclamation of the gospel to all nations. Christianity, it was claimed, had likewise tamed violent people and overcome demons that incited them to war. Roman peace and Christian peace thus supported each other, and the prophecy that swords should be beat into plowshares had received fulfillment in the *Pax Romana*.

It followed from this line of thinking that Constantine, no less than Augustus, was the recognizable agent of God to promote the welfare of God’s kingdom on earth. Even more than Augustus, Constantine was seen to fulfill God’s promise to Abraham to make him a nation:

[In the monarchy and the spread of the gospel] the pronouncements of the ancients and the sayings of the prophets were fulfilled. Their

³⁸W.H.C. Frend, *Town and Country in the Early Christian Centuries* (London: Valiorum, 1980), 97-98.

³⁹Yoder, *Christian Attitudes*, 35.

statements are too numerous to set forth here, but included among them are the words proclaimed about the saving Logos: “He will rule from sea to sea and from the rivers to the ends of the earth” (Ps 72:8) ... “In his days righteousness and fullness of peace shall spring up” (Ps 72:7).⁴⁰

The coming to earth of the divine Word coincided exactly with the unification and pacification of the world by Augustus and the creation of the Roman Empire. Between 311 and 320 Eusebius founded the political philosophy of the Constantinian state based on the unity of the church and empire under the providence of God. Constantine was even at times seen by Eusebius in terms of fulfillment of Messianic prophecies.

Eusebius had few problems with warfare. He saw Constantine as so in tune with God’s will that if Constantine wanted to fight, that must be what God wanted and Christians should be totally supportive. Old Testament wars were not a problem but a precedent. God’s ties with God’s servant Constantine were seen to be almost as close as they were with the heroes of the Old Testament. Ultimately, in his praise of Constantine for his imitation of the divine Emperor, Eusebius used his position as bishop and ecclesiastical scholar to bestow religious legitimation not only upon the emperor, but on the manner of his rule. Eusebius’s two great successors, Ambrose and Augustine, back off bit from his virtual Caesaero-papism. But from now on, the idea of the church refusing, in principle, to become involved in the state’s wars was the sole property of marginal, minority groups.

The emperor’s pastor—Ambrose

Ambrose was elected as bishop of Milan in 374 CE while he was the unbaptized governor of the province of Aemilia-Liguria in Northern Italy. As would be expected from a Roman political leader, his views regarding war and violence reflected Roman sentiments of justice, loyalty, courage, and public responsibility. Unlike Constantine, there can be no question about Ambrose’s own Christian commitment. But like Constantine, Ambrose thoroughly identified with the Roman Empire. It would never have occurred to him that Christians should occupy an orientation of distance from the state and its institutionalized violence. In this regard he was light years removed from Tertullian and Donatus.

For Ambrose, if people who fight for personal gain deserve to be condemned (which they certainly do), those same individuals were in quite a different position when they risked their lives for the welfare of their country:

⁴⁰Eusebius, *In Praise of Constantine*, 16.3, quoted in Swift, *Early Fathers*, 84.

There is nothing that goes against nature as much as doing violence to another person for the sake of one's own advantage. Natural feeling argues that we ought to look out for everyone else, to lighten the man's burdens and to expend our efforts on his behalf. Any man wins a glorious reputation for himself if he strives for universal peace at personal risk to himself. Everyone believes it is much more commendable to protect one's country from destruction than to protect oneself from danger and that exerting oneself for one's country is much superior to leading a peaceful life of leisure with all the pleasures it involves.⁴¹

This distinction is new in the history of Christian thought. It is now seen as virtuous to do something in an "official" capacity as a soldier for the state that would never be acceptable for the Christian individual.

Certainly one source for this innovation was Ambrose's Roman background. He was trained in imperial administration and brought a Roman political orientation to his ministry. For him, Augustus had prepared the way for Christianity by pacifying the strife-torn Romans. The courage of soldiers who defended the empire against barbarians and Roman citizens from thieves was full of justice, and Ambrose regularly prayed for the success of the imperial armies.

Ambrose shared the typical Roman abhorrence of civil war. But wars against barbarians and others who did not share the faith were a different matter. Since such people were natural enemies they were a legitimate object of attack as well as a legitimate target for usury:

Consider the text of the Law: "You will not exact interest from your brothers; you will exact it from a foreigner" (Dt 23:19-20). At that time who was a foreigner if not Amalech, Ammoreaus, or other such enemies? From such people the Law says, "Exact interest." That is to say, you can legitimately demand interest from someone whom you have every right to wish harm to and against whom you can lawfully wage war....Demand interest from him whom it is no crime to kill. The man who demands interests fights without a weapon; he who exacts interest of an enemy, avenges himself without raising a sword. Thus usury is legitimate wherever war is legitimate. "Your brother," in this context is, first of all, everyone who shares the faith and secondly, every Roman.⁴²

Despite his concern for preserving orthodoxy and maintaining the security of the empire, Ambrose insists on the need to distinguish

⁴¹Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy*, 3.3.23 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1896), 71.

⁴²Ambrose, *On Tobias*, 15.51, quoted in Swift, *Early*, 99.

between just and unjust wars; and in specifying the conditions that should govern justifiable wars he follows traditional Roman principles. Thus, a war that is designed to punish wrongdoing or is defensive in nature is justified, as is one undertaken to gain possession of territory that has been promised by God. In the latter case, Old Testament wars were in view, and Ambrose took it for granted that such conflicts were clear evidence that not all wars were immoral. Agreements with enemies should be kept, no unfair advantage should be taken of the enemy, and mercy should be afforded a foe in defeat.⁴³

Another innovation of Ambrose's that was very influential among later Christians and played a central role in resultant arguments favoring involvement in warfare was that love and extreme violence are not mutually exclusive. The responsibility for looking out for one's neighbor could require a person to use force on another's behalf even to the point of taking an aggressor's life. In such circumstances, love and extreme violence did not contradict each other; in fact the implication is that love demands the use of force.⁴⁴

It is interesting that this argument, so important for all subsequent discussion on the problem of warfare in a Christian context and generally couched in personalistic terms of an individual and his or her personal friend or neighbor, never came up until it was a question of Christians being involved in impersonal acts of violence such as warfare. I know of no Christian before the time of Constantine who ever argued that individual Christians were virtuous if they killed someone who was attacking a friend or neighbor. This was never the issue. The emotionally evocative case of, of course, loving one's friends so much that one would defend them with force is only used as a tactic to gain assent to a much different kind of claim—that one should kill to support the policies of one's government.

A third distinctive contribution Ambrose made was to emphasize that, while Christian lay people could (and should) fight in justifiable wars, clergy never should. The responsibilities of the two groups were seen to be quite distinct.⁴⁵ The distinction remains with us, though it is strongly counter to the early church's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and has been rejected by all ensuing peace churches who have asserted that what is normative for clergy is normative for all Christians.

It should be noted, though, that by denying the validity of clergy involvement in warfare, Ambrose places some sort of limit to the totalitarianism of the sword. The ideal of peace was still held out, and

⁴³Swift, *Early*, 99-100.

⁴⁴Ambrose, *Duties*, 1.36.179, 30.

⁴⁵Ambrose, *Duties*, 1.35.175, p29.

those who were seen to be the most spiritual were characterized by their peaceableness:

The peace which removes the enticements of the passions and calms the perturbations of the spirit is loftier than that which puts down the invasion of barbarians. For it is a greater thing to resist the enemy inside you than the one far off.⁴⁶

Other strands of Ambrose's thought may also be noted as distancing him a bit from Eusebius's attitude toward the empire. He continued to oppose violence in the matter of self-defense; he commented favorably on the gospel principle of turning the other cheek, and he did have some kind of concept of the brotherhood of humankind despite national or religious differences.⁴⁷ The most famous manifestation of his attempt to maintain some moral autonomy vis-à-vis the empire was when he challenged the emperor himself when he thought the latter had used force unjustly. In 390, the emperor Theodosius had had 7,000 Thessalonians massacred and was subsequently excommunicated by Ambrose until public penance was done.

Ambrose's overall influence, nonetheless, was one of making warfare morally acceptable for the church. Related to this was his very significant role in fostering the empire's repression of heretics. After his meeting with the emperor Gratian in 379, all heresies opposed to divine and imperial laws were ordered out of existence. To be a heretic was to be a traitor to Rome, and Ambrose served as the quasi-official apologist for this eventual conclusion.

Augustine and Christian ethics of war and peace: Background

If it may be accurately said that Ambrose was the founder of Christian just war thought, it is also true that Augustine was the person most responsible for detailing the implications of just war thought for the issue of Christian involvement in warfare. Like Ambrose, Augustine tapped into extra-biblical traditions in explicating his thinking. It is possible to detect many classical themes in Augustine's thinking about warfare and political order.

Cicero (106 BC-43 BC) was the decisive direct influence on Ambrose and Augustine. His influence on Ambrose is seen in how much Ambrose patterned his work entitled *De Officiis* after Cicero's work of the same title.

⁴⁶Ambrose, *On Jacob*, 2.6.29, quoted in Swift, *Early*, 110.

⁴⁷Louis J. Swift, "St. Ambrose on Violence and War," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 101 (1970), 538.

Augustine asserted that with Cicero Latin speculation began and ended. He generously ascribed to Cicero the inspiration for his own passion for philosophy.

Cicero was the first to work out in any detail the characteristics of the just war viewpoint. His discussion in *De Officiis* stated that the only excuse for waging war was so that people might live unharmed in peace. Victory should involve taking vengeance only on cruel and barbarous opponents. Those who surrendered deserved to be protected. At the beginning of a war there should always be an official demand for satisfaction or a warning and formal declaration. Wars for survival could be ferocious, but wars for glory (i.e., expansion) should be more humane. Promises to an enemy must ordinarily be kept.⁴⁸

No war was justifiable unless it was declared and waged to recover lost goods. Included in the category of “good” (or “property”) was anything for which satisfaction was demanded, whether real property or incorporeal rights. Consequently, warfare was not a willful exercise of violence but a just and pious endeavor occasioned by an injustice of the enemy. This point of one’s own presumed innocence is especially important in the history of just war thought. Since, of course, our side could not possibly be unjust, our enemies must be.

Cicero asserted that wars should be won by virtue and courage rather than by base means. Faith and honor should be maintained even with Rome’s enemies, and an oath sworn even under enemy compulsion had to be observed on pain of committing sacrilege.

The philosophical school of Stoicism, especially Seneca (ca. 4 BCE–65 CE), was also influential for early Christian just war thinking. For Seneca, nature held a central position, being chosen as a yardstick and model of all reasonable behavior that he proposed to people. His viewpoint was developed against the background of a pessimistic view of human motives. Humankind, especially the masses, he believed to be mainly corrupt and vicious.⁴⁹ This orientation came to be echoed by Augustine and came to play a central role in his thinking about war.

By around 350 CE, the educated elite within the church combined Christianity with love for the classical past. The one no longer implied an exclusion of the other.⁵⁰ Consequently, it was assumed to be natural that people like Ambrose and Augustine would utilize their classical educations for insight into questions relating Christianity and warfare.

⁴⁸Robert M. Grant, “War—Just, Holy, Unjust—in Hellenistic and Early Christian Thought,” *Augustinianum* 20 (1980), 174.

⁴⁹Gerardo Zampaglione, *The Idea of Peace in Antiquity* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame, 1973), 158.

⁵⁰Frend, *Rise*, 35.

The result was that when the Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries began to justify being in the military, they did not do it by finding new biblical materials, nor by deciding on the basis of grounds from within the text that older biblical readings should be interpreted in new ways. What they did instead was to insert their understanding of the Bible within the framework of commitments of other kinds; especially the conviction that the events of the fourth century had been providential, and the broad cultural assumption that it is fitting for Christians to assimilate the wisdom of their neighbors. Those understandings were not argued for on the basis of scripture; they rather defined a new framework within which scripture could be understood.

Augustine (354-430) was born and died in Roman North Africa. He received guidance from his father into a classical education and Roman and African patriotism. Quite likely Augustine never spoke anything but Latin. What was not Roman in Africa could only be thought of by such a person in Roman terms.⁵¹ Augustine was certainly an African, but he considered himself a Roman first. Thus it was not surprising that he would side with the empire and the Catholic church as opposed to African oppositionists from the lower classes when tensions arose.

Tensions certainly were bound to arise. Africa was essentially seen by Rome as a reliable source of taxes. It was the heavily administered granary of Rome. Many Africans increasingly chafed under this burden, and this formed the context of many of Augustine's pronouncements in favor of peace and order (i.e., no rebellion).

By the time of Augustine, the Catholic church had settled down in Roman society in general throughout the empire. The church's worst enemies were no longer, as a rule, placed outside itself; they were increasingly seen as inside, Christians' sins and their doubts. The climax of a person's life would not be martyrdom, but conversion from the perils of his or her own past.⁵² Augustine certainly fit in well with this milieu and did much to reinforce it.

Augustine's Catholicism reflects the attitude of a group confident of its powers to absorb the world without losing its identity. This identity existed independently of the quality of the human agents of the church. It rested on "objective" promises of God, working out magnificently in history, and on the "objective" efficacy of its sacraments.⁵³ There is little if anything left of a sense of polarization between the church and the world. Tertullian, no doubt, was turning in his grave.

⁵¹Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California, 1967), 22.

⁵²Brown, *Augustine*, 159.

⁵³Brown, *Augustine*, 214.

Augustine's teaching regarding war

While it seems legitimate to speak of Augustine as *the* just war theorist of the early church, it is nevertheless important to emphasize that, in reality, Augustine's doctrines of just war and (concomitantly) the punishment of "heresy" were not so much coherent, systematic positions as clusters of ideas grouped around the central theme of sin and its punishment. Augustine most definitely was not a self-conscious political theorist. He saw himself as a pastor, and as such, his writings were occasional and concerned with practical concerns in his churches and the wider church as a whole. In addressing these concerns, however, Augustine—consciously or not—made a huge imprint on the development of social and political thought.

1. *The imperfectability of human society.* A fundamental operating assumption for Augustine was that there is not and cannot possibly be perfection on earth, inside the church or out. There can be no total peace in the human city. He rejected the view that Christian perfection on earth was a possibility. With the passing of that hope also went the dream of peace on earth. Swords have never literally been beaten into plowshares and never will. Peace will only come, in eschatological fullness, when Christ returns. The rationale for this principle of no perfection on earth was based on Augustine's view of the profound significance of the Fall.

Augustine's view of the Fall determined his attitude toward society. Fallen people had come to need restraint. Every person's greatest achievements had been made possible only by a "straitjacket" of unremitting harshness:

The whole of humankind is a "condemned lump;" for he who committed the first sin was punished, and along with him all the stock which had its root in him.⁵⁴

It is on this concept of original sin that Augustine's ideas on war hinge. He had a fundamental pessimism concerning humankind's fallen state. Warfare inevitably follows from this situation, and the state's role in a fallen world is to wage war in order to punish sin and restrain evil:

Surely it is not in vain that we have such institutions as the power of the king, the death penalty of the judge, the hooks of the executioner, the weapons of the soldier, the stringency of the overlord, and even the strictness of a good father. All these things have their own method,

⁵⁴Augustine, *City of God*, 21.12 (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 989.

reason, motive, and benefit. When they are feared, evil men are held in check, and the good enjoy greater peace among the wicked.⁵⁵

Total peace is and can be a reality only in the City of God, which is an ahistorical ideal realm and in no way equated with temporal human society or even the church. It will become a concrete reality only at the end of history. This City is the only true republic in which perfect peace, harmony, justice, and satisfaction are assured to all its citizens. This City exists eternally in God's heaven and is the goal of God's elect while they sojourn as pilgrims in this sin-ridden, wretched earthly life. True justice can only happen in this City. Neither the Roman state nor any other state can possibly possess true justice. As a result, the most obvious feature of human life in the present is that it is doomed to remain incomplete. No human potentiality can ever reach its fulfillment in it; no human tension can ever be fully resolved. The fulfillment of human personality lies beyond the present life; it is postponed to the end of time when God's City will become a reality.

Because true justice and peace exist only in this ahistorical City of God, even true Christians live lives in which peace is at best precarious. The main goal of human life for people of faith is realized in experiencing forgiveness of sins, much more than in the perfection of virtues. Discipleship, including seeking peace on earth, has for all intents and purposes become optional.

2. *The state and relative justice.* The best that people can hope for in this interim time is a kind of coercive, approximate justice. Augustine saw the enforcement of this justice as the function of the state. Although without a doubt the main factors that shaped his thought in this regard were ideas from the classical tradition, it is significant that he also referred to the Old Testament for support.

He recognized that this appeal to the "sword-function" of the state by Christians was a relatively new thing. This was not a cause of serious problems for him because he saw God's revelation as coming in stages. He saw there being profound changes *within* the last age; i.e., the change from the apostolic age and the age of the martyrs to the age of the Christian rulers and of the church with coercive power at its disposal.

The state, in Augustine's view, was not primarily concerned with human self-fulfillment, but is rather to be focused merely on cancelling out at least some of the effects of sin. This work is, thus, primarily one of maintaining order, not building a new society. A central element in this work of the state is the just war. This is punishment imposed upon an unjust nation by a just nation when the former's behavior violates even

⁵⁵Augustine, *Letters*, 153.6.16, quoted in Swift, *Early*, 112.

the norms of temporal justice. Neither within a state nor in relations among states can punishment be avoided if the most flagrant injustices are to be prevented and a minimum of justice is to be preserved in the world. But the punishment is a grim and horrible necessity. War is always an evil, though on some occasions it may be necessary in order to prevent worse evils.

The “sword-function” is, in a temporal way, a gift of God or at least an example of God using evil tools to do good work. Even to disobedient, prideful humankind, God has been merciful; establishing institutions such as private property and the entire legal and political order that are divinely ordained as both punishment and remedies for the human sinful condition. Even so, the earthly peace and order these make possible are no longer spontaneous and natural but must be maintained by coercion and repression.

Ultimately, though warfare is to be regretted, it is a necessity. In the light of the alternatives it can even be seen as a good thing:

To make war and to extend the realm by crushing other peoples, is good fortune in the eyes of the wicked; to the good, it is stern necessity. But since it would be worse that the unjust should lord it over the just, this stern necessity may be called good fortune without impropriety.⁵⁶

Of course, this rejection of wrongdoers ruling good people applies only to non-Roman “wrongdoers” taking over the empire. As long as the empire exists, Christians are to obey its leaders. People are to be humble before rulers because they are humble before God. Their political obedience is a symptom of their willingness to accept all processes and forces beyond their immediate control and understanding. Augustine can even accept the exercise of power by wicked leaders as long as they are Roman and legitimate office-holders.

For Augustine, the empire stood for order against barbarian chaos. The empire was Christian. The church was able to give it guidance. Some semblance of justice might be realized. The empire was to be defended and Christians should do their part, which could be significant:

As for those who are endowed with true piety and who lead a good life, if they are skilled in the art of government, then there is no happier situation for humankind than that they, by God's mercy, should wield power.⁵⁷

⁵⁶Augustine, *City of God*, 4.15, 154.

⁵⁷Augustine, *City of God*, 5.19, 213-14.

When Augustine spoke of the role of the state as the coercive enforcer of relative justice and maintainer of a semblance of order, he was of course speaking of the Roman state. His loyalty to that state was reinforced by its role in helping with church discipline.

The coercive legislation of the emperors against heretics, Jews, and pagans was, for Augustine, a fulfillment of the Psalm that the kings of the earth should serve Christ. Even the leniency of the laws that allowed Jewish worship had a prophetic meaning. He was forced to justify the sovereign rights of the Roman state against Donatist critics who rejected that idea. In Augustine's view these rights remained a means to an end; ultimately the coercive legislation of the emperors formed part of the "prophetic *veritas*" of the expansion of the church.⁵⁸

3. *Just wars.* As agents of the state Christians could legitimately take life. Killing another person to protect temporal goods was an expression of inordinate desire and as such was culpable before God if not punishable before the law. It was precisely because the soldier or magistrate acted on behalf of others that he was free of such desire and was thus allowed or even obligated under certain conditions to take another's life.

Augustine supported defensive wars in principle and offensive wars when it was a matter of avenging injuries or regaining something that was wrongfully taken. He saw war as a means of punishing wrongdoers. Also, he found a classic case of justifiable aggression in the Old Testament. In refusing the Israelites free passage through their territory, the Amorites violated a nation's natural rights, and this was enough to warrant the use of force:

One ought to note how just wars were waged. Harmless passage, a right which ought to have been granted according to the most reasonable standards governing human society, was denied by the Amorites to the Jews. But, to fulfill his promises, God assisted the Israelites on this occasion since the land of the Amorites was to be given to them.⁵⁹

Augustine taught a new dispensation in terms of salvation, but utilized the old dispensation when arguing his ethics of war. That Israelite wars were enjoined by God was incontrovertible evidence that not all wars, even in a Christian context, are immoral. Augustine read the Old Testament differently from Origen or Tertullian, at least with regard to its implications for warfare. For him, there was no allegorizing of the text

⁵⁸Peter Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of St. Augustine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 323-24.

⁵⁹Augustine, *Questions on the Heptateuch*, 4.44, quoted in Swift, *Early*, 135.

nor any attempt to see the Old Testament as an early stage in salvation history which is now superseded by the Christian dispensation:

He [i.e., Augustine's opponent Faustus] ought not to be surprised or horrified at the wars waged by Moses because even in that case Moses was following God's instructions and in doing so was acting out of obedience rather than a spirit of savagery. Nor was God's action in ordering such wars inhuman. He was inflicting just punishments and striking terror in the hearts of those who deserved it. What is it about war, after all, that is blameworthy? Is it that people who will some day die any way are killed in order that the victors might live in peace? That kind of objection is appropriate to a timid man, not a religious one. What rightly deserves censure in war is the desire to do harm, cruel vengeance, a disposition that remains unappeased and implacable, a savage spirit of rebellion, a lust for domination, and other such things. The reason why good men in the face of violent resistance even undertake wars at God's command, or the command of legitimate authority, is to inflict just punishment on things like these. That is to say, when they find themselves in that kind of situation in human affairs, right order constrains them to initiate such wars or to follow the commands of others in this regard.⁶⁰

For Augustine, the Old Testament was a double image, serving both as a record of humankind's relationships with God now abrogated by Christ and as a body of precedents to guide courses of action. The New Testament doctrines of love and purity of motive were accommodated to the savagery of the Old, and the pacifistic witness was defeated. Since God as well as the emperor could order a just war, God's officials on earth could authorize a just war in defense of the moral order.

Though the use of violence was usually referred to by Augustine in terms of a necessary evil, there also was a sense in which he saw it as a possible act of love. It could be loving to punish criminals and fight just wars. We punish evildoers so that we may instill fear into them and others like them and thereby keep them from doing further wrong. In acting this way we are doing them a service. This line of reasoning provided support for the idea that it could be a positive good, even a Christian duty, to contribute to the coercive, ordering work of just wars and punishment of criminals. What really mattered for Christians involved in such activity was their attitudes. "It is not *militia* (military duty)," he said in one of his sermons, "but *malitia* (malice of heart) that forestalls the doing of good."⁶¹

⁶⁰Augustine, *Against Faustus*, 22.74, in *The Political Writings*, ed. H. Paolucci (New York: Gateway, 1962), 164.

⁶¹Swift, *Early*, 123.

Christ's teachings, Augustine argued, call upon us to keep our patience and good will toward even those we are punishing. Even Christ himself did not always literally "turn the other cheek." Thus the true meaning of his saying about turning the other cheek was seen to relate to the inward attitude of good will; outwardly we are "to do that which seems likely to benefit those whose good we ought to seek."⁶²

This text does not forbid punishment which serves as a corrective. In fact, that kind of punishment is a form of mercy. Nor does it exclude the principle of an individual's being prepared to endure greater sufferings at the hands of the one who is the object of correction. The only person suitable for inflicting punishment is the man whose love has driven out the normal hatred which rages in us when we have a desire for revenge. We do not have to fear, for instance, that parents seem to hate their young son if he has done wrong, and they box his ears to prevent a recurrence....These are two things, then, that we ought to look for: first, that the one punishing has been given the authority to do so by the natural order of things, and second, that he inflict punishment with the same kind of feelings that a father has toward his son who is still young enough that he cannot possibly be an object of hatred. This example is the best illustration of the fact that one can love and punish a son all at the same time rather than just letting him go undisciplined. The purpose, of course, is not to make the wrongdoer miserable through punishment but to bring him happiness through correction. On the other hand, the person doing the correcting is calmly prepared, if need be, to endure greater sufferings at the hands of him who is being corrected regardless of whether or not he has the actual power to coerce.⁶³

Augustine's efforts to harmonize the teachings of Jesus with the view that the Christian is obliged to serve as a soldier and to kill in battle rested primarily on the idea that Jesus' injunctions against the use of force were should be interpreted spiritually rather than literally. Jesus urged his followers to act in a *spirit* of love and benevolence toward their enemies, not to literal non-violence in the face of evil, injustice, and violence. In a sense Augustine turns Origen on his head. The latter spiritualized Old Testament wars and took Jesus' precepts literally. Augustine took the Old Testament literally and spiritualized Jesus' precepts.

4. The centrality of order. Augustine followed in the footsteps of his classical forebears in placing supreme importance on social order for the human city. This led to complete antipathy toward any hint of

⁶²Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University, 1963), 164.

⁶³Augustine, *On the Lord's Sermon*, 1.20.63, quoted in Swift, *Early*, 124-25.

sectarianism, perfectionism, and social radicalism—the kinds of things he saw contributing to social disharmony and civil strife. It was seen to be the responsibility of those unhappy with the status quo simply to submit to their leaders and, if they were part of the elect of God, to await a better lot in heaven.

“Order,” for Augustine, was “that which, if we follow it in our lives, will lead us to God.” Being part of the all-embracing order of the world, human society is one of the stages of humankind’s advance toward God.⁶⁴ The object of Augustine’s ideal state is “peace”—defined as “the tranquility of order,” a formula full of classical echoes. Augustine’s most bitter enemies were not Roman pagans. Rather, they were fellow North African Christians who advocated a church separated from the state based on strict obedience to the way of Jesus. In Augustine’s terms, such a church was a large detriment to social order and relative harmony.

The church and the world, in Augustine’s thinking, were not two separate entities. So it would not make sense to him to speak, as did earlier theologians, of a vocational pacifism that was obligatory only for those within the clearly differentiated church, that through church discipline maintains a well-defined membership made up only of practicing Christians. The “world” and the “church” were co-extensive for Augustine. He did distinguish between them, but in eschatological rather than sociological or historical terms. The difference will become clear only when God separates the wheat and the tares at the end of time.

The “true church” of Augustine corresponded with his notion of the city of God. It was not seen as a historical reality, but a heavenly reality of which the concrete church on earth was only an imperfect shadow. Thus, the historical church had few resources that contribute to a radical, disciplined group living an obedient lifestyle starkly at odds with the major currents of contemporary culture. Augustine, for various reasons, would not have supported such a church even if it had been a realistic possibility. His criticisms of the Donatists were not primarily related to perceived failures on their part to practice what they preached but to what it was that they actually preached.

5. Conditions for just wars. Even given his support for the state’s violence and in particular for the empire, Augustine did not advocate a blank check in which Christians simply blindly followed the state into all sorts of vain and evil oppressions. He had conditions for just wars and emphasized that Christians should disobey Caesar if Caesar asked them to do something they knew was directly against God’s will (such as

⁶⁴R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 78.

idolatry). But an individual's only recourse in such circumstances, it would appear, was seen to be passive non-cooperation.⁶⁵ There are no intimations in Augustine allowing for just revolutions.

The ruler who makes peace or prevents war by negotiation and agreement deserves greater honor than the warrior.⁶⁶ But, of course, that was not always possible. So Augustine occasionally spoke about the conduct of just wars. He never offered, as an ordered argument to be evaluated and debated, a systematic exposition of *the* just war theory. It was more than a millennium before that happened. He discussed it in the context of other concerns and then only briefly and in fragments.

He saw the chief of state as having both the right and the duty to decide that a just war be undertaken. To this person alone belongs the responsibility of judging whether another country has so seriously violated the rules of just dealing that it must be punished by waging war against it. If he decides that war is necessary, he has the right to begin hostilities, and the soldiers and citizens under his command must obey his orders, whether or not they agree with his judgment.⁶⁷

Once the war has been declared by the ruler, the soldier must simply obey his leaders. Augustine left no room for disobedience based upon the citizen's or soldier's individual decision that the command he receives is unjust or illegitimate. To do so would invite anarchy and desertion of duty and would throw a state or an army into utter confusion.⁶⁸ This principle also meant that it is illegitimate for anyone other than the ruler to declare and lead a war.

When an official killed on order he was not guilty of murder, and if he refused to kill he was guilty of treason. Never was Augustine more Roman, for to allow disobedience to an unjust command would give free vent to the individual passions he so ardently condemned. Rather than incur this risk, Augustine absolved the individual soldier of moral responsibility for his official actions:

A righteous man, who happens to be serving under an ungodly sovereign, can rightfully protect the public peace by engaging in combat at the latter's command when he receives an order that is either not contrary to God's law or is a matter of doubt (in which case it may be that the sinful command involves the sovereign in guilt whereas the soldier's subordinate role makes him innocent).⁶⁹

⁶⁵Swift, *Early*, 138.

⁶⁶Augustine, *Letters*, 229.2, cited in Deane, *Political*, 159.

⁶⁷Augustine, *Contra Faustus*, 22.75, in *Political Writings*, 165.

⁶⁸Augustine, *Contra Faustus*, 22.75, in *Political Writings*, 165.

⁶⁹Augustine, *Contra Faustus*, 22.75, in *Political Writings*, 166.

Here, again, he is far removed from his Christian predecessors. It is impossible to imagine Tertullian saying that there are times when a Christian is not responsible for the overt, conscious evil he or she does.

For Augustine, it is obvious that a defensive war is by definition just since it aims only to prevent or to punish the unjust actions of the aggressor. A lesser evil is allowed in order to prevent worse evils from occurring. An offensive war that is waged against a state refusing to make reparation for wrongs committed by its citizens or fails to return property which was wrongfully taken was also seen to be clearly justifiable.

Augustine never pulled back from his support of just wars, nor from utilizing the Roman sword to confront the Donatists and Pelagians. Towards the end of his life, however, he began to lose much of his positive emphasis on identifying the empire with God's work in the world. In his masterwork, *The City of God*, he repudiated any attempt to interpret Roman history in prophetic categories. The working out of God's purposes was seen not to stand or fall with the fate of *any* particular earthly society—including Rome.⁷⁰

However, the result of this development in his thought left him much more in the camp of Luther and Hobbes than Menno Simons or George Fox. The state (whichever one might be in power) is nonetheless necessary, even if for no other reason than to maintain a semblance of control over fallen humanity's innate tendencies toward violence, evil, and chaos. Life in the city of humankind is essentially a struggle to maintain order and restrain passions, and even the Roman Empire (albeit the empire after the sack of Rome in 410) can do nothing loftier than merely assist in that struggle.

The effects of Augustine's thought on the next few generations had especially to do with his acceptance of coercion of "heretics." When he finally agreed to coerce the Donatists, he propounded the *principle* that Christian rulers were duty-bound to use their power and authority to punish those whose views on doctrine or church structure are declared to be heterodox by the leaders of the church.⁷¹ He did not advocate the death penalty for heresy (not so much because he did not believe heresy worthy of death as because he did not want to give the Donatists any more martyrs), but it certainly did not take much development before heresy would indeed be seen as a capital offense. Perhaps his relation to the Crusades is not quite so direct, but as the decisive theorist of the Christian acceptance of warfare as a legitimate activity for Christian involvement, Augustine must be seen as an ancestor.

⁷⁰Markus, *Saeculum*, 53.

⁷¹Deane, *Political*, 215.

Augustine came to regard the state's persecution of Donatists as war, and he expanded his theory of war to take into account the conflict with the heretics. Over and above the "just war," he now spoke of holy war, "war sanctioned by God," in which the general and the soldiers rank in a special way as servants of God. The two parties to such a war cannot be judged according to the same yardstick: one fights for light and the other for darkness. What made a war of this kind holy was that the church of a Christian state was using force to maintain its unity. An aggressive war for the expansion of Christendom was not far behind.⁷²

Problems with the "just war" philosophy

Christian just war thought dates back to Ambrose and Augustine. Inherent from the start were numerous problems that were not truly addressed. Such as, the ruler is his own judge and jury. The ruler is one of the parties to the dispute and yet he must also act as the judge who decides whether or not the other state is guilty of injustice and whether its wrongdoing is great enough to warrant the infliction of punishment. This fact makes it clear why there has never been an unjust war according to any of its protagonists.

The difficulty of someone committed to one of the parties in a dispute objectively perceiving the relative justice of either side is illustrated in the case of Augustine himself. He assumed that Rome was clearly just and the barbarians unjust. This was key to him in justifying the warfare. However, a case can be made that if anything, in many ways the opposite was true, that the Romans mistreated and lied to the barbarians, and could have followed a policy of controlled immigration which would have kept the invasions from happening.⁷³

Also, Augustine disregards individual conscience once rulers decide to fight. There also is no place for a prophetic group (e.g., the church?) to say that the ruler is wrong and cannot be cooperated with. The early church's statement that they must obey God rather than human beings is stood on its head. It is implicitly denied that God could say something contrary to Caesar. Ultimately, the question of Christian involvement in war came down to the issue of how important inter-human love is in human relations. For Tertullian, Origen, Donatus, and Pelagius, it was determinative. For Ambrose and Augustine, the decisive victors in the contest over church policy, it was not.

⁷²Carl Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade* (Princeton University, 1977), 9-10.

⁷³Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 99-100.

Conclusion

Christians' acceptance of justifiable war was not so much the victory of ideas via debate as it was simply the inexorable march of time. From all appearances, it would appear that this was inevitable once the church became accommodated to the wider culture. Once that started, and it was difficult to imagine how things could have been different, pacifism as a universal Christian ethics was doomed.

The shift from pacifism to just war, though inevitable (and *because* it was an inevitable evolution) was not a result of a noble intellectual and moral wrestling with James Turner Johnson's alleged "original just war question"—i.e., "may a Christian ever morally take part in violence?"⁷⁴ There is no evidence of that question being asked and answered affirmatively prior to the commitment to identify with Rome and Rome's causes. To the degree that there was an original just war question, such a question would have been instead: "Now that we find ourselves fighting, how can we justify it?"

From my perspective, it is not a relevant question whether to condone or condemn the ethics of the early just war apologists. I regret their influence but cannot imagine how things could have been much different. But it is relevant to consider the authority of their acceptance of war for us. For the first time since Constantine, more than only a small, fringe group of Christians are questioning Christianity's acceptance of warfare. One main argument against such a questioning is that the church faced the issue of pacifism before and clearly rejected it. But if the nature of the rejection of pacifism was that of cultural conformity with no clear refutation of the pacifist position, then that rejection is less than clear and its authority for the present less than binding.

⁷⁴James Turner Johnson, "On Keeping Faith: The Use of History for Religious Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7 (1979), 112.

3. Rethinking Constantine and his critics: A response to Peter Leithart's *Defending Constantine*

[Posted on the ThinkingPacifism.net blog, May 29 and June 5, 2011]

When John Howard Yoder passed from the scene in 1997, I can't imagine even his strongest supporters would have expected that his importance would have continued to grow in the realm of theological ethics as it has. I certainly didn't. One indication of Yoder's importance is the presence of a recent book, *Defending Constantine* by Peter Leithart,¹ with a clear agenda of trying to counter Yoder's growing influence.

Leithart's Constantine

Leithart's is a curious book. After I finished reading it, I tried to figure out how to summarize what precisely he is trying to do. And I have had a difficult time. I suspect there may be some hidden agenda at work, because Leithart simply does not give a clear statement of his own constructive concerns. And, though he seems to have some profound disagreements with Yoder and routinely slips in sharp words disparaging Yoder's scholarship, he has not produced a simple hatchet job. Actually, when the smoke clears he has affirmed Yoder almost as much as condemned him. I would attribute Leithart's less than total rejection of Yoder's ideas to the fact that he actually did read Yoder with some care.

On the most obvious level, Leithart has made a case for present-day Christians drawing more positive conclusions about the political career of ancient Rome's first self-proclaimed Christian emperor. Most of the book is devoted to looking at Constantine's rise to power and his long and, according to Leithart, successful rule, a rule that reflects Constantine's authentic Christian commitment. But it's not quite clear why this matters. In the end, Leithart admits that his "main interest in this project

¹ Peter Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

has been theological.” He writes that his “historical portrait has implied a political theology” (p. 306). But what precisely this “political theology” is remains vague, even as Leithart ends his book trying to articulate it.

Certainly one element of Leithart’s theology is that it is anti-pacifist. This explains his need to hold Yoder up as his main theological opponent (and I strongly agree with Leithart that if an evangelical theologian is going to pursue an overtly anti-pacifist agenda they need to account for Yoder). Unfortunately, Leithart does not actually make a case for his anti-pacifism; he only asserts it.

Remarkably, in his final pages, Leithart gives a credible summary of Yoder’s theological agenda in Yoder’s critique of what he called “Constantinianism” (pp. 309-17). In fact, if Leithart had *started* the book with this summary and then proceeded to challenge it with his historical reconstruction, this book would have made a better contribution. Strangely, though, the bulk of the book is unfocused and relies on cryptic shots at Yoder’s historical work without really engaging the substance of his critique. This is strange because in this final section Leithart shows that he does understand Yoder’s thought pretty well. Too bad he didn’t use this understanding to add clarity and focus to the earlier discussion.

Leithart’s reconstruction of Constantine’s career is interesting—partly in the information he gives and his benign interpretation of Constantine’s career. Leithart’s Constantine does come across as a relatively admirable character (relative, that is, to other Roman emperors). It seems that Leithart may rely a bit too extensively and uncritically on Constantine’s contemporary, the historian Eusebius, who certainly had an agenda in his account of Constantine’s life and career. Maybe Eusebius is a reliable witness, but Leithart should have tried to show us why this would be the case in face of the general stance by historians that tend to perceive Eusebius’s account of Constantine as more than a little tendentious.

However, probably more importantly, Leithart’s reconstruction is interesting because even if he is correct in his description of Constantine’s career, the Yoderian case would not be damaged. Yoder would not have to disagree that there were many admirable things in Constantine’s reign relative to other emperors to still make his anti-Constantinian argument.

In his critique of Yoder, Leithart draws heavily on the Mennonite scholar Alex Sider. I think both Leithart and Sider misunderstand the actual point of Yoder’s critique, though, by taking the Constantine reference too literally. Leithart acknowledges that Yoder is using Constantine more as a rhetorical reference than arguing that the problem is centered in this one historical personage. The rhetorical relevance of Constantine seems quite simple. Here is the first case of a world ruler himself embracing the label of “Christian” and invoking the

support of the Christian God. Regardless of the details of the career of the historical Constantine, this embrace does change everything. Before Constantine, the Christian God was not linked with emperors. After Constantine and down to the present, the Christian God has been linked with world rulers and superpowers.

The issue with Constantine is not whether he was an admirable emperor. Perhaps, as Leithart argues, he actually was. The issue with Constantine is that from his time on, God and top-down political power (including the use of state violence) are linked in a way they had not been before—with disastrous consequences for the witness of the followers of Jesus and with problematic consequences for the state as well.

Leithart's argument for the authenticity of Constantine's Christian commitment (which actually is not central to the bigger issues because Constantine himself could have been sincere but still effected the problematic "shift" as I just characterized it) is weakened by two elements—he never clearly defines what he means by "Christian" in this context and he never accounts for Constantine's failure to be baptized until he was on his dying bed.

It seems that Leithart defines "Christian" in relation to Constantine mainly in terms of Constantine being willing to invoke the Christian God (though the invocation seems to have been lacking theological content) and treating Christians well. Of course, one of the big issues in the background in this entire book is the meaning of "Christian." More on this point shortly.

I am puzzled as to why Leithart does not even attempt to explain the significance of Constantine remaining unbaptized throughout almost the entirety of his career as a "Christian emperor." It would seem that if it is important to establish the authenticity of Constantine's own faith and to make the case for him as an exemplary *Christian* emperor, this hardly minor issue would have at least merited some kind of explanation. Heightening my puzzlement is how Leithart's conclusion to the book invokes the theme of baptism (*infant* baptism) as a key metaphor for his constructive agenda. I will admit to being a bit bamboozled by this baptism talk in general. Leithart is quite opaque here in terms of what this metaphor actually signifies. But even more bamboozling is why, if baptism is such an important motif, the elephant in the room concerning Constantine's own lack of baptism would not have been addressed.

Missing Yoder's political agenda

The heart of the problem with Leithart's book, though, beyond its lack of a coherent constructive argument, is his failure to take account of

the heart of Yoder's theological and ethical agenda. Leithart clearly has read the most important book for understanding Yoder's thought, *The Politics of Jesus*. But just as clearly, he did not grasp that book's central concern—which is the central concern for Yoder's entire life's work. These are the money quotes from Yoder:

Jesus was not just a moralist whose teachings had political implications; nor a teacher of spirituality whose ministry unfortunately was seen in a political light; nor just a sacrificial lamb preparing for his immolation, or a God-Man whose divine status calls us to disregard his humanity. Jesus was, in his divinely mandated (i.e., promised, anointed, messianic) prophethood, priesthood, and kingship, the bearer of a new possibility of human, social, *and* political relationships. His baptism inaugurates and his cross culminates that new regime in which his disciples are called to share. Hearers or readers may choose to consider that kingdom as not real, or relevant, or possible, or inviting; but no longer can we come to this choice in the name of systematic theology or honest hermeneutics. *At this one point* there is no difference between the Jesus of *Historie* and the Christ of *Geschichte*, or between Christ as God and Jesus as Man, or between the religion of Jesus and the religion about Jesus (or between the Jesus of the canon and the Jesus of history). No such slicing can avoid his call to an ethic marked by the cross, a cross identified as the punishment of a man who threatens society by creating a new kind of community leading a radically new kind of life.²

There is no *general* concept of living like Jesus in the NT (e.g., celibacy, type of work, rural life, way of teaching) There is but one realm where the concept of imitation holds—but there it holds in every strand of the NT literature and all the more strikingly by virtue of the absence of parallels in other realms. This is at the point of the concrete social meaning of the cross in its relation to enmity and power. Servanthood replaces dominion; forgiveness absorbs hostility. Thus—and only thus—are we bound by NT thought to “be like Jesus.”³

The basic issue in the critique of Constantinianism for Yoder is that leaders like Constantine, regardless of the sincerity of their own personal piety and their desire that the Christian God bless their nation, tend to contradict the message of Jesus—acting as “lords over others” rather than “servants of all.”

What makes Yoder's perspective so radical, though, is that he insists that the way of servanthood is political and it is the norm for the nations.

² John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 52-53.

³ Yoder, *Politics*, 130-31.

Yoder insists that the way Jesus was misunderstood (in his own day and ever since) was not in thinking that he was political when he was not, was not in mistaking his talk about the “kingdom” as talk about this-worldly social ethics, but in assuming that his message of servant-ethics is not relevant for the real world. Jesus’ contemporaries, including his closest disciples (reflecting a “Constantinian” mentality!), assumed that the only way to be political was to take the way of domination. Leithart’s Constantine, no matter how exemplary he may be in embodying Leithart’s sense of what a “Christian” emperor would be like, still clearly makes the same mistake. That is, Leithart does not even try to make the case that Constantine did not follow a domination path.

Leithart does show some awareness of what makes Yoder so radical in his final chapter, but this awareness makes his failure to address this key point in relation to Yoder’s critique even more problematic.

Leithart’s misreading of Yoder is compounded by a too-narrow understanding of Yoder’s pacifism. Again, *The Politics of Jesus* is the key text. In this book, Yoder does not overtly talk much about the principled refusal to take part in war. Rather, he presents pacifism as a much wider and deeper set of convictions, summarized in a nutshell as insisting that no cause, institution, or ideology should ever take priority over Jesus’ basic message of love, compassion, and hospitality.

Yoder sets up the basic set of issues at the beginning of *Politics*: Jesus did speak directly to social ethics and politics with this message of love, compassion, and hospitality. And, Jesus is the norm for all Christians at all times. Hence, all Christians at all times should have their social ethics determined by Jesus’ message. The big problem with Constantinianism—seen in Constantine himself, even as presented in the most flattering way possible by Leithart—is that it acts as if at times national interests, social “order,” the interests of power elites, religious institutions, and the like do provide occasions where Jesus’ message must be set aside.

It may be the case, as Leithart argues, that the true hero of the story of the first several Christian centuries, Augustine of Hippo, presented the case in his epoch-shaping book, *The City of God*, that the church needed to distance itself from too close an affiliation with the Roman Empire. But in a deeper sense, his embrace of the need to bracket Jesus’ ethics in the social arena, Augustine still embodies the worst aspect of the Constantinian project.

I do welcome Leithart’s book. I think many of the issues he raises are important, even if his way of raising them tends to muddy the waters rather than providing more clarity. I should also say that the book is well written, which is no small blessing. Hopefully, he will provide a useful impetus for better understandings of Yoder’s project—and even more,

for better understandings of the calling that people of good will have today to embody a peaceable politics. Even wrong-headed critiques can lead to good outcomes!

In response to a critical review of his book by John Nugent that challenged his reading of John Howard Yoder, Leithart suggests that it is important not to read his book as mainly about Yoder but mainly about his effort to rehabilitate the image of the Emperor Constantine. I certainly defend the right of an author to try to set the frame for how her or his writings should be read. However, I do tend to think the main point of Leithart's book *is* to challenge Yoder's influence among contemporary evangelical Christians. Or at least this is *a* main point.

What about Yoder's project?

The best study dealing with Yoder's thought that I have read is my friend Earl Zimmerman's book, *Practicing the Politics of Jesus*.⁴ I think this book deserves more attention than it has gotten (Leithart shows no evidence of being acquainted with it); hopefully as Yoder's stature continues to grow, those interested in his theology will recognize the importance of Zimmerman's contribution.

Zimmerman insightfully shows how Yoder's theological agenda was powerfully shaped by the years he spent in Western Europe in the immediate aftermath of World War II. According to Zimmerman, Yoder's theology, as it took its definitive form in his epoch-shaping book *The Politics of Jesus*, had three crucial influences: (1) his Mennonite tradition, especially as filtered through the perspective of his two most important teachers, Harold Bender and Guy Hershberger; (2) his direct experience in war relief and general encounters with the devastation of post-War Europe; and (3) his doctoral studies over the course of several years with the distinguished faculty of the University of Basel (Switzerland), especially with world-renowned scholars Oscar Cullmann (New Testament), Walther Eichrodt (Old Testament), and Karl Barth (Systematic Theology)—listed in descending order of importance to Yoder based on the number of their classes taken by Yoder.

Zimmerman asserts that to understand Yoder we must recognize that his pacifist ethics were not the product of disengaged contemplation in comfortable American Mennonite communities. Nor were they an updated echo of his sectarian tradition that had focused on community faithfulness over involvement in the complications of the “real world.”

⁴ Earl Zimmerman, *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: The Origin and Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007).

As presented by Zimmerman, Yoder developed his understanding of the “politics of Jesus” due to his immersion in the rubble (physically and culturally) of a Western Europe decimated by what we now recognize as one long war, 1914-1945. Yoder came to understand first hand the failures of Christian churches to provide an effective counter-weight to the forces of imperialism, militarism, and tyranny that created the catastrophe of the first half of the 20th century.

So, Yoder’s was very much an engaged pacifism that was forged in the fires of the direct consequences of war and had as its goal social transformation done right. He came to the conviction that one of the keys to understanding the catastrophe that befell western civilization was to recognize the failure of the Christian churches to be faithful to the message of their founder and Lord. Thus, the way out (not in order to “save” civilization but more simply in order to create humane space for human flourishing) was to recover and revitalize that message.

Yoder became convinced that such a recovery was possible, and he recognized as crucial support for this recovery the work of biblical scholarship to make more accessible the power and realism of the biblical story. Cullmann and Eichrodt were key examples of this kind of work, as was Barth in his own way. Zimmerman thinks the most important contribution Barth made to Yoder’s development was his affirmation of the centrality of the Bible (understood most fundamentally as a witness to Jesus) for contemporary theology and ethics. Yoder, of course, believed this already—but Barth’s warrant surely served to embolden Yoder in his audacious hope to speak far beyond his own Mennonite arena.

So Yoder became confident that present-day Christians may (and must) gain direct access to the power of the biblical witness to God’s transforming love embodied by Jesus and his community. Jesus’ message was clear and relevant. And a critical mass of Jesus’ contemporaries recognized that and put it into practice. However, of course, this “politics of Jesus” was not sustained by Jesus’ spiritual descendants—as witnessed by the fate of Western Europe by the mid-1940s, the most heavily concentrated Christian “civilization” the world has ever known.

Yoder’s use of the motif of “Constantinianism” emerges, then, as a way of explaining this failure. One of Leithart’s failures is that he focused on trying to chip away at Yoder’s historical account of the 4th century Roman emperor rather than addressing the problem that was the catalyst for Yoder’s critique—not really of Constantine himself so much as a critique of the Christian churches and their failure to sustain their commitment to the way of Jesus. Constantine symbolizes this failure in the sense that prior to his reign, the church understood itself as separate from the rulers of the Empire and after him this changed forever.

The *stated* emphasis in Yoder's critique of this Christian acceptance of placing such stock in linking with people in power is that it contradicts the teaching and example of Jesus (as well as the message of the Old Testament prophets and the teaching of Paul and the book of Revelation). The *unstated* emphasis, as Zimmerman shows us, is that this linking with people in power made the churches powerless to prevent the terrible disaster of 1914-45 in Western Europe and, consequently, the entire world. One reason for this disaster was the loss of Jesus' message of servanthood over domination as the normative *political* dynamic.

Leithart is correct, to a certain extent, when he points out the link between Yoder's pacifist social ethics and his identity as an Anabaptist-Mennonite. Leithart is profoundly mistaken, I believe, when he uses this as evidence for Yoder's "misreading" of the Bible and Christian tradition. And unfortunately, he mainly simply asserts that Yoder's is a misreading more than provides an argument for that conclusion.

In Zimmerman's account, we learn of the role Yoder's study of 16th-century Anabaptism played in the development of his mature statement on "the politics of Jesus." Being trained in Mennonite higher education with the greatest North American Mennonite minds of the time (e.g., Bender and Hershberger), Yoder naturally had an abiding interest in the first Anabaptists. His interest was shaped and stimulated by Harold Bender's famous account of the recovery of the "Anabaptist Vision."

When Yoder went to Europe in 1949 and paid close attention, he discerned that what was needed was a message that would speak to *all* Christians (not simply to Mennonites). This message had to be based on Jesus, not on a tiny "sectarian" closet in the bigger church building. So his focus in his doctoral studies was mostly on biblical studies, with some theology and a bit of philosophy (he studied briefly with philosopher Karl Jaspers). However, he knew all along that the theological program he was pursuing would take a decided Anabaptist bent as a means of then speaking to the larger world—quite distinct from mainstream Protestantism or Catholicism. At that time, it simply was not possible in Europe to get a *theology* dissertation approved that took an Anabaptist angle. So, Yoder's choice was to write a more conventional (i.e., non-Anabaptist) dissertation or instead write a dissertation on Anabaptist *history*. He took the latter path, and turned this necessity into a virtue.

Yoder's dissertation (recently translated and published in English as *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland*⁵) looked closely at the earliest Anabaptists, those in Switzerland in the Zurich area, and their

⁵ John Howard Yoder, *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland: An Historical and Theological Analysis of the Dialogues Between Anabaptists and Reformers* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004).

encounters with mainline Protestant reformers. As Zimmerman presents it, the appeal of the Anabaptists to Yoder was their critique of the change in the churches' relationship to the state symbolized by the Constantinian accommodation. As well, though, the Anabaptists Yoder studied modeled the kind of ecumenical engagement that Yoder himself sought to pursue (and in fact did pursue with remarkable effect for the rest of his life). The Anabaptists initiated the conversations with the mainline Reformers because they believed the message of Jesus as they had encountered it was true for the whole world, including first of all the broader Christian church. They sought through non-coercive conversation to witness to that message.

About ten years after Yoder's dissertation was first published (in German in 1962), he gained much wider fame by publishing *The Politics of Jesus*, clearly one of the most influential books written by any North American theologian in the 20th century.

Yoder's challenge for today

The issue in relation to Yoder's project for contemporary Christians is not his reading of the historical Constantine. Even Leithart ultimately admits that in *Defending Constantine*. But unfortunately, Leithart does not even then clearly identify the key issues that Yoder does pose.

I will suggest what I see as the two most fundamental challenges Yoder offers. First, is his account of the New Testament message basically accurate (in a nutshell, that Jesus did articulate and put into practice a directly practicable and normative political agenda)? Second, is Yoder's account of how tradition works accurate (in a nutshell, that it works in a way analogous to a vine that remains close to its roots as opposed to a tree that grows away from its roots—see especially Yoder's essay, "The Authority of Tradition"⁶)?

If Yoder is on the right track with both of these arguments—the normativity of a political Jesus and the on-going authority of that originating message—then, of course, the symbol of Constantine and what this embodies is a terrible problem for Christianity. If Yoder is right, then the catastrophes of the 20th century are understandable in relation to the Constantinian problem. And the need today, as much as in the 4th century, the 16th century, and the mid-20th century, remains for people of good will to strive for a politics of compassion to replace our disastrous politics of domination.

⁶ John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 63-79.

4. Anabaptist and Mennonite peace convictions

[Published as “From Sixteenth-Century Anabaptists to Mennonite Church U.S.A.,” in Ted Grimsrud, *Embodying the Way of Jesus: Anabaptist Convictions for the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 91-107. Supplemented by material from lectures presented to the Winter Bible Study, Salem Mennonite Church, Freeman, SD, January 1995.]

The Anabaptist movement included diverse expressions in its first decades. However, by the end of the sixteenth century the movement had settled into small communities scattered across Europe, most numerous in Holland, parts of Germany, Moravia, and Switzerland. Except for the Hutterites, who maintained a distinct identity from the 1530s to the present, just about all the Anabaptist groups in Europe in 1600 were (or eventually became) known as Mennonites. The other modern group that directly traces its lineage to the sixteenth century, the Amish, split off from Mennonites in Switzerland in the late 1600s.

Other groups have arisen that have been deeply influenced by the Anabaptist tradition but never affiliated with Mennonites. In recent years, numerous theologians from a variety of traditions identify themselves as, in some sense, being Anabaptist (or at least express strong affinities with Anabaptism).¹ So, “Anabaptist” is a broader category than “Mennonite.” Mennonites, though, do understand themselves as direct spiritual descendants of sixteenth century Anabaptists and generally affirm “Anabaptist” as a rubric that characterizes their values and aspirations. For all present-day Anabaptists, considering the history of Mennonites is instructive; here we have the thickest real-life embodiment of Anabaptist ideals and convictions.

In this chapter, I will trace the story from sixteenth century Anabaptists to the largest contemporary North American body,

¹ John D. Roth, ed., *Engaging Anabaptism: Conversations with a Radical Tradition* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), collects essays from various theologians discussing their attraction to the Anabaptist tradition.

Mennonite Church U.S.A. (which shares a history and retains a formal connection with Mennonite Church Canada).

I will consider the Anabaptist/Mennonite story in four parts. First, I will look at the origins of the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. Second, I will consider the first couple of hundred years in Europe and the evolution from being the core of the Radical Reformation to being the “Quiet in the Land.” Third, I will focus on the time of Mennonite migrations—to North America, and to Russia, then again to North America—down through World War II. Fourth, I will focus on the recent past, the present, and the future.

Origins of Anabaptist convictions (1525-1555)

The Anabaptist movement emerged in the 1520s as a part of the Protestant Reformation, especially in Switzerland, Germany, and Holland. The first Anabaptists were several young men who were supporters of Ulrich Zwingli, a church leader in Zurich, Switzerland, who in 1522 led the church at Zurich to separate from the Catholic Church.² These young supporters challenged Zwingli to make his reforms more radical, urging him to baptize only *adult* believers and to separate the church from the dominance of the Zurich city council. Zwingli said no, and the young “radicals” broke with him. In 1525, they instituted the practice of believers baptism, separating themselves from Zwingli’s church. They thus began what turned out to be the Reformation’s first free church (i.e., church free from state control).

These “radicals” early on, called “Anabaptists” for re-baptizers, preferred to call each other “Brethren.” They did not believe they were re-baptizers, since they did not recognize the validity of infant baptism. This movement, in several discrete expressions, early on spread rapidly across Western Europe.

Anabaptist theology emerged out of a great deal of ferment during these eventful years of the 1520s and 1530s. Three distinct movements all contributed to the formation of key Anabaptist values.

(1) *The Protestant Reformation*—In 1517, Martin Luther, a German Catholic priest of the Augustinian order and a popular theology

² Basic treatments of early Anabaptist movement include: C. J. Dyck, *Introduction to Mennonite History* 3rd edition (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993); George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* 3rd edition (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1992); J. Denny Weaver, *Becoming Anabaptist: The Origin and Significance of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 2nd edition (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005); and C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, Ont: Pandora Press, 1995).

professor, posted his Ninety-Five Theses in Wittenberg, leading to his break with Catholicism. Luther's movement gained allies among many of the local political leaders. The Magisterial Reformation (so called because of alliances with their nation's government leaders, the magistrates) grew quickly, fueled in large part by strong disillusionment with the Catholic Church.

A few years after Luther's movement emerged, a Catholic priest in Zurich, Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli, also broke with Catholicism and established, with the city's political leadership, another Protestant Church. Though influenced by Luther, Zwingli never became a Lutheran. His significant theological differences with Luther kept them apart. So, Zwingli founded the Swiss Reformed Church, independent both from Catholicism and Lutheranism.

Typically at that time, few church members could read; even fewer could read Latin, the language in which the Bible was available. To counter this problem, Luther translated the Bible into popular German. Luther's translation spread widely in all German-speaking areas. Now the Bible could be read in the language of the people. Zwingli shared Luther's commitment to giving all Christians direct access to the Bible. In fact, Zwingli accused Luther of not following the Bible closely enough.

The Anabaptists who broke with Zwingli shared his biblicism (basing belief and practice directly on the Bible). They strove to get the Bible into the hands of common church-goers and emphasized literacy more than most other Protestants. Christians need to read the Bible and apply its teaching to all of life for themselves. The Protestant Reformation contributed especially to Anabaptist biblicism. Out of this biblicism came the Anabaptist focus on the life and teaching of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount. A key dynamic of church life for the Anabaptists was the exercise of communal discernment in studying the Bible.

(2) *Peasants Revolt*—In the 1520s, general unrest among the poor peasants of Western Europe erupted in violence, the "Peasants War."³ This conflict emerged out of horrendous living and working conditions for the masses. Resentment over these conditions led to hostility toward church and political leaders who enforced and benefited from the exploitative conditions. The leaders smashed this revolt, with much bloodshed. In one major "battle," approximately six thousand peasants lost their lives—compared to six of the government soldiers.⁴

These events shaped Anabaptists' tendency to reject control by hierarchies, their recognition of the futility of revolutionary violence to

³ See especially James M. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Buffalo, NY: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).

⁴ Williams, *Radical*, 24.

correct injustice, and their concern for the lives of common people. The Anabaptist movement, in general, emerged as a grassroots movement that appealed to many disillusioned Peasant Revolt supporters. This contributed to an attitude of suspicion toward the powers-that-be and openness to new expressions of faith.

(3) *Monasticism*—An early Anabaptist leader, Michael Sattler, drafted the Schleitheim Confession of 1527 that cemented pacifism and discipleship as core Anabaptist beliefs. Sattler had been a Benedictine monk before becoming an Anabaptist. This background significantly shaped his theology, and through him the theology of Anabaptism.⁵

Monasticism began when a few devout Christians separated themselves from the wider culture, moving into small, isolated monasteries. One of the early monastic leaders, Benedict of Nursia (480–543), formed an order in 529 that eventually took his name, the Benedictines. In 1209, Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) founded the Franciscans. Benedict and Francis shared similar values (simplicity, peaceableness), values the monasteries kept alive.

In 1525, Michael Sattler left the Benedictines because he did not want to be so separate from the world. He found kindred spirits among the Anabaptists, and contributed to the movement strong values about community, service, and the love ethic.

These various currents came together to produce the Anabaptist movement. The movement, chaotic and decentralized, tended to attract at least a few people prone toward over-enthusiasm. It also, from the beginning in Zurich, met with extraordinarily harsh persecution from the powers-that-be. Many Anabaptists met with martyrs' deaths.

Nonetheless, the movement spread rapidly. It *never* had complete unity, suffering from the very start from internal conflicts and splits. We can't look back to a "Golden Age" when all Mennonites or Anabaptists were unified under one roof. Our present-day diversity is not new.

The extreme persecution surely contributed the most to the fragmentation of the Anabaptist movement. The Anabaptists found precious little breathing space. A tragic number of early leaders faced imprisonment, exile, and death. This extreme persecution left an indelible stamp on movement, especially in the withdrawal attitude that we will look at in the next section.

Even given the diversity that characterized the movement from the beginning, despite the persecution that decimated the ranks and kept the survivors constantly on the move, the Anabaptist movement by the 1550s

⁵ See C. Arnold Snyder, *The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984).

did have common features. Six key values may be mentioned as broadly characteristic of all the Anabaptist groups.⁶

(1) *All who believe in Christ are priests.* All Christians have direct and equal access to the Bible and to God. This includes a much lower view of the priesthood and sacraments than the Catholic Church of the 16th century.

(2) *Discipleship is central to faith.* Faith without works is dead. The only way to know Christ is by following him in life.

(3) *Bible is supreme authority.* The teachings of the Bible are the basic material for understanding Christian theology and ethics. The Bible carries a much higher authority than church tradition.

(4) *Only believers are to be baptized.* Baptism is for Christians who themselves have made a conscious decision to follow Christ. To be baptized, a person must be able to understand what the Christian life is about and to be willing to participate in the life of the church, giving and receiving counsel with fellow church members.

(5) *Violence is rejected.* Christians are expected to follow Jesus' way of peace, refusing to fight in wars. The church is free of state control, offenders within the church receive church discipline and not the state's sword, and God is seen to transcend national boundaries.

(6) *Christians are not to conform to the wider world.* Separate from the ways of the world, such as materialism, competition, seeking power and prestige, coercive way of relating. Such separation leads to living simply.

The quiet in the land (1555-1700)

For the development of the Anabaptist tradition, the significance of the persecution that the first generation faced cannot be overstated. From very early on, the expression of those values met with harsh resistance. That resistance determined the direction this radical movement would go for generations afterwards, down to the present. The state and state churches persecuted the Anabaptists as a threat to very fabric of western European society. The Anabaptists denied the ages-long assumption that church and state must be tied inextricably together. In a day when European civilization lived in terror of invasions from the Turks, the Anabaptists rejected any responsibility to join in military resistance. The Anabaptists also rejected hierarchical structures in church and society.

In response to the persecution, Anabaptists sought to remain faithful to their central values. Often they faced two choices—repudiate their

⁶ My summary here is my own synthesis, influenced by, among other writings, John Howard Yoder, "A Summary of the Anabaptist Visions, in Dyck, ed., *Introduction*, 136-45;" Weaver, *Becoming*, 113-41; and Snyder, *Anabaptist*, 379-96.

faith (which doubtlessly many did) or flee to new locations. The Anabaptist movement evolved after the first generation into a migrating people, seeking tolerance and the chance to practice their faith without resistance from the outside. By the mid-16th century, when many of the Brethren came to be called Mennonites (after an important and relatively long-lived Dutch Anabaptist leader named Menno Simons), they had given up the confrontive, evangelistic style of the early Anabaptists, evolving toward becoming the “quiet in the land.”

This era of harsh persecution and the resultant evolution of the group into a migrating people, primarily seeking tolerance and security, served as a crucial defining time. Out of the experience of persecution came dynamics that reshaped the Anabaptist movement and determined how the original creative values would be expressed.

What are some changes wrought by this era of persecution on the Anabaptist movement?

(1) *A change from voluntary membership to membership by birth.* Theologically, one of the largest Anabaptist innovations was to reject infant baptism for believers baptism. They believed that membership in the church is not for everyone in the society, but only for Christians who *voluntarily* join the church. However, in practice, their focus on voluntary membership did not last long. The effect of living as a migrating people, separate from the wider culture, pushed them to be self-contained societies. In general, all in these mini-societies became church members, being born into it. Few people from outside these mini-societies joined their churches. In numerous situations, governments gave Anabaptists tolerance with the understanding that they would not try to convert outsiders.

(2) *From urban to rural.* The first Anabaptists often lived in cities. Before long, though, the focus turned to the countryside, as the more likely environment conducive to tolerance. Before long, Anabaptists' skill as farmers and their willingness to cultivate unsettled countryside became their main attraction to potentially tolerant princes.

(3) *From adult baptism to baptizing children of the church.* The practice of baptizing adults who made a clear and conscious choice to move from the world of darkness to the world of light changed after the first generation. This change came in conjunction with the rapid evolution of Anabaptist communities to be self-contained and ghetto-like. After the first generation, the practice of baptism centered much more on the integration of children of the church into the adults' church. Baptism become more of an initiation rite set at a somewhat arbitrary age to mark the full membership of children whose faith generally evolved gradually.

(4) *From evangelism to seeking toleration.* The first Anabaptists zealously evangelized outsiders with the call of Christ. In face of extraordinarily

hostile reactions from their societies' powers-that-be, the later Anabaptists soon became much more concerned with finding tolerant locales quietly to practice their faith within their isolated communities. Often, part of the agreements they made with estate owners included the promise *not* to evangelize.

(5) *From open membership to ethnicity.* The first Anabaptists came from the wider society in which the movement arose. They shared their neighbors' language and cultural practices. However, in time the Anabaptist religious community and the Anabaptist cultural community (which were basically identical) became distinct from the surrounding culture. This led to the emergence of Anabaptist ethnicism.

An ethnic enclave is a group of people distinct from surrounding groups not only in terms of theology but also distinct in terms of various other characteristics, most notably language, but also dietary practices, dress, and other folkways. Anabaptists became an ethnic enclave largely as a response to the intense persecution they faced. This persecution caused them to turn inward, to band together in migrations where they took along their native language and folkways to a new environment. Their different language and folkways marked them off as different from the surrounding culture. Over several generations, these differences became ingrained and they evolved into a distinct *ethnic* group.

(6) *From a more personal orientation to a more communal orientation.* The first Anabaptists, though certainly community-oriented, generally had a strong sense of individuality that allowed them to differentiate themselves from their wider culture and consciously choose to join a different church. Over time though, this individuality became increasingly diminished as children were socialized to identify first of all with their separated, self-contained community.

(7) *The emergence of the powerful dynamic of Gelassenheit.* The word *Gelassenheit* refers to a spiritual attitude of yieldedness, submission, humility, openness to martyrdom. The value placed on this attitude increased significantly over time in the Anabaptist communities in response to persecution and marginalization. Anabaptists had little external power and hence the ideal of transforming the wider world diminished. The focus of their faithfulness became more oriented around something they could do—live submissively and with their wills yielded to God's will, even when that meant suffering and martyrdom. The Hutterites used the notion of *Gelassenheit* in a very concrete way—the ideal of community of goods.

These developments shaped the history of Anabaptists down to the present, especially those who continued to face persecution and the need to maintain a separated identity.

Holland provided an exception. After the last Dutch martyrdom in 1574, Anabaptists increasingly found toleration in Dutch society. This tolerance led Dutch Anabaptists to increased acculturation that in some ways modified many dynamics that marked Anabaptism's evolution. Unlike the Anabaptist populations elsewhere in Western Europe, Anabaptists in Holland in the 17th century and later rarely migrated. They lost membership not through people leaving with the hope of finding increased tolerance elsewhere so much as through the processes of assimilation, inter-marriage, secularism, and joining other churches.

Thinking in terms of Anabaptist groups that eventually ended up in North America, the changes from 16th century Anabaptism significantly effected their expression of the key Anabaptist values noted above.

(1) *Priesthood of believers*—The sense of community strengthened with the increased sense of separation from the wider culture. Also, though, the communities tended toward stronger internal leadership, and many conflicts resulted. The Anabaptist movement as a whole remained decentralized, with no unified leadership that encompassed all groups.

(2) *Discipleship*—The focus of energy turned away from transforming the world. The focus turned inward toward seeking for community purity and a personal sense of submission to God and the community. Instead of evangelism, the focus became more works of service, especially mutual aid (i.e., service of others inside the community).

(3) *Bible-centered*—The Bible remained central, but the focus became more one of repeating first generation interpretations and insights into biblical teaching than of continuing to seek new applications of biblical teaching to new settings.

(4) *Believers baptism*—The survival of the church came to depend on retaining children of the church instead of gaining new converts. Hence, baptism served more as an initiation rite for bringing in children of the church into the community than as a sign of conversion.

(5) *Rejection of violence*—The commitment to pacifism became perhaps Anabaptism's most distinctive characteristic, accompanied by solidifying a two-kingdom orientation holding that governmental activities are not appropriate for Anabaptists. They assumed a clear distinction between church and world, and their responsibilities lay exclusively in the former.

(6) *Non-conformity*—The sense of separation from the wider world was strengthened (in part due to the development of Anabaptist ethnicism). Anabaptists grew in self-consciousness as people who did not conform to the wider world. Along with non-conformity, the strengthening of community-consciousness led to a decrease in the *internal* non-conformity that was allowed. Anabaptists were becoming more different from the outside world but more like each other.

The migrations (1683-1945)

The first known Anabaptists to move to North America came from Holland and from all appearances crossed the ocean in search of economic opportunity more than religious toleration. Scattered references may be found to Anabaptist settlers, the first being in 1644 in the Dutch settlements in New York. Dutch Mennonites established the first permanent congregation of Anabaptists in North America in the Germantown area near Philadelphia in 1683.

The first larger influx of Anabaptists migrating to North America came in the first half of the 18th century. They mostly originated in Switzerland and South Germany, and migrated to escape the persecution they still faced in Europe. Dutch Anabaptists assisted their brethren on the way, but few desired to leave Holland at that time.

These migrating Swiss at first settled in Pennsylvania, finding welcome from the Quakers who promised them religious freedom and respect for their pacifist practices. Between 1700 and 1756, approximately 4,000 Swiss and South German Mennonites came to the United States, until immigration was halted during the French and Indian War.⁷ After the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars, another influx of about 3,000 Swiss and South German immigrants came to North America. Many of these also settled in Pennsylvania, but some moved further west to Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and north to Ontario.

For generations these Anabaptists lived an isolated existence in the United States, maintaining many of the ethnic practices of their European forebears, such as use of the German language (“Pennsylvania Dutch”). This isolation lasted throughout the 19th century and beyond in some communities, though gradually they did become more acculturated—a process that has greatly accelerated in the 20th century.

The various wars of the US, especially the Revolutionary War and the Civil War tested Anabaptist pacifism, though in many ways Anabaptist convictions were strengthened.⁸

⁷ See Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, and Peoplehood: The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985).

⁸ See Peter Brock, *Pacifism in the United States: From the Colonial Era to the First World War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968); Richard K. MacMaster, Samuel Horst, and Robert Ullé, *Conscience and Crisis: Mennonites and Other Peace Churches in America, 1739-1789* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1979); MacMaster, *Land*; Theron F. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988); and Samuel L. Horst, *Mennonites in the Confederacy: A Study of Civil War Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1967).

In the late 1800s, many Anabaptists began a process of assimilating with the broader American culture that has continued to gain momentum down to the present. Probably the main factor contributing to this process has been the religious toleration they have found in the United States. North American toleration contrasts with the harsh persecution Anabaptists earlier faced in Western Europe.

The first steps in this acculturation process began when many congregations adopted church practices used by more mainstream churches such as revival meetings, foreign missions, beginning of Sunday school programs, and the publication of religious literature.

A more recent influx of Anabaptist to North America came from Russia. In the years of strong persecution before Holland granted toleration to Anabaptists (ca. 1580), many Dutch Anabaptists migrated to the Danzig area on the Baltic Sea. Though they originally spoke Dutch, over the years they spent in the Danzig area they began speaking the local German dialect known as Low German. Low German became the language for their descendants.

The Low Germans found a measure of tolerance in the Danzig area in the late 16th and 17th centuries. Anabaptists from throughout Europe continued settling there through the 18th century. In 1772 sovereignty over this area was transferred from Poland to Prussia and the toleration lessened. The new overseers exerted pressure on the Anabaptists to participate in the military and placed increasing restrictions on their land ownership. As military demands increased and the Anabaptist population also increased, the difficulty in maintaining a viable way of life and holding to their convictions at the same time increased significantly.

These dynamics led many to consider another migration. Beginning in 1762, Catherine II of Russia had invited Germans and other western Europeans to move to Russia and occupy land vacated by Turks in southern Russia.⁹ In the 1780s, Danzig-area Anabaptists showed interest in Catherine's offer. They had farming skills to offer Russia. Russia offered them assurances of autonomy, freedom of religion, and no military involvement. Besides their farming success, all the government asked of the Anabaptists was not to recruit local Orthodox Christians.

The Mennonites established two main colonies in Russia, first Chortitza followed by Molotschna. These colonies thrived throughout the 19th century, growing increasingly prosperous until the upheavals in

⁹ For Mennonites in Russia, see John Friesen, ed., *Mennonites in Russia, 1788-1988* (Winnipeg, Man: CMBC, 1989); James Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889* (Winnipeg, Man: Hyperion, 1988); and John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets, and Mennonites* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1982).

Russian society that came with World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the establishment of Stalinism.

Along with the growth and prosperity of the two main colonies in Russia came some tensions. Over time, the colonies grew more and more stratified between wealthy landowners and landless laborers who struggled to make a living. Also, the Russian government began to pressure the colonies in the second half of the 19th century to integrate more with the Russian society, especially by participating in the military and entering the Russian educational system (including the use of the Russian language). Throughout Anabaptist history, language has been a central factor in the maintenance of a distinct identity in relation to the wider culture. These Mennonites resisted these pressures, but they caused significant stress within the colonies.

A third tension stemmed from controversy within the churches following the emergence of a reform movement that eventually separated to form the Mennonite Brethren church.

The pressures from the Russian government on Mennonites to assimilate more with the wider culture echoed similar earlier pressures from the Prussian government, the main factor in migration to Russia. So, many began to consider the migration option once more, understanding the issue as a choice between staying in Russia and facing the trials of increasing governmental pressure to accommodate or facing the trials of uprooting and seeking new life in a foreign land.

In response to threats of Mennonites to leave, Russian leaders relented somewhat and lessened their pressures. They established the world's first thoroughgoing alternative service program that allowed Mennonites to stay out of the military. They also allowed the Mennonite schools to continue to teach German and Anabaptist religion. These changes were not enough for many. About one-third of the Russian Mennonites (ca. 18,000) migrated to North America, settling mostly in the Midwest, from Manitoba in the north down to Oklahoma in the south, with the largest settlements established in Kansas.¹⁰

As it turned out, neither the Mennonites who stayed in Russia nor the Mennonites who migrated to North America sustained the Russian Mennonite way of life for long. Those who stayed faced incredible trauma with the Russian upheavals. By the end of the 1930s, the Mennonite churches in Russia had ceased to exist as openly-meeting congregations, thousands of Mennonites had lost their lives, hundreds more had been exiled to Siberia, and the Soviet government forbade those who remained to practice their faith. Recent research indicates that

¹⁰ Schlabach, *Peace*, 231–94.

even in face of such violence, the Anabaptist faith did survive in Russia—but at great cost in secrecy.¹¹ A group of about 20,000 Russian Mennonites did migrate, mostly to Canada, in the 1920s.

The Mennonites who migrated to North America prospered. They accommodated rapidly to the wider culture, largely due to the religious toleration that they found. In some ways, their experience in North America paralleled the experience of Anabaptists in Holland after they gained toleration—the loss of much that was distinctive about the Anabaptist faith tradition.¹²

These series of migrations shaped the expression of key Anabaptist values. Up until the 20th century, the migrations solidified Anabaptist ethnicity. As Anabaptist groups migrated to new areas, they tended to take their language (e.g., Pennsylvania Dutch and Low German) and folkways with them, remaining distinct from their new surroundings, often for generations. Did this ethnically based separation from the world reflect the same concerns as the 16th century Anabaptists commitment to non-conformity? Certainly separation from the outside world was much easier when the outside world was so clearly different in various ways (most obviously language) from the church-community.

The migrants often selected themselves by the strength of their convictions. This dynamic surely had the effect of helping those convictions to remain viable. The people who stayed behind tended to be the people more comfortable with their environment and more open to accommodation with the wider culture.

An example of this can be seen with regard to the commitment to pacifism. Mennonites who remained in Holland, Switzerland, Prussia, and Germany mostly gave up on pacifism by the 19th century. The pacifist ideal in Europe essentially remained limited to the Russian Mennonites—descendants of those who had left Prussia in large part in order to maintain their freedom from military involvement. Quite likely, the migration of one-third of the Russian Mennonites in the 1870s repeated this process. Those who left probably felt more commitment to the peace position than did those who stayed.

The migrations stimulated mutual aid among Anabaptists—including Anabaptists of different nationalities. Dutch Mennonites assisted Swiss and South Germans who migrated to North America. In the 1870s,

¹¹ Walter Sawatsky, “Historical Roots of a Post-Gulag Theology for Russian Mennonites,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 76 (2002), 148-80.

¹² See James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), and Paul B. Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996).

North Americans helped Russians in their move to North America. The prime 20th-century case of Anabaptist mutual aid was the establishment of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in the 1920s. MCC offered life-saving assistance to Russian Mennonites facing starvation in the aftermath of the Russian Civil War. As it turned out, MCC also was the channel for invaluable assistance for the 20,000 Russian Mennonites who migrated to North America during this time.

The 20th century and beyond

In the 1870s, Anabaptists in North America began to open up to the wider culture, influenced by revival meetings, missions, Sunday Schools, and the publication of religious literature. Around this same time, about 18,000 Russian Mennonites moved to North America and found the most hospitable environment their people had ever known.

The two World Wars brought out some tensions between Anabaptists and surrounding culture. However, the dynamics changed a great deal between the two wars. Anabaptists experienced World War I as a more difficult and alienating experience. By the time of World War II several factors reduced the tensions. North American society was not nearly as militant in its pro-war fervor. Anti-German sentiment had fueled resentment toward German-speaking Anabaptists during World War I (many not realizing most German-speaking Anabaptists were *hundreds* of years removed from residence in Germany). By the time of World War II, many fewer Anabaptists spoke German as their first language. Also, peace church leadership saw World War II on the horizon and did a great deal of effective work with the US government to establish more acceptable provisions for conscientious objectors. As result, a generally mutually acceptable program (Civilian Public Service) was set up.

Consequently, even the evolution of Anabaptist relations with military actions in North America shows that Anabaptists found a safe haven in the North American cultural melting pot. Anabaptists have settled in and found a home here over the past one hundred thirty years, more than any other situation they have faced (except for Mennonites in Holland).

Anabaptists have become increasingly acculturated in North America, most clearly seen in the adoption of the language of the surrounding culture. After speaking their various forms of German for hundreds of years in several different locations, North American Anabaptists have now become mainly English speaking (with the exception of churches established among recent immigrants). This removal of the language barrier has opened Anabaptists to outside influences, both from secular society and other Christian traditions, more than any other development.

Another indication of acculturation has been Anabaptist commitment to higher education, both in terms of the establishment of Anabaptist colleges and seminaries and in Anabaptists' widespread attendance at non-Anabaptist colleges, universities, and graduate schools.

Somewhat connected with the commitment to higher education, Anabaptists have increasingly chosen to enter the professional (e.g., medicine, law, education) and business worlds, leaving the farms behind. This has led to a reversal of the 16th-century ruralization of Anabaptist culture. Anabaptists are becoming increasingly urbanized. One important effect of this movement to the city has been the growing scarcity of distinct Anabaptist communities. Without the distinct language and distinct communities, Anabaptist ethnicity is dying out.

Another factor leading to acculturation and loss of ethnicity has been increased inter-marriage between Anabaptists and non-Anabaptists. While often these marriages result in the Anabaptist spouse leaving the home church, such marriages also contribute to an increase of non-ethnic Anabaptists joining Anabaptist churches. As well, greater acculturation also has resulted in greater visibility of Anabaptists in American culture, leading to non-ethnic Anabaptists joining Anabaptist churches by choice.

The process begun in the late 19th century of borrowing religious techniques such as revival meetings, Sunday school, and publications from non-Anabaptists has continued. Along with the increased stability and security Anabaptists have found in North America has come increased prosperity. Anabaptists have generally joined with their North American neighbors in accumulating possessions.

Another indication of the accommodation of Anabaptists can be seen in their response to World War II. Even with the generally attractive provisions for COs and strong support from church leadership for conscientious objection, approximately 50% of American Mennonite young men who were drafted during the War joined the military. This certainly served to reflect the loyalty that Anabaptists had come to feel for their adopted nation.

The Anabaptist group I am focusing on, the Mennonite Church USA has evolved into a full-fledged denomination, also reflecting cultural accommodation.

Among the Anabaptists who came to North America in the 18th and early 19th century and formed the Mennonite Church, another sign has been the loss of distinctive dress. Until well into the 20th century, these Mennonites adhered to the practice of "plain dress," characterized, in part, by head coverings for the women and plain coats for the men. Starting in the 1950s and accelerating in the 1960s and 1970s, fewer and fewer Mennonites have been dressing plain.

A final example of Anabaptist acculturation is the increase of Anabaptist participation in politics. For years many Anabaptists did not vote, nor try to influence policy makers or run for office. Again, this was more true for the earlier immigrants. However, this withdrawal stance has been fading away. Mennonite Central Committee has an office in Washington, DC, and Anabaptists are much more likely than before to vote, to write letters, even to run for office.

How has this acculturation of affected key Anabaptist values?

Anabaptists remain committed to the Bible; however, their interpretations are shaped much more by outside influences. These influences include TV and radio ministries and non-Anabaptist Bible colleges on the one hand, and universities and critical Bible scholarship on the other hand. These influences have fostered a growing gap between the views of Anabaptist professors and their students on the one hand, and the “people in the pews” on other hand.

With the loss of ethnicity, the sense of community has become more voluntary. The priesthood of believers more than ever relies on choice, and as a result is much more fragile, especially in areas with little social pressure to be involved in church.

The practice of believers baptism has evolved. Many Anabaptists accept membership transfers from churches that baptize infants without re-baptism. The age for baptizing children of the church has tended to get younger. In some cases, under the influence of evangelical churches, congregations have connected baptism to conversion more closely. All of these tendencies have contributed to baptism being separated more from mutual accountability within the church and from the call to discipleship.

The peace tradition has evolved in several ways. Possibly as a result of the wider cross-fertilization with other Christians, Anabaptists less strictly adhere to the peace position. It is hard to gauge commitment to pacifism in the absence of a draft. Anabaptist churches still teach and profess pacifism. The outside world highly respects Anabaptist pacifism. Probably the clearest development has been the increase in Anabaptist nonviolent political activism. This style of involvement has not been widespread, but it has gotten wide exposure and reflects a sense of responsibility for the affairs of the wider world that was not characteristic on earlier generations of Anabaptists.¹³

¹³ Leo Driedger and Donald Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), and Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach, eds., *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially Kathleen Kern, “From Haiti to Hebron with a Brief Stop in Washington, DC: The Christian Peacemaker Teams Experiment,” 183–200.

As would be expected, the ideal of non-conformity has been less central the more Anabaptists have assimilated with North American culture.

In light of this general acculturation, what might the future hold for the Anabaptist faith? It seems clear that Anabaptist churches will increasingly become multi-cultural. The significance of stable, generations-long, rural Anabaptist communities will continue to shrink in the midst of increasingly mobile North American culture. As a result, the perpetuation of the key Anabaptist ideals will no longer depend on a sustained, concrete “community of memory.”

Certainly these values have always been evolving and being shaped by historical events. This process will surely only accelerate as Anabaptist communities become more and more changeable, fluid, and oriented around centers other than ethnicity. Due to the influence of the media and the education of Anabaptists in non-Anabaptist colleges and graduate schools, the influence of non-Anabaptist theological orientations will continue to grow. This factor also will serve to make the adherence to traditional Anabaptist ideals more tenuous.

At the same time, these ideals continue to be widely held in Anabaptist churches and are gaining increasing respect outside of Anabaptist circles. The ideals will not die, just as they have not died since the time of Jesus. The big question facing Anabaptist churches is not whether we can keep these values alive. The big question is whether we will continue to be used by God as a carrier of these values.

The early Anabaptists’ peace position

In light of this survey of the evolution of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, let’s focus more directly on the pacifism of that tradition. At the time of the Reformation in the 16th century, church and state were tied closely together in Europe. The state enforced church discipline when it was called upon to do so—even executing “heretics.” The state had the final say regarding the structure and practices of the church. All citizens were baptized Christians. All the leaders of the state were Christians and considered their work to be consistent with being Christians. The nation was considered to be, in every way, a Christian nation.

For early Anabaptists, this situation was problematic for several reasons:

(1) In this situation all infants were baptized and brought into the church. But this meant that there was no requirement of faith on the part of that person—how could an infant have faith? The Anabaptists understood baptism by water to be a statement of faith. It was the first

step of a life of discipleship following one's conversion to Christ. Universal infant baptism could not have this meaning and was therefore seen as invalid. But to reject infant baptism was to reject the idea that all people in the nation are automatically members of the church. This is to say that church and state do *not* have the same populations.

(2) When everyone in the state is a church member, church discipline becomes difficult with a tendency toward a lowest-common denominator approach. This weakened the call for a high level of righteousness on the part of all members. There was less emphasis on the sense that those without a living faith should not be members.

(3) When all members of society are members of the church, one tends to think that the "true" church, made up of those who genuinely believe, is "invisible." We can not really know who is in it and they have little impact on the world. For the Anabaptists, it was important that the church be "visible" and show the world a better way, a higher justice.

(4) Sometimes God's will and that of the state are in conflict. When the state controls the church, any conflict will mean that the church is not free to obey the will of God. With the first Anabaptists, this occurred when they wanted to begin believers baptism. They felt that God said yes—but the state said no. In areas such as war, violent police action, and capital punishment the state calls upon Christians to violate God's will by taking human life. The church must be free to say no to that.

Church/state separation

The Anabaptists rejected the church/state tie. They baptized adults and instituted membership that was voluntary and depended on the members having a living faith and choosing to join the church. They were one of the first "free churches," free of government control and receiving no revenue from the government. Members of the church were people who freely chose membership rather than being "forced" into becoming members due to being baptized while they were infants. Though church/state ties continued for hundreds of years after the first Anabaptists, the Anabaptists are important in being among the first to insist on having a church free from government control.

Mennonite history is full of ambiguity regarding this issue. After the first few years of Anabaptism, and in the face of great persecution in most of Europe, Mennonites understandably tended to locate in places where they found tolerance for practicing their faith. Thus, Mennonites made agreements with various countries wherein they would live peaceably and productively (especially with their skilled farming practices) in exchange for promises of tolerance, especially in areas such as freedom from state-

controlled education and from military conscription.

This was especially true in Russia. Mennonite perspectives on church/state issues there in the 19th century were complicated by the privileged status the Russian government granted Mennonites, and by the reality that in Mennonite colonies, the social structure was a kind of mini-state. The colonies were in day-to-day life virtually autonomous and hence ordered their own political affairs. So, in many ways, they became mini-Christendoms, with no separation between church and state.

As it turned out, about one-third of the Russian Mennonites left for North America in the 1870s, in part due to their sense that the Russian government was beginning to make more demands, especially as related to involvement in the military. Many of the Mennonites who came to North America probably would have liked to replicate the largely autonomous village set-up they had known in Russia. However, that wasn't possible. Nonetheless, Russian Mennonites have tended to be more positive about participation in political activities than (Old) Mennonites, both in the US and Canada.

Overall, the Mennonite tradition has held membership in the church to be different than citizenship in the nation/state. Membership in the church is by choice, citizenship in the state is generally a matter of birth. Being a citizen of a certain country has nothing to do with citizenship in God's kingdom. There is no such thing as a "Christian country," citizenship in which automatically makes one a Christian. The only entry into membership in the church is a faith commitment to Jesus Christ.

Mennonites believe that Christians should be good citizens in their respective countries. They should, as a rule, obey the laws. They should be peaceable and respectful with regard to their leaders. They should pray for their leaders and pay the taxes that they owe. To this degree, Mennonites have emphasized good citizenship. But the judge of what constitutes good citizenship is God and the Bible, not the government. In other words, Christians should be good citizens only insofar as that is consistent with being good citizens of God's kingdom. If there is ever any conflict, the citizenship in God's kingdom should take priority.

On one level, this has meant that Mennonites have not felt responsibility for holding political office or even necessarily voting when that has been a possibility. God citizenship has meant co-operating with the state to the degree they could, but it has not meant running the state.

On a different level, this has meant that Mennonites have tended to reject the idea that citizenship in a country means fighting in a country's wars. The priority of citizenship in God's kingdom means that one must obey the way of Jesus at all times, even when the state calls upon one to do otherwise. The state may claim that God is on its side and that

therefore to fight for it against its enemies is obeying God's will. But, in the Mennonite view, the faithful Christian should reject that claim and point out that Jesus' way can never mean taking human life in warfare.

The rejection of war

Although Mennonites have never been totally unified on the issue of pacifism, virtually all Mennonite groups have affirmed it as their church's official position. This has been true even among those who accept the priority of individual conscience on this issue and tolerate participation in the military by members. We may see an analogy with the church's attitude toward baptism. The church's official position, universally, is that of believers baptism. But in some settings, people who have been baptized only as infants are accepted as full members. Believers baptism and pacifism are the church's position, but diversity is tolerated.

According to historians, the first people to be full-fledged pacifists (that is, totally to reject fighting in wars as a matter of principle) were the early Christians. From the time of Jesus until early in the 4th century, virtually all that was written on the subject by Christians took a pacifist position. There were a number of reasons for this pacifism, including a belief that life is sacred and should not be taken; a loyalty to Jesus' teaching that his followers are to love their enemies; and a sense of alienation from the Roman empire and its idolatrous emperor worship which was seen as being closely connected with the military.

Early in the 4th century, this commitment to pacifism as the norm for *all* Christians suddenly ended. A major reason was the dramatic change in the Roman Empire's attitude toward the church. Instead of persecuting the church, the Empire embraced the church under Emperor Constantine and eventually made Christianity the official religion of the Empire. So from the 4th century on, pacifism was not the expected stance of Christians. A few small groups arose from time to time who tried to return to the early church's pacifism, including the Anabaptists.

The first Anabaptists—the Swiss Brethren—articulated a pacifist commitment by 1524. This was about a year before they began to baptize adults. Most of the other early Anabaptist groups and leaders also articulated such a position. When the Anabaptist movement solidified into the Mennonite church, pacifism was firmly entrenched as an “official” position and has continued to be such down to the present.

The basic influence leading to the Anabaptist's pacifism was their taking the New Testament accounts of the example and teaching of Jesus as the central authority for Christian life. They saw Jesus as their model in a way which resulted in them being committed pacifists. They could

not imagine Jesus taking part in warfare or condoning his followers fighting wars. The Anabaptists' central commitment was to discipleship. This meant the ideal of following Jesus' way of peaceableness and meekness at all times and at all costs. Following Jesus meant seeking to share Jesus' way with all people. This was contradictory with fighting against others and seeking to kill them. Faithfulness to Jesus might mean following him even to the point of giving up one's life. It could never mean taking someone else's life.

These Anabaptists also sought to follow Jesus' way of dealing with conflict within the church, especially as found in Matthew 18. This might include using church discipline to remove a person from the fellowship and allowing that person to go her or his own way. However, such responses to conflict could never include using the sword and taking that person's life—something all too common among the other churches of the time who executed so-called heretics, including many Anabaptists.

About ten years after the first Anabaptist baptisms, there was a revolutionary Anabaptist movement in Holland that took over the city of Münster and espoused revolutionary violence. This group's reputation tarnished that of all Anabaptists. The Münsterites were quickly put down, and for years the Anabaptists in Holland worked hard to convince the world that they were not violent revolutionaries but rather were peaceable and nonviolent.

In the time since the 16th century, Mennonites (as well as Hutterites and Amish) have generally remained committed to their founders' pacifism. They have until very recently mostly been apolitical, more or less accepted the inevitability of the non-Christian world waging wars, and even accepted the right of the non-Christian government to use the sword. But the state's violence remained "outside the perfection of Christ" and thus was not an option for them. On numerous occasions large groups of Mennonites migrated away from a situation where their young men were liable for the draft.

The basis for their pacifism has largely continued to be their strong commitment to following Jesus and their understanding that that means loving one's enemies and accepting suffering rather than doing violence against one's fellow human being. The strictness of their beliefs can be seen in that in all of the wars of the United States up to, and, in some places, including World War II, Mennonite young men who chose to join the military were often excommunicated from their churches. By the time of World War II, few General Conference or Mennonite Brethren churches were that strict. Since World War II, there have also been few (Old) Mennonite congregations taking such actions.

EMBODYING PEACE

A significant development in the 20th century in the United States has been the use of alternative service for conscientious objectors during times of the military draft. The first modern alternative service program happened in Russia in the 1870s, where Mennonites were allowed to do forestry work rather than go into the military. The first wide-scale alternative service program in the United States was set up just prior to World War II. Mennonites, Quakers, Church of the Brethren and some other scattered religious objectors made up the program with by far the largest percentage being Mennonites.

Alternative service was seen positively by Mennonites because it provided a possibility to do more than simply say no to participating in the military. The alternative service program gave them an opportunity to perform works of service to society without having to violate pacifist principles. In the initial years of World War II, almost all alternative service took the form of government-sponsored work camps. Later in the war, COs were allowed to work in mental hospitals, and a few other similar types of service. Then, in the 1950s and 1960s, the alternative service program was loosened more from government control so that work with Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Voluntary Service became an acceptable means of service.

Mennonites' commitment to pacifism has gone hand-in-hand with commitment to service and mutual aid. Their pacifism has not traditionally led them to political action and attempts actively to oppose the state's wars. It has been more a matter of saying no to their own involvement in the wars. But it has also been more than simply saying no. It has meant saying yes to works of service and relief. Mennonites did not argue against World War II on political grounds, even as they refused to fight. But as soon as they could, following the war, many went to Europe to aid in rebuilding; providing food and shelter to the war's victims.

Contemporary issues

Recent years have seen new developments among Mennonites with regard to their peace concern. Especially since the unpopular Vietnam War, but even going back as far as World War II, American Mennonites have not been persecuted so much as respected for their pacifism.

In World War I, there were scarcely any conscientious objectors outside the peace churches (and most of the peace church COs were Mennonites). Those who were COs faced great hostility in most parts of the country. One of the most famous cases was two young Hutterite COs from South Dakota, Michael and Joseph Hofer, who died due to how they were treated by the military. With World War II, about one-third of

all COs were non-peace church people and the overall response in society toward COs was one of semi-tolerance and guarded respect—though there were certainly some exceptions and instances of hostility. By the time of the war in Vietnam, the majority of COs was not from peace churches. Many things contributed to this change, but it certainly signals a much greater openness to pacifism among American people.

At the same time, strictness within the Mennonite churches regarding involvement in the military has greatly loosened. It is difficult to imagine a Mennonite young man being excommunicated today simply for joining the military.

Another significant development has been that Mennonite pacifism has become more overtly political, at least in some circles. More and more Mennonites are seeing themselves as having more responsibility for the social order outside the church. They vote, they write letters to legislators, they have an office in Washington, DC, a few even run for office. And some commit acts of civil disobedience such as tax refusal and trespassing on nuclear weapons sites in attempts to influence the government to change its policies.

Modern Mennonites are divided on the implications of such activism. Some believe that Mennonites still should not be political, or at least limit their political participation to legal expressions such as voting and letter writing. Others say that times are different now. What was not even thinkable for followers of Jesus in the past is terms of influencing the government while remaining faithful to Jesus' way is now a possibility, even a responsibility. If we can make a difference, we should—even if it means breaking the law with acts of civil disobedience.

Another issue is the tension some perceive between emphasizing pacifism on the one hand and personal salvation on the other. The evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* a number of years ago focused on Mennonites. In an editorial, one of the magazine's editors wrote of an Anabaptist friend of his, who when asked several years ago if he were forced to choose between standing for pacifism or the need for a personal salvation experience, answered "pacifism." The editor saw it as a sign of progress that now his friend would likely answer "personal salvation."

However, some Mennonites would still see this question to imply that pacifism and salvation can be separated—and have trouble with a notion of personal salvation that implies that pacifism is at most a tacked-on option. "Salvation" without pacifism may cut the heart out of the notion of God's love as the determining factor for Christian ethics. God bringing about salvation through Jesus is itself an act of loving enemies (Romans 5:6-11), a model for how the human experience of salvation affects how we live and think: God's love for me, a sinner, models love for enemies.

EMBODYING PEACE

As it has been passed on over generations, Mennonite pacifism has also had a “shadow side.” One tendency Mennonites have, like most other Christians, is striving to find things which make them feel good about themselves—including “good works,” activism, service. All these good deeds are fine in themselves, but they become more negative when they are used to buttress self-righteousness and a sense that *we* are better than other people. Mennonite pacifism can lend itself to this, where we pacifists are “better” than those who haven’t “seen the light.”

Another kind of subtle down side is a tendency toward being passive-aggressive. We have an ideal of being non-conflictual, everyone getting along. So we *avoid* conflict. We may then have to find devious ways to express our resistance to someone else. We repress our internal hostility and anger. When these kinds of attitudes, this kind of repression, this kind of avoidance, are passed on from generation to generation, you will find some problems—church splits over unresolved conflicts, excessive gossip, back-stabbing, bitterness, and so on.

One of the great contributions of the Mennonite tradition to the history of Christianity has been its reminder that Jesus was a peacemaker and that he calls upon his people to be the same. This message has been heard in many places today far beyond the Mennonite churches, especially as Christians worldwide have raised their voices in opposition to the nuclear arms race. Mennonites should be thankful for that, but they should continue to remind their fellow Christians that stopping nuclear weapons is not the same thing as gaining world peace. Nuclear weapons are simply a symptom of the larger problem—that is, the problem of war itself.

5. Anabaptism for the 21st century

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In contemporary American culture, religious labels have become increasingly imprecise. Our dominant religion remains Christianity, but what does “Christian” mean? Until recently, many observers of America have spoken of moving into a *post*-Christian era. However, clearly we have not yet arrived at such a state. Currently, we are in the midst of a revival (of sorts) of the public expression of overt Christian religiosity. High-profile politicians use explicitly Christian language as much as, if not more than, ever.¹ Evangelical and fundamentalist Christians exercise extraordinary influence over public policy makers.²

For those Christians who find their faith calling them to Jesus’ way of peace,³ of resistance to injustice, of exercising strong support for

¹ For example, see the evangelical faith of various U.S. governmental leaders described in laudatory articles in the prominent evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*, including: Sheryl Henderson Blunt, “The Unflappable Condi Rice,” 47.9 (September 2003); Tony Carnes, “The Bush Doctrine,” 47.5 (May 2003); and Tony Carnes, “Bush’s Defining Moment,” 45.11 (November 12, 2001).

² See Michael Crowley, “James Dobson: The Religious Right’s New Kingmaker,” *Slate* (November 12, 2004) and Brian MacQuarrie, “Dobson’s spiritual empire wields political clout,” *Boston Globe* (October 9, 2005).

³ This essay depends heavily upon John Howard Yoder’s articulation of a modern Anabaptist understanding of the message of Jesus and its normative relevance for Christian social ethics. When in the paragraphs that follow, I used terms such as “Jesus-oriented” what I have in mind is “Jesus-oriented” along the lines Yoder defines in *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994). Yoder asserted at the beginning of his classic text that he intended to pursue “the hypothesis that the ministry and the claims of Jesus are best understood as presenting to hearers and readers not the avoidance of political options, but one particular social-political-ethical option” (11). In a nutshell, Yoder characterized the option Jesus presented as “an ethic marked by the cross, a cross identified as the punishment of a man who threatens society by creating a new kind of community leading a radically new kind of life” (53).

addressing the needs of vulnerable people, of a desire for more mercy and less retribution, the current scene is profoundly challenging. Such Christians see the very basis for their core convictions—the Bible (which they read as centered on Jesus’ message)—being associated in the public eye with policies and rhetoric and values that they abhor.

What is presented as the “biblical” or “Christian” view, by common agreement among people who both agree and disagree with it, seems to include support for the wars and militarism of the United States⁴ and for capital punishment and a harshly retributive criminal justice system.⁵

So, what do Jesus-oriented Christians in America do? If they cede Christianity to those who are pro-military and pro-death penalty, they cut themselves off from the taproot of their own meaning system and spiritual empowerment. If they explicitly affirm their Christian convictions, they run the risk of being lumped in the public eye with these prominent expressions of “Christianity” that so contradict their reading of the gospel message.

The relevance of Anabaptism

Our time of anxiety, uncertainty, and contention concerning the viability of Jesus-oriented Christian faith may provide those who follow the peace witness of the Radical Reformation tradition an important opportunity. Now may be an opportune time to present Anabaptism as an important resource for articulating an alternative style of Christianity in a culture that too-often associates Christian faith with domination.⁶

⁴ For a pro-militarist America critique of pacifist Christians see Keith J. Pavlischek, “Can the Vital Center Hold? A Critique of the Evangelical Pacifist Left,” *The Brandywine Review of Faith & International Affairs* 31 (Spring 2005), 31-37; and James W. Skillen and Keith J. Pavlischek, “Political Responsibility and the Use of Force: A Critique of Richard Hays,” *Philosophia Christi* 3 (2001), 421-445.

⁵ See Bruce W. Ballard, “The Death Penalty: God’s Timeless Standard for the Nations?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43.3 (September 2000), 471-487.

⁶ See Arthur G. Gish, *The New Left and Christian Radicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970) for a perceptive attempt to link the Anabaptist tradition with the countercultural politics of the 1960s. John Howard Yoder cited Gish approvingly in *The Politics of Jesus* (page one, footnote one), and I see my argument being somewhat parallel to Gish’s perspective. However, as Yoder does, I too mostly seek to draw on the message of *Jesus* as the basis of my proposal—and Anabaptism as an important application of Jesus’ message. That is, my concerns are not intended so much to be reduced to “leftist” partisan politics as to be an attempt to apply the *perennially* normative “politics of Jesus” to early 21st-century North America.

I want to reflect, as a theological ethicist and pastor, on how pacifist, Jesus-oriented Christians might best draw on the Anabaptist story for inspiration and guidance for their witness in our current highly militarized environment in 21st century America—and especially in face of the association in the public eye of this militarism with Christianity.

What do I mean by “Anabaptist”? I will not equate the term “Anabaptist” with “Mennonite,” though they are closely related. The Mennonite tradition evolved directly from the first Anabaptists of the 16th century and remains the most visible and widespread embodiment of the Radical Reformation. However, “Mennonite” seems too narrow a term for a perspective that will help a wide range of Jesus-oriented Christians to affirm and witness to their faith in *contrast* to imperial Christianity.

“Mennonite” refers to a specific denomination with limited relevance for those not part of that denomination. I seek a label with broader appeal, that in some sense might be relevant to people with similar convictions from other traditions—be they near “relations” to Mennonites such as Church of the Brethren, more distant “cousins” such as Baptists or Disciples of Christ, or even more distant “cousins” such as Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics.

The term “Anabaptist” may be closely linked with a concrete embodiment (which is important for my purposes, showing how a set of convictions work on the ground) in the Mennonite tradition, yet also may speak more of vision and ideals and be freer from being reduced to denominational specificity than “Mennonite.” “Anabaptist” may be seen as more amenable to being linked directly to the way of Jesus, having a sense of transcendent ideals *combined* with concrete embodiment.

So what is “Anabaptism” and how might it contribute to a renewal of peace-oriented Christianity in the 21st century? To answer this question, we will be helped by looking at the development of the modern use of the term. Though the term “Anabaptist” (literally meaning “re-baptizer”) dates back to the 16th century, only in the past sixty years has it gained wide currency as a *positive*, self-affirming label. Mennonite historian Harold Bender, in his famous 1943 presidential address to the American Society of Church History, entitled “The Anabaptist Vision,”⁷ played a major role in transforming the term. Bender provides what is still a useful orientation for defining the term “Anabaptism.”

Certainly, the study of “Anabaptists” occurred long before Bender. His contribution was most of all *rhetorical*, providing a language to help

⁷ This essay was published in *Church History* 13 (March 1944), 3-24; *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18 (April 1944), 67-88, and Guy F. Hershberger, ed., *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1957), 29-54. In what follows, I will cite the printing in the Hershberger book.

present-day descendants of the “Anabaptists” affirm that term and thereby affirm their heritage (and its core theme of discipleship).⁸

After Bender’s essay, self-identified Anabaptists more comfortably used the term as an affirming identifier—and as a perspective standing in contrast not only with mainstream Catholicism and Protestantism but also with Mennonitism insofar as this latter was seen to be straying from its originating ideals. Of course, negative associations have continued in some circles,⁹ but after Bender such associations have diminished greatly.

Bender crystallized his thoughts on the significance of Anabaptism in this essay.¹⁰ As Bender’s biographer Al Keim writes: “It was Bender’s calling to articulate a new interpretation of history which influenced how historians understood the Anabaptists. Only after the fact did he come to understand that he had also provided his fellow Mennonites with a new self-definition of who they were and whence they had come. He gave Mennonites a ‘usable past’.”¹¹

A key factor that heightened the influence of Bender’s synthesis was that it was widely distributed among thousands of young Mennonite men from the various Mennonite traditions who served as conscientious objectors in Civilian Public Service during World War II. Many of these young men became influential leaders in various Mennonite settings.

Bender boiled the Anabaptist vision down to three basic convictions. “First and fundamental in the Anabaptist vision was the conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship.”¹² Anabaptists saw Christian faith as requiring outward expression, the response to God’s grace with the “application of that grace to all human conduct and the consequent Christianization of all human relationships.”¹³ While this first point certainly reflected traditional Mennonite self-understandings, Bender’s use of the rubric “discipleship” actually was new—he himself had previously used the term “holiness of life.”¹⁴ The language of “discipleship” now added rhetorical force to the vision.

⁸ On Bender’s rhetoric, see Gerald Biesecker-Mast, *Separation and the Sword in Anabaptist Persuasion: Radical Confessional Rhetoric from Schleithelm to Dordrecht* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2006), 44-59.

⁹ For example, Willem Bakke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), largely defends the continuing validity of John Calvin’s hostility toward the 16th-century Anabaptists.

¹⁰ For the story of Bender’s remarkable speech, see Albert N. Keim, *Harold Bender, 1897-1962* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 306-331.

¹¹ Keim, *Bender*, 327.

¹² Bender, “Anabaptist,” 42.

¹³ Bender, “Anabaptist,” 43.

¹⁴ Keim, *Bender*, 326.

“A second major element in the Anabaptist vision [was] voluntary church membership based upon true conversion and involving a commitment to holy living and discipleship.”¹⁵ Bender saw the rejection of infant baptism that gave the movement its name as stemming from this view of the church. In the Anabaptist view, the church is to be made up of people seeking to follow Jesus in *all* areas of life. The Anabaptists’ vision for transformed life at its heart was a vision for a new kind of church, in which all members lived lives of deeply committed discipleship.

“The third great element in the Anabaptist vision was the ethic of love and nonresistance as applied to all human relationships.”¹⁶ Bender supports this point with quotes from Anabaptist leaders representing Mennonite and Hutterite streams, and from all three geographical centers of early Anabaptism—Switzerland, Holland, and South Germany/Austria. He makes what came in time to be a controversial assertion, that “Biblical pacifism...was thoroughly believed and resolutely practiced *by all* the original Anabaptist Brethren and their descendants throughout Europe from the beginning until the last century.”¹⁷

So, “Anabaptism,” as defined by Bender, included at its core seeing discipleship as central to Christian faith, basing church membership on true conversion and a commitment to follow Jesus in life, and seeking to shape the life of discipleship around pacifism. This basic definition remains useful, even if we must take care in how we use it.

In time, Bender’s portrayal of Anabaptism came to be challenged. Most famously, a 1975 article, published in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* and written by three non-Mennonite historians, James Stayer, Werner Packull, and Klaus Deppermann, “From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins,” sharply critiqued Bender’s delineation of one normative Anabaptism dating from the first baptisms among the Swiss Brethren in Zurich in 1525 that cohered closely with his three core points. While granting that the Swiss Brethren were the first Anabaptists, and that later leaders of what they argue were separate Anabaptist movements certainly knew of the Swiss Brethren, the three authors argue that the movement was way more diverse than Bender allowed for. “A number of Anabaptist movements arose that were independent of the Swiss Brethren.... They had basically different memberships and theologies.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Bender, “Anabaptist,” 47.

¹⁶ Bender, “Anabaptist,” 51.

¹⁷ Bender, “Anabaptist,” 52 [emphasis added].

¹⁸ James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull, and Klaus Deppermann, “From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49.2 (April 1975), 85.

As it turned out, the polygenesis thesis gained almost the immediate assent of many Mennonite historians.¹⁹ Likely, the article did not so much effect a paradigm shift as reflect what had already happened in Anabaptist historiography—though it appears to have been necessary in the Mennonite context for non-Mennonites to be the first explicitly to raise the critique. James Stayer himself wrote later of his surprise at this assent: “I expected an impassioned defense by Mennonites of the idealized Anabaptist vision of Harold S. Bender.... The last thing I could have imagined was that the Mennonites would have abandoned Bender’s conception of evangelical Anabaptism without a determined critical defense. The unexpected was precisely what happened.”²⁰

Surely a major factor in the acceptance of the polygenesis critique by professionally trained Mennonite historians was their conviction that Bender’s argument was inadequate historically; it did not fit with the evidence. In his desire to provide warrant for his vision of core Anabaptist convictions, Bender may have too quickly imposed his own assumptions on the 16th century and defined too strictly who truly was Anabaptist and who was not.²¹ Bender’s conclusions about “authentic Anabaptists” would seem to follow more from to his 20th-century definition of what is “authentic” than an inductive examination of the 16th-century evidence. The 16th-century Anabaptist experience was much more complicated and dynamic than reflected in Bender’s simplistic distinction between authentic and aberrant Anabaptists.

This problem with Bender’s project serves as a warning for any who would generalize about *the* Anabaptists—and even more for any who

¹⁹ See J. Denny Weaver, *Becoming Anabaptist: The Origin and Significance of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 1st ed. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987), a widely used popular-level synthesis that takes the polygenesis perspective as settled.

²⁰ James M. Stayer, “The Easy Demise of a Normative Vision of Anabaptism,” in Calvin Wall Redekop, ed., *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 109. Along with the “Monogenesis to Polygenesis” essay, Stayer also has in mind his earlier book, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1972).

²¹ For example, Bender defined early Anabaptist leader Balthasar Hubmaier as outside the pale in this way: “Not all Anabaptists were completely nonresistant. Balthasar Hubmaier for instance for a brief period (1526-28) led a group of Anabaptists at Nikolsburg in Moravia who agreed to carry the sword against the Turk and pay special war taxes for this purpose. This group, which became extinct in a short time, was known as the ‘Schwertler’ in distinction from other Moravian Anabaptists called the ‘Stäbler,’ who later became the Hutterites and have continued to the present. It is obvious that Hubmaier and the ‘Schwertler’ represent a transient aberration from original and authentic Anabaptism” (Bender, “Anabaptist,” 51).

would draw lines separating “authentic” from “inauthentic” Anabaptism. However, present-day theological and pastoral needs in face of popular pro-military Christianity require an attempt by pacifist, Jesus-oriented Christians to connect with the Anabaptists. As I will discuss below, a “hermeneutical” approach that reads the Anabaptists in terms of their relevance for our context need not make the mistake of insisting on one “true,” historically-precise representation of “authentic” Anabaptism.

It may be that the demise of Bender’s “monogenesis” assumption has contributed to a greater reluctance to speak in terms of the relevance of 16th-century Anabaptism for today’s Christians. Discussions of Anabaptism in Mennonite academic circles tend often to be oriented more toward fairly technical historical details with relatively little attention to an Anabaptist vision for today.²²

The most thorough recent history of Anabaptism produced in a Mennonite context, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction*, by C. Arnold Snyder, professor of history at a Mennonite school, Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario, separates its historical discussion from reflection on present-day concerns.²³ Such studies provide essential historical background for present-day attempts to

²² Two collections of mostly Mennonite-authored studies, Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism Revisited* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992) and H. Wayne Pipkin, ed., *Essays in Anabaptist Theology* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), both mostly focus on “objective” description of the past, not interaction with the present (though an important exception is Arnold Snyder’s essay in the Pipkin volume). See also German Mennonite historian Hans-Jürgen Goertz’s historical survey, *The Anabaptists*, 2nd edition, translated by Trevor Johnson (New York: Routledge, 1996).

On the other hand, see John Driver, *Radical Faith: An Alternative History of the Christian Church* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 1999), a survey of various “radical” movements throughout the past 2,000 years that makes an overt link between these movements and present-day discipleship. J. Denny Weaver, in the second edition of *Becoming Anabaptist* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005), includes a 62-page essay, “The Meaning of Anabaptism,” that perceptively reflects on the present-day relevance of the 16th-century events. C. Arnold Snyder’s booklet, *From Anabaptist Seed* (Kitchener, ONT: Pandora Press, 1999) was written for Mennonite World Conference as a resource for the present-day worldwide Mennonite fellowship. See also, Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic Nor Protestant*, 3rd edition (Kitchener, ONT: Pandora Press, 2001).

²³ Kitchener, ONT: Pandora Press, 1995. See also C. Arnold Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004). This study of 16th-century Anabaptist spirituality ends with a short chapter, “Anabaptism Today,” that is the only place in the book where direct application of Anabaptist thought to the present is made.

appropriate Anabaptist insights for present witness. *Starting* with our present-day concerns, however, might lead us to ask somewhat different questions of the Anabaptists than a strictly historical approach does.²⁴

Mennonite historians of Anabaptism understandably see their first concern to be an as accurate as possible accounting of the events of the 16th century.²⁵ However, history in this mode focuses more on questions of factuality than questions of meaning. And, as a consequence, the results are more oriented toward “what happened then” and are not in themselves of direct interest to present-day Anabaptists seeking resources for today’s faithfulness. It will take additional theological-ethical work to synthesize the historical date with present-day social-ethical concerns. Here is where hermeneutical reflections may be useful.

Participating in the Anabaptist tradition

The spirit of the 16th-century Anabaptist movement, following on the spirit of the 1st-century Jesus movement, inspires those who would understand themselves as Anabaptists today. James McClendon provides a helpful perspective on what links these three moments (and many others). We have to do with *one* on-going story. When we participate now in the story of Jesus, in some sense we are present with him, “this is that,”

²⁴ Snyder wrote response to a critique of his book for not serving a present-day peace agenda adequately that such an agenda is not part of his historical work in writing this book, “what does my personal commitment to peace have to do with *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction?* In fact, not very much at all.” C. Arnold Snyder, “*Anabaptist History and Theology: History or Heresy?* A reply to J. Denny Weaver,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 16.1 (Winter 1998), 53.

²⁵ Certainly the debate within the field of Anabaptist studies about how best to understand the events of the 16th century remains active. See John D. Roth, “Recent Currents in the Historiography of the Radical Reformation,” *Church History* 71.3 (September 2002), 523-535, for a most helpful survey of this debate. Roth, however, focuses strictly on discussion of the 16th century, not on any attempts to apply that research to the present.

Thomas Heilke, a political scientist who is an Episcopalian with deep interests in the present-day relevance of the Anabaptists, in “Theological and Secular Meta-Narratives of Politics: Anabaptist Origins Revisited (Again),” *Modern Theology* 13.2 (April 1997), 227-252, offers a perceptive critique of “value-free” interpretations of Anabaptism, focusing his concern on the work of James Stayer and other “profane” or “social-scientific” scholars. Heilke argues that Stayer and the others bring their own ideological blinders to the task of interpreting Anabaptism and hence have no basis for dismissing as too ideological “evangelical” interpretations of Anabaptism that seek to recover some of the Anabaptists’ prophetic critique for present-day believers.

it is the same story (e.g., Jesus challenging the temple-merchants, the 16th-century Anabaptists refusing to take up arms against the Turk, our own resistance to violence in 21st-century America).²⁶ So we cannot, *should not want to*, simply treat earlier parts of the story as mere artifacts of the past.

Hence, present-day Anabaptists are in sync with the spirit of 16th century Anabaptists when they see themselves as *participants* in the same story, recognizing that they do not stand outside of it as “neutral.” The kinds of questions participants will ask of the story by definition will be at least somewhat different from non-participants’ questions. And the questions asked will inevitably shape how the story is retold.

Still, our appropriation of the Anabaptist story is not served by airbrushing objectionable elements out of it. Hubmaier, for example, played a major role in Anabaptism’s early development. He was the only person in the first generation to earn a doctorate in theology, and his writings especially on baptism profoundly influenced other Anabaptists. Bender’s dismissal apparently stemmed from Hubmaier’s rejection of pacifism: “It is obvious that Hubmaier...represent[s] a transient aberration from original, and authentic Anabaptism”²⁷. But such an obvious distortion of the actual historical situation, does not serve an authentic joining with the Anabaptist story.

Present-day Anabaptists seeking to witness to peace in our current context will want to avoid a narrow, ideological reading that mainly serves to reinforce their biases. They will also be wary of a neutral, objectivist reading that by blinding us to our own biases actually also serves to reinforce them. A third path may be found through the affirmation of a hermeneutical-circle type of approach. I will describe this third path with reference to the thought of German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer,²⁸ though various other ways of describing the participatory interpretive process would also be appropriate.

We may think of the 16th-century Anabaptist materials as one horizon, or one particular perspective with its own concerns and biases. A second horizon is ours in the present, our perspective with our own concerns and biases. We will only access the voice of the distant horizon

²⁶ James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, volume one (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 33. “The...‘is’ in ‘this is that’ is...neither developmental nor successionist, but mystical and immediate.”

²⁷ Bender, “Anabaptist,” 51.

²⁸ In particular, I draw on, *Truth and Method*, second revised edition (New York: Crossroad, 1990). For an interesting contemporary Mennonite engagement with Gadamer’s philosophy, see Michael A. King, *Fractured Dance: Gadamer and a Mennonite Conflict Over Homosexuality* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2001).

by bringing it into conversation with our own horizon. We will only gain understanding from the 16th-century horizon by being conscious of our own biases. We recognize that our questions—which are required in order to hear the other story at all—cannot help but reflect our biases, our agenda that arises out of our own particular life-setting.²⁹

Gadamer insists, though, that to recognize and affirm our biases need not lead us to see only that which reinforces those biases. The key is truly to be attentive to what the other is actually saying. When we genuinely listen, we will find ourselves revising our assumptions in light of what we hear. True understanding happens when we walk a fine line, use our particularity to provide access to the particularity of the other and then transcend our particularity to hear the other as other.³⁰

Historical research, in uncovering and describing the materials that give us access to the Anabaptists, provides a necessary service for our appropriation of the 16th-century Anabaptist story. However, historians too have biases (their own questions that guide their research) shaping which materials they describe and how they describe them. Sometimes historians' questions may be different than ours in pacifist, Jesus-oriented Anabaptist communities. Ultimately, present-day Anabaptists are not accountable to definitions of meaning and relevance from within the discipline of academic history nearly so much as to the needs and interests of present-day Anabaptist communities. At the same time, historical research does serve to help us avoid mistaking *our* biases for 16th-century Anabaptists' (even when these biases overlap a great deal).

In light of the foregoing, let us return to Bender's "Anabaptist Vision." Recognizing the validity of the polygenesis-oriented critique of Bender's too narrow definition of "authentic Anabaptism," I suggest nonetheless that we may helpfully separate this supposedly historical definition of Bender's from his constructive proposal for how to summarize the core values of the Anabaptists in a way usable for present-day, pacifist, Jesus-oriented American Anabaptists as we seek to live faithfully in the 21st-century context of militaristic Christianity.

We may forego Bender's apparent desire to set up boundary lines for determining valid expressions of Anabaptism (past *and* present) while still valuing his summary of the vision. If we think of such a summary more as

²⁹ To be clear about my own biases, *I* write as a committed pacifist who seeks to follow Jesus' model of resistance to the powers of death and violence. I read the Anabaptists to gain guidance and inspiration for this approach to life.

³⁰ For more on Gadamer, see Ted Grimsrud, "Biblical Interpretation: Anabaptist Theology and Recent Hermeneutics," in *Embodying the Way of Jesus: Anabaptist Convictions for the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 57-71.

a basis for conversation, inspiration, and guidance, an aid for fostering clarity of self-identification, and a provisional definition for interested seekers, we may see value in trying to emulate his efforts.³¹

Bender's own summary retains much that is commendable, and suggestions I make below overlap with his in significant ways (even though I did not consciously have his three points in mind when I formulated my points). However, what he most of all offers is simply a model for an *on-going* task—the constructing of a new “vision” for a living faith tradition in light of an ever-dynamic world.

We learn from previous articulations, but are responsible for our own in light of *our* contexts. Also, given the complexity of the 16th-century Anabaptists, we will always have new and at least slightly different questions to ask of them. We acknowledge that the 16th century (and the years in between with their own embodiments of the tradition) will in a genuine sense always be changing—and this “change” is to be desired. I propose, then, that we are best suited to think of “Anabaptism” as a *hermeneutic*.³² By “hermeneutic” here I mean an interpretive framework, a set of values and convictions that guide how we see our world.

The content of this framework, the source of these convictions, emerges initially and formatively from the Jesus story. The 16th-century Anabaptists and their successors sought to embody Jesus' way and understood themselves to be subject to the Jesus story. Consequently, those who draw on the 16th-century Anabaptists appropriately value that from the 16th century most closely linked with the Jesus story.³³

³¹ See an example of such a useful presentation of the 16th-century Anabaptists in John Howard Yoder's chapter, “A Summary of the Anabaptist Vision,” in C. J. Dyck, ed., *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, second edition (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 136-45.

³² In this statement I follow John Howard Yoder in his essay, “Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality.” He wrote, “what is meant here by the label ‘Anabaptist’ is not a century but a hermeneutic. It is represented for certain types of discussion by the 16th-century movement, but it can be valid apart from that particular period” (in A.J. Klassen, ed., *Consultation on Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology* [Fresno, CA: Council on Mennonite Seminaries, 1970], 5).

³³ For instance, on the issue of pacifism, present-day Anabaptists are not bound by “loyalty” to historical objectivity to argue that Anabaptism was not pacifist due to the existence of scattered non-pacifist 16th-century Anabaptists. To a large (and, given the context, quite impressive) extent, the Anabaptist movement as a whole in its early years did embody Jesus' way of peace. The affirmation of pacifism as central to Anabaptism, then, is a synthesis of evaluating the Anabaptists in light of the Jesus story, recognizing the impressive (though not universal) embodiment of pacifism in those early years, and a conviction that both in the years since 1540 and in our present, pacifism stands

The category “Anabaptist” has *always* been a construct, a heuristic device. From 1525 on, no concrete entity existed with the self-identity of “Anabaptist” and clear markers of who belonged or not to this entity. In fact, in many ways up until Bender’s rehabilitation work, “Anabaptism” was a *negative* term used of the Catholics’ and mainstream Protestants’ most hated enemies—and not a term Mennonites, Amish, or their close spiritual relatives commonly used of themselves.

Since 1943, as reflected in Bender’s own essay and in the *different* definitions of “Anabaptist” by historians and theologians, the term has been fluid. So, there is no historically-objective entity “Anabaptist” that has ever existed as such. All there ever has been are various attempts to apply a modern definition to a variety of people with no formal overarching unity. Hence, I do not claim to have *the* Anabaptist Vision—just one perspective for the conversation, shaped by peace concerns.³⁴

Because of the fluid nature of the category “Anabaptist,” we are free to recognize that it *is* an appropriate term for phenomena that extend beyond the first half of the 16th century. It is an ideal type, a creation of the interpreter meant to foster understanding. We seek to correlate our “type” as closely as possible to the actual events of history, but recognize that we must always hold it lightly, guarding constantly against the tendency to reify the type and mistake it for actual reality. The ideal type means to serve understanding, to aid in interpretation, not to define actual reality. Thinking of Anabaptism as a hermeneutic, shaped by the 16th-century story but dynamically and continually applicable to present reality, for the purpose of perceiving and practicing how to live in the context of the *on-going* story of Jesus’ way of peace fits with how the term has actually always functioned.

Anabaptism for 21st-century Americans

We do well to follow Bender’s lead in formulating a perspective we may appropriately refer to as a contemporary Anabaptist Vision (or,

as an extraordinarily high priority. See John Howard Yoder, “Anabaptists in the Continental Reformation,” in *Christian Attitudes To War, Peace, and Revolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 161-95. The main difference between what I do here and what I criticize Bender for doing with regard to Hubmaier is that I do not try to define a *normative* Anabaptism so much as suggest what is most *usable* for us from the Anabaptist tradition.

³⁴ For more on these concerns, see Ted Grimsrud, “Anabaptist Faith and American Democracy,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 78.3 (July 2004), 341-62, and “Negotiating Democracy: Mennonite Reflections,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 23.2 (Spring 2005), 94-103.

better, Visions, emerging from the work of many of us engaging in the process of reflection and application). We best see such visions as aids for on-going conversation and discernment, a process that never ends – not for issuing statements that serve as instruments meant to establish boundaries, enforce conformity, and exclude dissent. The hope in articulating contemporary Anabaptist Visions is *not* so much to “get it right” in a scientifically historical sense once and for all. Nor is it to construct boundary lines, separating “true” Anabaptists from “inauthentic” Anabaptists. Rather, we hope to speak meaningfully to *our* present in order to encourage, instruct, inspire, and empower. I intend what I outline below to reflect just *one* perspective on how to participate in the Anabaptist story. Hopefully, it may stimulate thoughts and conversations drawing on other perspectives.

As we work at articulating an Anabaptist Vision applicable for early 21st-century Americans, we start with reflections on *our* situation. What kinds of guidance do we need? What issues shape the questions we ask of the Anabaptist tradition? To ask what is relevant for us from the Anabaptist tradition is to ask: what resources might we find in the tradition to help us face creatively and faithfully the challenges, even crises, of our day? And we certainly have plenty of crises demanding our attention. The following examples are not suggested with the assumption that Anabaptism promises to solve them. Nor should we think that Anabaptism should be seen primarily as a tool for determine public policy in secular nations such as the United States and Canada. It is in the spirit of the biblical prophets that we may see Anabaptist convictions as providing bases for critiquing social currents that contradict God’s intentions for shalom-shaped human living.

The world’s ecological balance has been profoundly upset, as seen with climate change, air and water pollution, toxic wastes, extinction of ever-increasing numbers of species, depletion of wildlife populations. Millions upon millions of people are living in abject poverty in a world increasingly becoming a “planet of slums” as neo-liberal economics continues to drive formerly subsistence farm families off the land.³⁵

The United States expands its militarism as the world’s only superpower, reaching the point of spending roughly as much on the military as the whole rest of the world combined—a shocking outcome following “victory” in the Cold War and the elimination of any major military rivals. Such militarism requires expression, and the United States’ in the winter of 2005-6 is centered on the invasion and occupation

³⁵ See Mike Davis, “Planet of Slums,” *New Left Review* #26 (March/April 2004), 5-34.

of Iraq—an excursion that surely has reached the “quagmire” state.³⁶

Within the United States, we have in recent years seen the myth of secularism shattered with the stunning emergence of right-wing Christianity as a major political and cultural force. Many Anabaptist Christians (and Christians of various other stripes) worry that right-wing Christianity is dealing the Christian faith a serious body blow in its linking of Christianity so closely with what seem to be anti-democratic public policies and governmental policies. As traced in Thomas Frank’s book, *What’s the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*,³⁷ politicians beholden to the powers of wealth have exploited the vulnerability of right-wing Christians to be manipulated based on their religiously based views. Such politicians use issues such as abortion and homosexuality to gain support from conservative, working-class Christians, and then proceed to enact policies that undermine the livelihoods and communities of these same Christians.

What kinds of questions for the Anabaptist tradition emerge from our present context? How may these crises I have mentioned, and others unmentioned, shape our appropriation of the resources of our faith story? Modern-day American Anabaptists should see themselves as, to some degree at least, sharing the 16th-century Anabaptists’ sense both (1) of separating themselves from many of the basic values of the wider society, especially those that under gird violence and domination and are underwritten by Christian rhetoric, and (2) of witnessing *against* that violence and domination, making known as widely as possible the peaceable message of Jesus.³⁸

In sharing such a sense of separation and call to witness, modern-day Anabaptists might focus first of all on the elements of the early Anabaptist movement that led to their getting in trouble with the established churches and governments of Western Europe. Such a

³⁶ See several examples from across the political spectrum: from a former member of the United States foreign policy establishment, Chalmers Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004); from a long-time critique of U.S. foreign policy, Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003); and from a self-described conservative Republican, Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³⁷ New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004.

³⁸ See Ray C. Gingerich, “The Mission Impulse of Early Swiss and South German-Austrian Anabaptism.” Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1980, for a presentation of this passion for such witness on the part of the first Anabaptists.

starting point is not an anachronistic imposing of a 21st-century agenda onto a 16th-century context. In fact, perhaps the main commonality of the various groups of Anabaptists, with all their differences, after the practice of adult baptism, was that they almost all got into trouble, were persecuted, and faced the genuine possibility of martyrdom.

This tendency to get into trouble for their faith was one of the main “this-is-that” elements of their own self-perception. By getting into trouble they linked back with Jesus. Scholars today recognize that one of our keys to understanding Jesus and his ministry is to ask what it was that he did to get into so much trouble.³⁹ Consequently, in considering the Anabaptists as continuing in the story of Jesus, we will understand that this is a logical question to ask of them as well. If we consider what kinds of things got the Anabaptists in trouble we might actually find both important elements of commonality among the groups of the 16th century *and* direction concerning their relevance for us today.

Many present-day American Mennonites and other Anabaptists have gained a level of comfort and prosperity heretofore uncommon in the Anabaptist tradition. It is possible that our present social location may contribute to a reluctance to risk “getting into trouble”? Present-day Anabaptists face a challenge of discernment. Are we reluctant to risk prophetic critique and engagement because of legitimate concern about the need to provide a biblically faithful alternative to polarizing “partisan politics”? Or is our reluctance more due to a desire to avoid the precise kinds of risks biblical prophets and 16th-century Anabaptists took in confronting the powers that be in their day?⁴⁰

Four central characteristics of the 16th-century Anabaptists may be seen as directly linked to their being attacked by the powers-that-be and as potentially constituting the core of an Anabaptist Vision for 21st-century America. Interestingly, these four characteristics overlap a great deal with Bender’s three core characteristics from 1943.⁴¹

³⁹ See N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) and William Herzog, *Jesus, Justice, and the Reign of God: A Ministry of Liberation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

⁴⁰ See John D. Roth, “Called to One Peace: Christian Faith and Political Witness in a Divided Culture,” *Mennonite Life* 60.2 (June 2005), along with various responses, for stimulating reflections on these issues.

⁴¹ For a similar summary, see Walter Klaassen, “Who can be called Anabaptist?” *Mennonite Weekly Review* (October 17, 2005), 6. Klaassen writes: The 16th-century Anabaptists “challenged virtually everything their Christian culture took for granted. They rejected all religious coercion and insisted that government had no role in the internal life of the church. They rejected the emerging capitalist economic system primarily because it discriminated against

(1) The Anabaptists established themselves as a church *free* from state control and from the dominance of the state churches. In the debates that led to the first Anabaptist baptisms in January, 1525, the issue was framed as one of whether they would accept the state's demand that they limit their push for reform by continuing to baptize infants. The Anabaptists saw infant baptism linked with the lifelong membership of all citizens in the state church, signaling to them the subordination of the faith community to the political structures. Such subordination would, in their view, compete with their highest priority on following Jesus' way.

By breaking with the state-church and refusing to submit to the state's domination expressed through infant baptism, Anabaptists were not simply guilty of heresy; they committed sedition, *rebellion*, a capital offense. They were executed by both Catholics and Protestants; to all of Western Europe they were rebels.

(2) A second and closely related reason the Anabaptists got into trouble was their refusal to participate in or even support the state's wars—especially with the Muslim Turks invading from the south. For the first 15 years or so following 1525, the Anabaptists were not universally pacifist.⁴² However, though the debates continue in our day among historians, the evidence does point to strong support for pacifism among most Anabaptists following the Schleithem Confession's explicit rejection of the sword in 1527 and the martyrdom of the one overtly non-pacifist Anabaptist leader, Balthasar Hubmaier, in 1528.⁴³

The other main context for Anabaptists using violence was the infamous incident in the city of Münster in 1534-35. The devolution of the Anabaptist rule of that city following their nonviolent gaining of power, when in the face of a brutal siege from Catholic forces the desperate and increasingly deranged people in the city resorted to violent self-defense, stood as an unique event in the entire Anabaptist movement. The events at Münster actually served to push the movement as a whole even more in the direction of pacifism. On the heels of Münster, a former Catholic priest named Menno Simons, ascended to leadership among the Dutch Anabaptists and overtly guided them in pacifist directions.

A common complaint against the Anabaptists was that they refused to take up arms to defend their nations—especially to defend Christian

the poor and defenseless. They refused to accept any justification for the use of force and killing in defense of the gospel. They paid an extremely high price for the baptism of believing adults, because it was against the law and often carried the death penalty. If we in North America are going to call ourselves Anabaptists, it would seem we ought to resemble them in some way.”

⁴² As documented by Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*.

⁴³ See John Yoder, *Christians Attitudes*, chapter 10.

Europe from the Turks. In doing so, they threatened the security and well being of their societies. As Walter Klaassen writes, “Refusal to fight meant that one was ready to let the infidel conquer Christian Europe.”⁴⁴

(3) A third characteristic indicative of a counter-cultural sensibility that posed a threat to the cultural consensus was the Anabaptists’ upside-down sense of social power and hierarchy. German Mennonite historian Hans-Jürgen Goertz argues that the main commonality for the various Anabaptist groups was their anticlericalism, their rejection of church hierarchies and top-down leadership.⁴⁵ This stance of deep suspicion towards established power dynamics was a source of conflict between the Anabaptists and their society. Though, before long, Anabaptists established their own internal hierarchies and suffered under authoritarian leadership (witness the “banning wars” in mid-16th-century Holland), they remained suspicious toward the powers-that-be in the state-church and government.

(4) A fourth characteristic is the alternative economics that characterized Anabaptist communities. They valued economic *sharing*, supporting people in need in their communities rather than the accumulating of wealth that at the same time was driving nascent capitalism and the emergence of European empire building with the “discovery” of the New World. While only the Hutterites self-consciously instituted thoroughgoing community of goods, all Anabaptist groups worked at mutual aid and wide-ranging sharing of wealth.⁴⁶ These practices ran against the grain of the broader society and occasioned much scorn and criticism from those outside the Anabaptist movement.

All four of these core characteristics remain of great relevance for the articulation of an Anabaptist Vision for today’s American Anabaptists. In what follows, my intention is mainly to speak to the calling of pacifist, Jesus-oriented Christians to witness to the way of restorative justice and transformative peace and to resist the dehumanizing dynamics of the “spirit of our age” in 21st-century North America. I am not advocating an attempt to impose Christian values from the top down on an unbelieving society. I write in a spirit meant to reflect A.J. Muste’s response to being questioned about whether he undertook his political protests because he truly thought he could change governmental policies. He said he protested not so much because he expected to change those policies but

⁴⁴ Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic Nor Protestant* second edition (Waterloo, Ont.: Conrad Press, 1981), 50.

⁴⁵ Goertz, *The Anabaptists*.

⁴⁶ James M. Stayer, *The German Peasants’ War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Buffalo, NY: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 8-9.

because he did not want those policies to change him.⁴⁷

In a time of trumpet-blowing nationalism that underwrites imperialism as a “Christian” duty, for Anabaptists to insist on a reading of the Jesus story that names nationalism as *idolatry* certainly might lead to trouble. When this trumpet-blowing nationalism rallies behind the invasion and violent occupation of another nation (in our present case, Iraq), outspoken witness to a faith that *rejects* warfare might well seem seditious.⁴⁸ In face of a national political culture that through absolutist assertions of power by leaders, closely-guarded secrecy of policy deliberations, strong efforts to institute one-party rule, and seeking to intimidate and thereby silent media scrutiny,⁴⁹ moves ever-closer to authoritarianism, to insist that genuine power flows from the bottom up goes strongly against the grain.

As our economic system continues to transfer wealth from the world’s poor into the hands of the wealthy in the name of “free trade” and “privatization,” and to empower corporations to seek ever lower labor costs, for Anabaptist Christians to reiterate their convictions concerning economic sharing, simplicity, and gathering wealth is to witness against some of the most tenaciously “religious” beliefs in our culture.⁵⁰

These examples illustrate that the core Anabaptist convictions maintain an undiminished relevance. Communities seeking to embody this vision may also face at least some of the same kinds of hostility from the dominant culture that 16th-century Anabaptists did. Hence, to consider following this path also requires taking seriously the need to cultivate various sources of encouragement, solidarity, and hopefulness. These sources certainly include at their heart a critical mass of similarly-committed people to stand with one another.

The calling to live in the Anabaptist tradition is a rigorous calling. If “Anabaptism” is linked with Anabaptists of 16th-century history, it will never be used simply to evoke some vague positive feelings. The historical specificity of actual Anabaptism is a specificity of genuine commitments

⁴⁷ See David McNair, “War is not an accident: A profile of radical pacifist A.J. Muste,” *Oldspeak: An Online Journal Devoted to Intellectual Freedom* (Oct 21, 2002) [http://www.rutherford.org/oldspeak/articles/politics/oldspeak_muste.asp].

⁴⁸ Witness the inflammatory post-9/11 statement by Washington *Post* columnist Michael Kelly that pacifism is “objectively evil,” “Pacifist Claptrap,” *Washington Post*, September 26, 2001.

⁴⁹ On the media, see Eric Alterman, *What Liberal Media? The Truth About Bias and the News*, revised edition (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

⁵⁰ See David Loy, “The Religion of the Market,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65.2 (Summer 1997), 275-290 and Harvey Cox, “The Market as God,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 1999), 18-23.

that generally required a self-conscious counting the costs of living out convictions seen as heretical and treasonous by the people with power to arrest, to injure, even to execute.

The contemporary challenge

Many different kinds of Christians may draw guidance, inspiration, and hope from the witness of the Anabaptist tradition. In the 16th century, as in the first century, various political, cultural, and religious dynamics coalesced creatively to say “no!” to religion linked with political authoritarianism. In both settings, courageous and far-sighted peaceable communities emerged—amidst great suffering—to witness to an alternative to domination and power politics.

The early years of the 21st century call for nothing less. American Anabaptists have a responsibility not only to witness of Jesus’ gospel of peace to the wider “secular” world, but also to their fellow Christians. Such a witness may both challenge easy generalizations that link Christianity with U.S. imperialism and retributive justice *and* provide a rallying point of encouragement for other Christians who share Anabaptists’ convictions concerning peace, freedom from state domination, and upside-down views of power and economics. In drawing overtly on Anabaptism, present-day Jesus-oriented Christians may bring together both a set of ideals clearly connected with prophetic biblical faith (especially as taught and lived by Jesus) and an actual embodied tradition that has sought to live in the real world based on those ideals.

Certainly, the living out of Anabaptist convictions since the 16th century in Mennonite, Hutterite, and Amish communities (and those of related groups) has reflected some faithfulness and some unfaithfulness to gospel ideals. Those ideals are not negated by the unfaithfulness of actual Anabaptists. The ideals remain a living challenge—always calling those who profess them to greater faithfulness. Nonetheless, that these ideals *are* livable (if only partially) is borne out by the many examples of faithfulness across the generations.

The 21st century American heirs of 16th-century Anabaptism face great opportunities and responsibilities. A creative, living relationship with their tradition remains necessary to their calling.

6. The ethics of conscientious objection to World War II

[Paper presented to the ethics section of the Pacific Northwest American Academy of Religion annual meeting, Portland, Oregon, May 5, 1990. The paper was drawn from Theodore G. Grimsrud, "An Ethical Analysis of Conscientious Objection to World War II," Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 1988.]

Introduction

As a graduate student in Christian ethics, I found myself increasingly uncomfortable with the approach to ethics that characterized many of the textbooks I encountered.¹ Recent critiques and alternatives to this "standard account"² by writers such as Stanley Hauerwas, James McClendon, and Alasdair MacIntyre persuaded me that such alternatives are possible. However, as a rule, even these alternatives remained pretty abstract and intellectualized themselves.

When I began to work at formulating a dissertation topic, I felt that I wanted to test these competing approaches to ethics with an historical case study. So I decided to look at conscientious objection to World War II. My goal was not so much to "overthrow" the standard account as it was simply to consider the World War II experience and see how the standard account's notion of conscientious objection worked.

Most contemporary ethics have focused on styles of argumentation and ethical justification, placed (at least implicitly) the locus of human morality in the autonomous individual, and seen "real" morality as unencumbered by historical contingencies and community loyalty. In contrast, I argue we best understand morality by looking interpretively at

¹ Two Christian examples include Timothy O'Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality*, 2nd edition (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990) and J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Moral Judgment*, 2nd edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989). A well-known philosophical treatment is William Frankena, *Ethics* 2nd edition (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

² As termed by Stanley Hauerwas.

particular historical manifestations of it. And, more specifically, I argue that we best understand these historical manifestations with an approach that considers the historical and communal background and context for the particular events. I see morality as historical, practical, social more than ahistorical, abstract, individualistic.

The standard perspective explains World War II conscientious objection by speaking of rugged individuals whose consciences prohibited them fighting. The “typical” conscientious objector (CO) would be a man who courageously stood as an individual against his community and said “no.” He would be a free thinker, one who resists any kind of creed or set of rules based on tradition.

I argue that that perspective only accounts for a few COs. The large majority are best defined much more as faithful members of *communities* of dissent; communities that, in line with long held traditions of pacifism, held that it was wrong for their members to fight. Thus, the taking of the CO stand became, for most who did so, an act of conforming to the mores of the communities they identified most closely with much more than an individualistic stand over against any community’s imposition upon them. They faced the crucial issue of which community they ended up obeying—their small pacifist community or the larger national community that called upon them to go to war. I do not argue that the application of the standard account of morality to World War II conscientious objection is wrong *per se*, but that it is inadequate. It at best only helps us to understand a small fraction of the COs.

The way of thinking about conscientious objection I propose as an alternative corresponds with a view of morality where for most of us our ethics are decisively influenced by the communities of which we are part. Few of us exist as morally autonomous individuals. We tend to be shaped by our families, our neighborhoods, our churches, and our other communities. When we find ourselves facing crucial choices in our lives, our wholly personal existential decision is usually not the decisive factor. Rather, our predisposition, our deposit of values, our character—all of which are socially formed—largely determine our choices.

The “standard account”

Ethicist James Childress perhaps most clearly and concisely outlines many elements of the standard account of conscientious objection in general—though without direct reference to World War II.³ Childress,

³ James Childress, “Conscientious Objection,” in James Childress and John MacQuarrie, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia:

himself a Quaker, writes “objectively,” with no reference to any faith communities or traditions or to his own beliefs.

Definition of conscientious objection. For Childress, conscientious objection to war is best seen as an individual’s rejection of direct involvement in warfare based on “claims that the refused act, if undertaken, would violate his or her conscience and would result in a loss of integrity and wholeness in the self, along with heavy guilt and shame.”⁴ Thus, the notion of “conscience” is definitive for conscientious objection.⁵ The CO takes his stand primarily due to his fear of the sanctions that will arise should he violate his personal conscience. These sanctions are essentially internal to the individual and not related to any community identity.

The appeal to conscience asserts a personal sanction rather than an authority.... J. Glenn Gray in *The Warriors* describes what happens when soldiers discover that they cannot continue obeying certain orders. “Suddenly the soldier feels himself abandoned and cast off from all security. Conscience has isolated him, and its voice is a warning. If you do this, you will not be a peace with me in the future.” This threatened “ache of guilt,” as Gray describes it, is a fearful sanction for those with an interest in the self and its welfare.⁶

Childress apparently sees the basic equation faced by the CO as being the individual against the state. No one can make the CO’s decision for him since conscience is strictly an individual matter wherein which an individual’s conscience directs only that individual. “Conscience is personal and subjective; it is a person’s consciousness of and reflection on his own acts in relation to his standards of judgment.”⁷ The implicit basis

Westminster Press, 1986), 118-20; James Childress, *Moral Responsibility in Conflicts: Essays on Nonviolence, War, and Conscience* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

⁴ Childress, “Conscientious,” 118.

⁵ Etymologically, “conscientious objection” is closely tied with “conscience.” My later attempts to separate the two somewhat would seem to argue for the use of a different term than “conscientious objection.” However, in general usage, the term “conscientious objection” can be seen to have only a descriptive sense as used of people who reject military involvement without the necessary implication that their reason for doing so was because of the dictates of personal conscience. In fact, my argument is that personal conscience as understood by recent moral philosophy was not all that important for World War II COs. However, I will continue to use the term “conscientious objection” in strictly a descriptive sense. Childress, of course, ties “personal conscience” and “conscientious objection” inextricably together.

⁶ Childress, *Moral*, 172.

⁷ Childress, *Moral*, 169.

for conscientious objection is the individual's conscience claiming the probability of being violated by the state's demands. Other actors (such as faith communities, families, friends) are absent as determinants in Childress's account of conscientious objection.

Characteristics of conscience. So Childress sees conscience as individual and internal. He provides no explanation of its development beyond the notion that it is basically negative (telling the individual what *not* to do) and that it makes its presence felt when one is faced with a strong demand to do something that violates one's deepest values and thereby violates one's true self. Childress cites Hannah Arendt in asserting the negative function of conscience:

These are the rules of conscience, and they are—like those Thoreau announced in his essay—entirely negative. They do not say what to do; they say what not to do. They do not spell out certain principles for taking action; they lay down boundaries no act should transgress. They say, Don't do wrong, for then you will have to live together with a wrongdoer.⁸

The sense of wrongness that the conscience leads the individual to feel is a conviction that doing certain things would violate one's sense of selfhood and personal integrity. The key value for a person of conscience is loyalty to the self.

In appealing to conscience, I indicate that I am trying to preserve a sense of myself, my wholeness and integrity, my good conscience, and that I cannot preserve these qualities if I submit to certain requirements of the state or society.⁹

Childress mentions no communal referents that might demand loyalty. Nor does he make any historical referents, thus implying that conscience and conscientious objection can be thought of in a timeless, contextless, and ahistorical manner.

Function of conscience in conscientious objection. The CO's conscience provides him with the threat of fundamental sanctions that will arise should he violate that conscience. The main sanctions are the fear of loss of integrity and wholeness in the self, along with heavy guilt and shame (the shame being fear that others will condemn the person for violating his conscience).

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 63; cited in Childress, *Moral*, 173.

⁹ Childress, *Moral*, 180.

The person violating one's conscience faces:

The sanction of the loss of integrity, or wholeness, which is closely connected with feelings of guilt and shame. When a person appeals to his conscience, he indicates a liability to certain feelings that he predicts will result from acting in certain ways. The phrase *bad conscience* especially indicates the feelings of guilt and shame....If an agent feels *guilty* he invokes a moral concept of right, expects others to feel resentment and indignation, and can relieve his feelings by acts of reparation or by forgiveness. If he feels *shame*, he invokes an ideal such as self-control or love, expects others to feel contempt for his shortcomings, and overcomes the feeling of shame ... only by improving in the future....A person who thinks that a war violates the principles of just war may feel guilty about his involvement in it. But he may also have an image of himself as one who can withstand social pressures, and he may be ashamed that he submitted to family and community pressures to serve in the army.¹⁰

Conscience works as an "internal voice" threatening these sanctions if violated. A person who does not stop to listen to that voice will not be bothered by conscience. Conscience, for Childress, "is a voice that is heard only when one is still and quiet, when one, in effect, stops and thinks."¹¹ It would seem, then, that only a sensitive, self-aware, introspective person listening to his conscience can be a genuine conscientious objector. Since conscience is ultimately internal and individual, so too are claims for conscientious objection.

COs share with others a sense of a *prima facie* duty not to kill others. But, with the CO, no other duty can override that duty. This kind of conscientiousness cannot be publicly substantiated.¹² Thus, the CO depends essentially on a subjective appeal to his personal sense of selfhood that would be violated should he be forced to fight.

Childress's basic assumption that conscientious objection is a matter of individuals refusing to allow their conscientious scruples to be violated is also reflected in the work of Gordon Zahn, a Catholic sociologist, and Mulford Sibley, a Quaker political scientist. Both were COs in World War II and served in Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps. Both eventually concluded ultimately that the camps were an unacceptable compromise with a warring government and that they should not have accepted assignment to CPS camps. Both have written extensively on the experience of COs in World War II and on pacifism in general.¹³

¹⁰ Childress, *Moral*, 174-75.

¹¹ Childress, *Moral*, 176.

¹² Childress, *Moral*, 182.

¹³ Gordon Zahn, *Another Part of the War: The Camp Simon Story* (Boston: Univer-

For Sibley and Zahn, the paradigmatic CO acts on the basis of his *individual* conscience and freely chooses to say no to the War. Hence, by implication people who become COs primarily in obedience to church policy or in mere conformity to family and peer pressure were not acting with mature consciences and therefore were not truly *conscientious* objectors. Many other writers, such as Childress, either ignore those “non-paradigmatic” COs in their discussion of COs in history or in theory or else greatly downplay their significance.¹⁴

For the standard account ethicists (and as reflected in the assumptions of the historians), the paradigmatic CO is a young man who, essentially in a way independent of communal determinants, has a very sensitive personal conscience that he refuses to violate. This conscience indicates to him that it is wrong to fight in war and that if he does choose to go into the military he will violate something vital and fundamental about his deepest identity. Such a violation would be a fate worse than death.

The emphasis falls on the individual and on the beliefs one has somehow (and it is not particularly important how) developed. For Childress at least, conscientious objection is something that can be discussed in a way unrelated to any particular historical situation.

We can see several philosophical assumptions operating in the standard account perspective.

1. *Ethics as rationalistic.* Childress begins his discussion of the nature of

sity of Massachusetts Press, 1979; “A Descriptive Study of the Social Backgrounds of Conscientious Objectors in Civilian Public Service During World War II” (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1953); Mulford Q. Sibley, *The Obligation to Disobey: Conscience and the Law* (New York: Council on Religion and International Affairs, 1970); *Conscientious Objectors in Prison* (Philadelphia: Pacifist Research Bureau, 1945); *Conscription of Conscience: The American State and the Conscientious Objector, 1940-1947* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1952).

¹⁴ E.g., Peter Brock, *Twentieth-Century Pacifism* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970); Charles Chatfield, *For Peace and Justice: Pacifism in America, 1914-1941* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971); Robert Cooney and Helen Michalowski, *The Power of the People: Active Non-Violence in the United States* (Culver City, CA: Peace Press, 1977); Charles DeBenedetti, *The Peace Reform in American History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980); Staughton Lynd, ed., *Nonviolence in America: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966); Lillian D. Schlissel, ed., *Conscience in America: A Documentary History of Conscientious Objection in America, 1757-1967* (New York: Dutton, 1968); Theodore Wachs, “Conscription, Conscientious Objection, and the Context of American Pacifism, 1940-1945” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1976); Lawrence S. Wittner, *Rebels Against War: The American Peace Movement, 1941-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).

conscientious objection by asserting that one of the central aspects to conscientious objection is an appeal to the CO's conscience. This appeal is said to be an invocation of one's conscience for the purpose of interpreting and justifying one's conduct to others.¹⁵ Such a focus on justification indicates an attempt by Childress to frame this discussion in the context of a search for a common ethical language through which people may find a universally acceptable means allowing them successfully to make such a justification. In this perspective, the realm of ethics is seen to be the realm of Reason, the realm of rational arguments. You deal with conscientious objection on the level of the justification given for acts, justification that is made in terms of a language common to everyone—the language of Reason. It makes sense, then, that for people with this approach to ethics, the paradigmatic CO would be the person highlighted in the accounts of Sibley and Zahn. This CO is able to speak the ethicist's language. He thinks in terms of rationalistic justification and is able to present his experience in those terms.

2. *Conscience as individualistic.* The standard account sees conscience as a central element to the phenomenon of conscientious objection. The entire locus of the consideration of conscience is on the individual. The realm of conscience is the realm of person introspection. Little is said about the formation of conscience; the focus is on the function of conscience – which is strictly a matter of the morally autonomous individual. Nothing is said about the role of community identity in the formation and function of conscience, implying that such identity is seen to be unimportant in the workings of conscience. The sanctions with which conscience threatens potential COs are strictly personal – the loss of one's sense of self, experiencing guilt, a sense of shame. Shame does have a communal referent, but here the potential CO is not threatened with shame for violating communal ethics as much as shame for being seen as a person who cannot stick to one's personal convictions.

3. *The individual against the state.* The basic confrontation, according to the standard account, is that of the solitary individual standing against society and the state. The power that the individual depends upon for being able to withstand this pressure is primarily the power of his individual conscience. The CO is a heroic individual who exerts his independence from social ties and champions deviant values with the strength of his will. With this assumption about the nature of political reality in general and conscientious objection in particular, it is again not surprising that the paradigmatic CO is seen to be the rugged individual who stood against the wishes of his family, friends, and political

¹⁵ Childress, *Moral*, 165.

community on the basis of his personal convictions that threatened his very sense of self should he join the military and fight in the War.

4. *Some questions.* This standard account is persuasive. The ethicists and historians who articulate it have evidence for their perspective. Many World War II COs did in fact, largely conform to this paradigm. However, with regard to the World War II experience, the standard account leaves much experience unaccounted for. I argue not that the standard account is wrong in what it explains but that it is incomplete. It fails to provide an explanation for the reality of most World War II COs. Most COs did not base their stand on the rationalistic arguments of individual conscience, nor did they have the experience of being solitary individuals standing alone against society and the state.

The experience of most World War II COs more closely approximates Michael Walzer's notion of conscientious objection:

Conscientious objection has and probably ought to have greater weight in the eyes of the larger community when it has as its basis a smaller community, within which some degree of responsibility, mutuality, and social discipline is likely to exist. Conscience is supposed to represent (it is one of the things we mean by the word) an inner alternative to the ego, a motive beyond self-interest. I do not doubt that it can play this role whenever a man discovers a principle for which he is ready to risk his comfort and even his life. But it is most likely to do so, and to do so in some stable and dependable way, when a man first discovers his fellow man, and works out with them (or with some of them) the principles for which he is ready to take risks.¹⁶

World War II conscientious objection

In the history of conscientious objection in the United States, we can discern four distinct streams that produced most COs. The oldest and largest is the peace church tradition, dating back to the 16th century Anabaptist movement out of which emerged the Mennonites (and their "cousins," the Amish), the 17th century Quaker movement, and the 18th century emergence of the Church of the Brethren. These three groups often were neighbors in colonial Pennsylvania and at times made common cause in their opposition to warfare. By the time of World War II, Mennonites retained most clearly their old traditions regarding pacifism. Quakers and Brethren evinced a weakened pacifist commitment and also reflected other influences.

¹⁶ Michael Walzer, *Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War, and Citizenship* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 131-32.

The second stream dated back to the 19th century rise of separatist Christian groups, most notably the Jehovah's Witnesses, who did not call themselves pacifists but who opposed involvement in wars fought by human governments.

The third stream, strongly influenced by the Social Gospel movement in Protestant churches, emerged as a fruit of the peace movement of the 1920s and 1930s, fueled in part by disenchantment with World War I.

The fourth stream was much less coherent and tied to past traditions. During World War I a small but still significant number of young men found themselves unable to cooperate with the war effort. These men (one notable example was Evan Thomas, the brother of the well-known Socialist politician Norman Thomas) based their pacifism not so much on religious beliefs or communal identity but more simply on their individual inviolable consciences that refused to permit them to fight.

World War II COs reflect these streams with differing tendencies. For the sake of analysis and comparison, I call these respectively the servant (Historic Peace Church), separatist (Jehovah's Witness), transformer (Social Gospel), and resister (personal absolutists) modes.

The transformer and resister modes share a basic sense of responsibility for reforming or even revolutionizing American society as a whole. Both modes found cooperation with government conscription questionable, especially as manifested in the Civilian Public Service (CPS) program. These two modes differ, however, in that while, on the one hand, the typical transformer-mode CO willingly cooperated with the government program when he received "meaningful" work assignments (e.g., working in mental hospitals), on the other hand, the typical resister-mode CO refused all cooperation with the government, asserting that conscription in any form intrinsically violated the practice of freedom, democracy, and the expression of personal conscience.

The servant and separatist modes together differ from the other two in their *not* having a sense of responsibility for the United States as a whole. The sense of social responsibility for and to their particular faith communities. They, especially the servant-mode COs, less often resented the perceived meaninglessness of agricultural and forestry work – at least based on a perception on their part that it hindered them in fulfilling their calling to institute social reform in the wider American society. They had no such sense of calling.

These two modes, however, also differed from each other in many ways. The servant-mode COs basically experienced contentment with CPS and gratitude for the government's "leniency" in providing for alternative service. The separatist-mode CO, as least as typified by Jehovah's Witnesses, shared with the resister-mode CO (though for vastly

different reasons) a rejection of conscription *per se* and usually ended up in jail. The separatists did not particularly have any impulses for social reform or social service like the others, at least partly due to their general alienation from that society. They generally stayed to themselves in the CPS camps and prisons, except for evangelistic forays.

These different responses to World War II correspond with different practices and traditions expressed in different kinds of communities. All are morally interesting, and none defines conscientious objection as a whole. However, the servant mode deserves special attention for several reasons. For one, it was the most common. To a certain degree, this is the case because CPS was especially tailored to that type of objector. But also, many characteristics of the servants' experience enabled them to express and retain their CO commitment when others could not do so. These factors are often overlooked by analyses that focus on individual conscience as the crucial element in conscientious objection.

Servants

The largest number of COs fit in the servant category. I estimate that about two-thirds of the 12,000 COs who did alternative service are best seen as "servants." They tended to accept the state's authority and right to draft them. They generally cheerfully cooperated with the alternative service program. They focused little on thinking and talking about transforming the world to pacifism and other desired social change. They tended to feel more responsible to their church communities than to the wider society. Very few servants went to prison.

As a result of their positive perspective, they did find productive work to do—forestry and agricultural work that would not have been done otherwise, mental health work, sanitation work in the south. After the War, some of this energy led to the formation of the Mennonite Mental Health Services started several alternative mental health hospitals.

Servants tended to sustain their pacifist commitment despite the length of the War and the restrictions placed on them in CPS. Servants did not have the high expectations of transformers regarding the significance of their alternative service work, being less prone to frustration over failed hopes. They were also more likely to value the work they did do, given their generally more rural, farm-oriented backgrounds. Many servants, in sharp contrast with resisters, accepted the government's perceived right to institute conscription and, in fact, felt gratitude for the existing CO provisions. This attitude clearly made their alternative service situation more palatable.

Of the factors that contributed to maintenance of servants' positive

attitude, the support of their home communities perhaps had the greatest significance. Knowing the support of family, friends, and fellow church members significantly affected morale. Servants had a very strong and historically established, though not always explicitly articulated, belief system deeply integrated into their pre-reflective beings. They combined this with a communal support structure of church community, family, and friends. The quiet strength of these bases for commitment allowed them to function constructively in the war context, a context where virtually the entire society is geared toward winning the War and that allowed very little outlet for the energies of resisters and transformers.

Servants' lack of absolutism and overly optimistic expectations enabled them to focus on the creation of practical possibilities for service while remaining free from involvement in warfare. Their communal solidarity contributed to community renewal and creativity, especially among the Mennonite churches, instead of fragmentation and alienation. Servants responded to the same situation that engendered the transformers' National Mental Health Foundation (a reform movement within the existing mental health community) by forming alternative mental hospitals. This response models the potential of "alternativism" as a creative possibility for effecting long-range social change.

On the other hand, many servants tended to be provincial, often being only concerned with their church communities and the rural world in which they had grown up. Thus, they often expressed lack of interest in learning from others with different experiences and ideas, especially of the resister or transformer tendencies. They could validly, at times, be criticized for being more concerned with taking care of their own kind than with facilitating the good of the broader pacifist community as a whole. Many servants avoided having their personal ownership of pacifist convictions tested very strenuously. Many took a relatively easy route of going along with their faith community's desire for them to be COs, facing no resistance from local draft boards, and spending the War years in base camps surrounded by people from similar backgrounds and doing the same kind of work they had grown up doing.

Separatists

The most striking fact about separatists, as characterized by Jehovah's Witnesses, is that about 4,500 went to prison as COs. These young men requested full exemption from the draft as ministers (according to the draft law many should have had that granted; that they did not surely was due to draft board bias). About 10% of those doing legal alternative service fit in this category.

Separatists were hostile toward the state, even labeling it as Satanic. At the same time, they were also apolitical in terms of “earthly” issues. They were influenced most directly by their church, especially their leaders who promised sanctions should Witnesses join the military. Those who did do alternative service tended to be non-involved as much as possible. They were not disruptive, but they saw the work projects as distractions from their true work of evangelism. Somehow, even in the face of such widespread imprisonment, separatists tended to maintain their CO commitments. This largely stemmed from the strength of their religious identity. Plus, even in prison, fellow Witnesses stayed together and no doubt reinforced each other’s commitments. The one factor that on rare occasions did lead to loss of commitment was when a Witness lost his “faith” and left his church altogether.

The main strength of separatists can be seen in their strong sense of communal solidarity that only grew stronger in the face of the societal pressures they faced. This exemplifies the potential power of these groups. Jehovah’s Witnesses, in particular, by the uncompromising of their commitments to adhere to their group’s policies and convictions, did have the effect in the years following World War II of loosening government restrictiveness in its treatment of religious objectors.

On the other hand, separatists had little or no interaction with other COs beyond the necessary, hence they had little openness to learn new things or be challenged in their own thinking. Many separatists seem to have had little personal ownership of the convictions that led them to be COs. Their communal life appears to have been somewhat coercive, contributing to their commitments to refuse to fight being based more on fear of communal sanctions than on their positive beliefs. Consequently, as well, when separatists lost their commitment to their religious group, they also tended to lose their commitment to being COs.

Transformers

Transformers had a strong motivation to create a peaceable world. Many were strongly influenced by the student movement in mainline Protestant circles during the 1930s, with its strong sense of idealism and desire to effect a social transformation toward the values of the kingdom of God. Transformers were somewhat critical of the warring state, but because they (initially) believed the alternative service would entail meaningful work opportunities, they were willing to cooperate with the alternative service program. The large majority of transformer COs did alternative service, with only a few going to prison.

They were most strongly motivated by a desire to bring about social change. As it became clear to them that their actual alternative service work would do little to change the world, some became disenchanted. Transformers continued to exert pressure on the government to give them more meaningful work. Eventually these efforts bore some fruit, as after a few years COs were allowed to work in mental hospitals and to do some public health work in the south in addition to forestry and agricultural work. Some transformers, however, became convinced that they could actually do the world more good by fighting against Hitler than by performing what seemed like quite marginally important alternative service work. So, many of the defections from alternative service to the military came from COs with transformer tendencies.

Transformers faced a much more ambivalent home context than did servants, who generally were strongly supported by family and home churches. Few transformers had such strong support. Many had some individuals, especially pastors, who supported their choices (or at least supported their right to make the choice for alternative service). However, both families and home churches of transformers tended strongly to support the war effort and often to be critical of COs. Consequently, transformers found it more difficult to maintain morale, a difficulty that led some to leave for the military and others to become seriously unmotivated and essentially simply to wait for the war to end.

Probably about 20% of COs performing alternative service fit in this category. Most came from mainline Protestant denominations, especially those most influenced by the earlier Social Gospel movement—Methodists, Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ, and to a lesser extent Presbyterians and Episcopalians.

Transformers had a strong sense of responsibility for seeking the public good. They kept alive and witnessed to a vision of a peaceful, just, Christianized social order. Many transformers maintained a commitment to their vision throughout the War, exemplifying the power of that vision to sustain hopefulness even in the face of apparent total lack of progress in making it real in a widespread way. Those transformers who retained a sense of vision persevered in their quest for meaningful work possibilities, a quest which at least partially succeeded with the establishment of CPS units devoted to public health, special medical research, and, most significantly, mental hospital service. The National Mental Health Foundation models an effective reform effort initiated by only a few committed individuals. These individuals displayed great creativity and energy in establishing and nurturing into fruition a sustained and at least moderately successful effort to reform the American mental health system.

On the other hand, the high ideals of transformers led to unrealistic expectations regarding what they would be able to do within CPS. It is possible that for many transformers, an optimism regarding the possibility for the widespread transformation of the existing social order contributed to a certain naiveté about the state's intentions and willingness to accommodate transformers' wishes. In the long term, such naiveté often led to frustration and cynicism when the high hopes were dashed. Some transformers were fairly easily persuaded by the course of events to give up their pacifism when they came to believe that the most effective possibilities for making peace and meeting human needs could be found in the military. They generally lacked a deep sense of communal rootedness and commitment to pacifism that contributed to a relative inability to retain their pacifist commitments, even though the ideal of community was highly regarded.

Resisters

A rejection of cooperation with the warring state characterized the resister tendency. Many resisters went to prison and those who did not generally found themselves in positions of non-cooperation with the alternative service program. Resisters saw war as intrinsically evil and not to be compromised with in any way. They saw conscription as inextricably tied to war itself. Some resisters were essentially apolitical and mostly concerned with simply not being forced to violate their consciences by fighting or in any other way cooperating with the war effort. Other resisters argued more on political grounds against the state as coercive and imperialistic. Most resisters saw their acts of non-cooperation as fulfilling their sense of responsibility to resist state totalitarianism and encroaching militarism.

Notions of nonviolent resistance influenced many resisters, especially those formulated and practiced by Gandhi. For others, simply their own sense of unwillingness to cooperate in any way with the war-making state and its instruments influenced them the most. The most distinctive trait of resisters vis-à-vis transformers can be found in the resisters' strong criticism of alternative service and unwillingness to cooperate within the program. Transformers tended willingly to cooperate in order to gain the possibility of performing meaningful work.

Those COs with resister tendencies had a comparatively high proclivity for burn-out. Their stance demanded a great deal in terms of emotional and physical energy as they strove hard to avoid compromise and to resist intense to do so. Such energy inevitably ran low over time, especially when the war dragged on and on. For those in prison, this

emotional and physical toll ran even higher. Another important factor, especially for those with dependents, emerged when the financial burden grew increasingly heavy. Along with financial hardship, many resisters also suffered greatly from lack of emotional support from family and friends. For many, refusing to fight in the war left them very lonely.

A sense of independence from formal religious institutions and dogma characterized most resisters. Secular, individualist resisters who essentially arrived at their commitments on their own, typically affiliated with the War Resisters League under the need for support during wartime. Resisters tended to have a strong, coherent sense of personal conviction and conscientiousness about their pacifism and complete unwillingness to cooperate with the war system. They had a depth of commitment that provided them the strength to withstand extreme social pressure and deprivation. Those who went to prison especially experienced hardships and at times faced extremely violent sanctions.

Resisters model the power of a few heroic individuals to withstand the coercion of the all-powerful state based on their unshakeable convictions and total commitment to remain true to those convictions at all costs. For pacifists and others committed to radical social change they exemplify the power of principle. Resisters prophetically exposed American militarism's totalitarian tendencies.

Evaluation of the standard account

The standard account corresponds closely to the characteristics of those COs with resister tendencies. Resisters often spoke of their concern over the possibility of violating their personal consciences as a major motivation in their taking the CO stand. They expressed concern over facing the sanction of loss of personal integrity and sense of selfhood should they violate that conscience. They referred to a strong sense of selfhood that included strong convictions regarding the total evil of taking human life under any circumstances. Many believed that this sense of selfhood would be sacrificed with any kind of compromise with the war system, including submitting to conscription in any way. Hence, even doing alternative service constituted a threat to the self.

The locus of concern for resisters was on freedom of conscience. Their biggest problem with CPS came over the issue of the lack of freedom in choosing whether and how to do works of service. They emphasized the individual, personal nature of conscience and the need for conscientious acts to be un-coerced. They believed that any kind of conscription not only violated their sense of pacifism as part of their selfhood, but it also violated their sense of freedom to choose when and how to serve others.

The standard account also implies that the CO stands as an individual facing the state alone and acting independently of communal determinants. To be truly conscientious, the objector rises above any kind of direct influence by outside forces and determines for himself what is the right thing to do. Without question, this description applied to resisters. Resisters almost always acted self-consciously in opposition to community expectation, be it expectations of family, friends, home communities, or the larger national society. They acted due to intensely powerful personal convictions that moved them to risk extreme sanctions for the purpose of remaining free of the evil of the war system.

Also, as predicted by the standard account, resisters tended to have well-developed, sophisticated, rationalistic arguments that supported their stand. They appealed to an assumed common store of values and beliefs with a common language that they shared with all people of good will and open minds, even including those who did not share their pacifism. Resisters often engaged in apologetics for their position, arguing that the War was irrational, that American traditions support the freedom of conscience, and that if American people could only overcome their ignorance they would see things the resisters' way. Resisters, it seems, serve as paradigmatic COs for the standard account. As a means of understanding the experience of these COs, the standard account is an accurate reflection of reality. However, as we have seen, resisters made up only about 10% of the total CO population during World War II.

The standard account corresponds less successfully to those COs with transformer tendencies, though in many ways it remains accurate. Transformers, like resisters, placed a high premium upon the centrality of personal conscience in their coming to and maintaining a commitment to being COs. They did not, however, use this language as uniformly as resisters. They tended more willingly to compromise with the state in its establishment of alternative service as part of the conscription program.

Like resisters, transformers expressed themselves in "public language." They gave rational arguments for their stand and assumed that these arguments would be accessible to anyone who cared to listen. They also believed their biggest hindrance in spreading their message was ignorance and assumed that if they worked hard enough they could conceivably convince just about anyone of the validity of their stance.

The standard account, therefore, helps to some degree in illuminating the experience of transformers. However, it leaves some major issues out. The standard account does not predict the positive thrust of most transformers, whose commitment to being COs primarily stemmed from their urge to effect social change and not their fear of violating their personal consciences. In other words, conscientious objection according

to the standard account is deontological in that the CO is governed by principles, primarily that one must not violate one's personal conscience. Transformers' CO stance, however, was primarily teleological—i.e., governed by their goal of changing the social order. Evidence of this focus can be found in the experience of some transformers who became convinced that their goal could be best served by their leaving CPS and joining the military. Presumably such a switch remained consistent with their goal rather than principled motivation.

Transformers made up about 15% of the total CO population. Combined, resisters and transformers constituted about 25% of the total. Thus, the standard account, even partially, fits only about one-quarter of all COs to World War II.

The standard account almost totally fails to predict the servant and Separatist tendencies that together totaled about 75% of the overall CO population. These two tendencies vary a great deal from one another. However, they do resemble each other in the ways that they are distinct from the standard account, which is why I will treat them together here.

As a general rule for servants and separatists, the central basis for being COs had much more to do with their communal involvements than with their fear of violating their personal conscience. This can be illustrated by comparing the answers COs gave on the questionnaires they filled out to support their CO claims. Mennonites and Jehovah's Witnesses tended to give short answers that varied little from CO to CO, reflecting a strong sense of communal norms determining the shape of their commitment. In contrast, COs with resister and transformer tendencies gave long, involved, very personal statements.

Many Mennonite COs said that their church membership served as the central basis for their CO stand. They might use the language of individual conscience, and no doubt most had a strong personal commitment to pacifism. However, the formation of their conscience and their personal ownership of their pacifism resulted from their church involvement and were decisively shaped by that involvement. Unlike the standard account CO, whose greatest fear is that of the internal sanction of a loss of selfhood, servants' and separatists' greatest fear had to do with the threat of external sanctions and a loss of communal membership and identity. That these sanctions had some force can be seen in that only about one-third of the Mennonites who joined the military returned to their churches, and many of those only returned after public acts of repentance. Mennonites who wanted to remain in good standing in their churches generally had little choice but to join CPS.

Hence, the key concern for servants and separatists centered on obedience to church teaching and not on the freedom of the individual

conscience from coercion. Their sense of selfhood emerged from their church involvement and could not be separated from that. To lose their community connection would be a very fundamental violation of their selfhood. They operated with a much different sense of selfhood than that allowed for by the standard account.

Servants and separatists, especially those from peace churches, as a rule grew up as part of traditions with long pacifist commitments that found expression in day to day life, though not always clearly articulated as such. The commitment to take a CO stand emerged from that context and to a large degree reflects internalized habits learned by young people from an early age. These pre-reflective habits do not lend themselves to rational argumentation. Hence, a focus on such argumentation as tied closely to the meaning of conscientious objection cannot help but miss out on crucial elements of the servant and separatist reality.

Whereas the standard account pictures COs as standing alone against the state, servant and separatist COs found themselves as part of communities that together stood against the state. These COs gained power from the fact that they did not stand alone but shared their commitment with other COs and had the backing of family, friends, and church communities. Though this support system meant that servants and separatists need not have as much personal strength to maintain their commitment as did the isolated resisters, the support system also meant that many *more* servants and separatists were able to withstand the pressures that pushed many COs to give up their commitment.

Philosophical presuppositions

At the beginning of this essay, I briefly mentioned three philosophical assumptions of the standard account that have significant impact on how it represents conscientious objection. In considering the actual experience of COs in World War II, we see that the standard account does not adequately provide for the majority of World War II COs. These philosophical assumptions are a major reason for that.

1. *Ethics as Rationalistic.* The standard account approaches ethics as a search for a common, rationalistic ethical language with which arguments can be justified in a way that is accessible to all rational people. For most COs, especially the large majority characterized by servant and separatist tendencies, ethics was better seen as an ethos than as rationalistic argumentation. That is, analysis of their morality reveals that it had to do with a way of life much more than with a way of thinking and arguing. This way of life stemmed from these COs' communities' visions and commitments. The commitment to pacifism

resulted from young men growing up in these communities where nonresistance was a day-to-day practice, something people accepted and lived even before they could argue for it rationally.

This situation of ethics as an ethos shows how such ethics are established through practical life, a way of life that presupposes a community and an ongoing tradition. This way of life produces an ethos of moral commitments and practices that have little connection to a rationalistically articulated ethics. The standard account, by focusing on arguments, justification, and a quest for a common language, misses altogether the reality—witnessed in the experiences of most World War II COs—of the creation of an entire way of life that served as the formative and sustaining context for most COs to World War II.

2. *Conscience as Individualistic.* The standard account sees conscience as a central element to the phenomenon of conscientious objection. The entire locus of the consideration of conscience is on the individual. The realm of conscience is the realm of personal introspection. As we saw, for most COs, conscience had definite communal determinants. Few of those with servant or separatist tendencies described their pacifist convictions as based on the dictates of their *individual* conscience. Their conscientiousness was based on their *communal* identity.

Michael Walzer's notion of conscientious objection more closely fits the experience of servants and separatists than does Childress's. Walzer sees the existence of pacifism in the practices of smaller communities serving as a better basis for conscientious objection than pacifism merely existing as a matter of the personal consciences of autonomous individuals. The "conscience" in conscientious objection works best when "a man first discovers his fellow men, and works out with them (or with some of them) the principles for which he is ready to take risks."¹⁷

The communal nature of their convictions, including the on-going emotional and material support they received, contributed significantly to the success of servant and separatist COs during World War II (success in the sense of their capability of maintaining their commitments and having positive experiences in CPS). The resister stance, which closely corresponds to the standard account's picture of conscientious objection, demanded heroic capabilities from COs and hence characterized only a small number of men.

3. *The Individual Against the State.* The basic confrontation, according to the standard account, is that of the solitary individual standing against society and the state. The power of the individual depends upon his being able to withstand this pressure and is primarily the power of his

¹⁷ Walzer, *Obligations*, 131-32.

individual conscience. For most World War II COs, the individual's primary identity came from that individual's membership in his faith community. He did not stand alone against the state. The state generally dealt with these communities, not isolated individuals. These dealings, while not necessarily confrontive, clearly established that COs' scruples against being involved in any direct way in the war effort would be tolerated by the government.

COs standing outside such communities and with different concerns more in line with non-cooperating convictions, gained much less satisfaction from the government. Frustration with that situation contributed to COs with resister and, to a lesser degree, transformer tendencies having a much less satisfactory experience during the War than did servants.

Conclusion

The standard account of conscientious objection, while somewhat accurate in predicting the characteristics of the small minority of World War II COs with resister tendencies, distorts the overall reality of conscientious objection to World War II. Not only does it show little respect for the commitments and practices of most COs, it does not provide any analytical tools for accurately portraying the experiences of the large majority of COs.

My focus here has been on one specific case study of moral practice, the experience of COs during World War II. At this point, I can simply claim that the standard account of ethics does not provide a broad and deep enough focus to help us understand the ethics of people in that one case, World War II conscientious objection. Beyond that case, I can assert that we should suspect that the standard account would have similar problems with other cases.

We have seen that the standard account displays an impoverished vocabulary of ethics. It simply does not have the language to consider ways of life that enshrined values and practices determinative of the ethical commitments and behavior of most World War II COs. Many present-day ethical thinkers claim that this is an endemic problem with the standard account in contemporary ethics in general. Nothing I have discovered in my research has led me to doubt that these thinkers are correct.

7. A moral response to World War II¹

[Presented as the Keeney Peace Lecture, Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio, October 25, 2011]

World War II was the biggest catastrophe ever to befall humanity. Think of it like this: say a meteorite crashes into my hometown of Harrisonburg, Virginia, and kills everyone, around 40,000 people. This would be incredible news. America's worst ever natural disaster. But then, imagine that something like this happens *every single day* for five years. You can't imagine that? Well, that's what World War II was—40,000 people killed every single day for five years.

But World War II wasn't a natural catastrophe—it was something human beings did to each other. These 75 million people didn't die due to impersonal nature run amok. They were killed by other people. World War II was an intensely moral event. Human choices. Human values. Human actions. And World War II has cast a long shadow. We're still in its shadow. As William Faulkner wrote, "the past is never dead. It's not even past." Just one example. In Barack Obama's acceptance speech upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, he alluded to the necessity for America to fight in Afghanistan—and cited the war against Hitler as one key rationale. That war was obviously a necessary war, our nation's "good war," and it helps us see our current war as necessary as well.

What do key stated moral values in the United States say about World War II? They were stated famously on two occasions during 1941 by Franklin D. Roosevelt. These statements were circulated widely and provide us with stable moral criteria for our reflections on the moral legacy of World War II.

In his January 1941 State of the Union address, Roosevelt outlined his famous "Four Freedoms"—freedom of speech, of worship, from want, and from fear, the freedoms, he said, "we seek to make

¹ This essay serves as an introduction to Ted Grimsrud, *The Good War That Wasn't—And Why It Matters: The Moral Legacy of World War II* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

secure...everywhere in the world.”² Then in August, Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill drew up the Atlantic Charter. This agreement articulated what came to be the Allies’ war aims after the U.S. entered the war in December. The key goals were “the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live” and that the nations of the world would disarm once “a wider and permanent system of general security” would be established.³ So, these are the moral criteria for evaluating the war—did it lead to increased freedom everywhere in the world, to political self-determination, and to disarmament?

I will address five questions concerning World War II’s moral legacy: (1) Was the American involvement in World War II necessary? Did it have just causes? (2) Were the means Americans used to fight this war just? (3) What were the costs of this war? (4) What was the aftermath of the War? How did it impact, for example, American foreign policy and attitudes toward war and peace? (5) Have there been alternatives to achieve freedom and self-determination apart from such violence?

Was the cause just?

In traditional moral reasoning concerning warfare, two central categories shape the discussion. Were the causes just (in Latin, the *jus ad bellum*—just entry into war)? And were the means just (the *jus in bello*—just actions in war). When we ask, was this war necessary, we ask the first question, about just cause.

Many people insist that it is simply a no-brainer. These are the words of historian Eric Bergerud: “I find it almost incomprehensible that anyone would claim to discover moral ambiguity in World War II...Machiavelli...was quite right when describing a necessary war as a just war. If World War II was not necessary, no war has been.”⁴

Others do believe there is moral complexity but conclude that the war was necessary, all things considered. Another historian, Kenneth Rose, expresses it this way: “World War II was the greatest disaster in human history, but was this a just war that Americans had to fight despite its appalling price?” Well, yes, Rose concludes. Because the Germans were perpetuating “an abomination on the human species....The dire

² For an audio recording and written text of this speech, see <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrthefourfreedoms.htm>.

³ For the text of the Atlantic Charter, see http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_16912.htm.

⁴ Eric Bergerud, “Critique of *Choices Under Fire*,” *Historically Speaking: The Bulletin of the Historical Society* 9 (20087), 41.

consequences of a German victory don't make this war 'good,' but they do make it just, and necessary."⁵ For Rose, indeed this war was necessary because of what we learned about what the Nazis did. But were German atrocities actually why America entered the War? Did opposition to German abominations determine American strategy during the War? These are important and complicated questions.

In present-day conversations, Americans tend to give three main reasons for this war's necessity. (1) To maintain our national autonomy. "If it wasn't for this war, we'd all be speaking German now!" (2) To further democracy in the face of global tyranny and totalitarianism. (3) To save the Jews from the Nazis. What about these reasons?

Neither Germany nor Japan appear actually to have intended to invade and conquer the U. S. Crazy both nations may have been, but their leaders all knew such an invasion would be impossible. The incredible logistical challenge faced by the Allies in invading France in 1944 in negotiating only a few miles across the English Channel show that invading the U. S. across vast oceans simply couldn't have been done. Plus, neither seem to have wanted to conquer the U. S., in any case. Both wanted to dominate their own regions, not the entire world. They desired some sort of coexistence with the U.S.—and decided war was necessary when Americans had no interest in that kind of coexistence and actively opposed their actions.

But wasn't the U.S. then wanting to back democracy against totalitarianism? Wasn't that why America aided the British against the Germans and the Chinese against the Japanese? This is complicated. Certainly, most Americans supported democracy. But in terms of U.S. foreign policy, the picture is ambiguous. China under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek was an authoritarian dictatorship. Britain was a democracy—internally, but also ruthlessly ruled over a global empire that, at least for its non-white subjects, resisted ideals of genuine self-determination. And, during the war, the U.S. made common cause with the Soviet Union. Stalin's empire was about as far from democracy as any major nation has ever been. The American fight against Germany furthered the reach of Soviet totalitarianism. As well, defeating the Japanese helped open the path for a Communist takeover in China.

Then there is the fate of Poland. In the 1930s, Poland was a military dictatorship. Britain allied with Poland against Germany for reasons of *realpolitik*, not out of a quest for democracy. Germany invading Poland trip-wired World War II and caused Britain to declare war on Germany.

⁵ Kenneth Rose, *The Myth of the Greatest Generation: A Social History of Americans in World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 251.

This war utterly *devastated* Poland. It led directly to 20% of the Polish population being killed. When the war ended, the Western Allies acquiesced to the annexation of Poland into the Soviet Empire and the imposition of a totalitarian Communist government. Poland was on the “winning side”—and was crushed.

What about saving the Jews? This is also complicated. General Dwight Eisenhower, the Allied supreme commander in Europe said, on the site of a newly liberated concentration camp at the end of the war, “*This is why we were fighting.*” But in fact, Eisenhower’s own policies during the War ignored the fate of the Jews in the Nazi death camps, even though the Allies’ leaders knew from early on at least some of what was happening. Nothing was done to stop the holocaust as it was happening.

The Allies’ position was that the best hope for the Jews was to end the war in decisive victory as soon as possible—and only then turn to liberating the camps. In fact, though, by insisting on “unconditional surrender,” the Allies prolonged the war for many months, during which time the Nazis desperately accelerated the killing.

So, if the U.S. involvement in World War II was not about protecting the country from invasion, not about furthering democracy in face of totalitarianism, not about rescuing Jews—was it really necessary? Why did the U.S. fight? This is a simplistic and brief answer, but let me suggest four main reasons: (1) The conflict of American imperialism with Japanese imperialism over dominance of the Far East, especially China. (2) The strong alliance the U.S. had with Britain and its *non*-democratic global empire. (3) Concerns on the part of American corporations that the Germans were proving after all to be a threat to their interests. (4) The growing awareness that a war would be highly economically profitable, as it proved to be beyond anyone’s wildest imagination. None of *these* reasons would pass muster with just war philosophy.

Were the means just?

Were the *means* just? Is a “necessary war” just regardless of the tactics? The moral tradition of thinking about warfare has insisted that necessity alone does not make a war just. Two key criteria in particular measure the justifiability of tactics in warfare: the criterion of proportionality (that the damage done by the tactics does not outweigh the good accomplished by their implementation) and the criterion of noncombatant immunity (wars should not be waged on civilian populations).

American military people were aware of these moral criteria concerning the waging of war. At the beginning of the European war,

President Roosevelt broadcast to Western Europe a call for the belligerents *not* to target civilians. He feared “hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings who have no responsibility for, and who are not even remotely participating in, the hostilities” would be killed. Let the belligerents “determine that [their] armed forces shall in no event, and under no circumstances, undertake the bombardment from the air of civilian populations or of unfortified cities.”⁶

By early 1942, the U.S. joined the European air war. The British were intentionally bombing population centers, and the Americans argued instead for focusing on military objects. By the summer of 1943, new American leaders were more open to civilian bombing. The British created a list of German cities to be smashed, beginning with Germany’s second largest city, Hamburg. In July, for the first time, air attackers intentionally created a firestorm that incinerated everything in its path—including tens of thousands of old people, children, and other non-combatants. The second intentional firestorm was loosed on Dresden early in 1945—an attack immortalized in Kurt Vonnegut’s novel *Slaughterhouse Five*. Vonnegut, a prisoner of war, witnessed the destruction of this “unfortified” city that was full of war refugees.

In the cases of both Hamburg and Dresden, Allied awareness of *jus ad bellum* criteria led to attempts to present the attacks as having military purposes. However, with Hamburg, which was a center for war manufacturing, the attacks actually focused on the city center. As an ironic consequence, survivors of the bombing, deprived of their normal livelihoods due to the destruction of the central city, flocked to the suburban weapons plants for work, alleviating what had up to that time been a chronic labor shortage in those plants. So, the bombing actually assisted the German war effort. With Dresden, the only possible military-related significance of the city was its role as a transportation center. Again, the actual focus of the bombing mostly ignored the railroads. Within three days, Dresden’s transportation facilities were back in full swing and in fact large numbers of German troops and supplies passed through the city not long afterward on their way to battle to the east.

Whatever reluctance Americans had for targeting civilians was gone by the time they attacked the Japanese mainland early in 1945. The first and most destructive attack was on Tokyo, March 9. The U.S. dropped 2,000 tons of incendiary bombs. They burned Tokyo’s most densely populated districts to the ground in a ferocious firestorm that killed more than 85,000 people. Over the next five months, the Americans pursued a

⁶ Quoted in A. C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities: The History and Moral Legacy of the World War II Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan* (New York: Walker, 2006), 148-49.

city-bombing campaign across Japan. Up to 900,000 people were killed and maybe 20 million rendered homeless. “The principal cause of civilian deaths,’ says the postwar US Bombing Survey, “was burns.” The commander for this campaign was General Curtis LeMay. This is what he had to say about the campaign: With our attacks, hundreds of thousands of people were “scorched and boiled and baked to death.”

It was only one more step to the attacks that ended any pretense of operating according to moral criteria in war tactics—the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Debate continues about the military necessity of those bombs. Regardless of its military necessity, these weapons brought immediate death to tens of thousands of noncombatants and lingering death to tens of thousands more in the months to come, and poisoned the genetic legacy of most who were exposed to that radiation. Their use clearly violated the *jus in bello* criteria.

Not only do we see during the years of World War II steady accommodation to tactics that drastically violated the criteria of proportion and noncombatant immunity, the use of these tactics had a major impact on the practice of warfare for the United States in the years following. I’ll offer just one example. During the entire course of World War II, with the kind of devastating consequences I have alluded to, the United States and Britain dropped about 3.4 million tons of bombs on Germany and Japan. Twenty years later, during the Vietnam War, the U.S. dropped 6.7 million tons of bombs on Indochina.

British philosopher A.C. Grayling’s careful consideration of the evidence in his book *Among the Dead Cities* concludes that the Allied bombing of Germany during World War II constituted a war crime. Former American Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, who worked during World War II analyzing targets for the American air war, stated not long before his death that the firebombing of Tokyo was also a war crime. Is any war requiring war crimes ever “necessary”?

What were the costs of the War?

What were the costs of this war? Actually determining the “cost” of World War II is, of course, an impossible task. However, if we are to conclude that the good the war achieved in some genuine sense surpasses its cost, we must have some sense of what that cost was. It’s too easy to say, hey, we won, so it was worth it. An approach based on moral criteria has actually to weigh the costs before determining “it was worth it.”

We may start with the number of deaths. Of the major belligerents, the United States suffered by far the fewest. Even so, over 400,000 Americans died. Great Britain lost about 450,000 (proportionately about

three times more than the U.S.) and the Soviet Union perhaps as many as 26 million (65 times more than we did). Of the Axis powers, Germany lost as many as 10 million lives and Japan close to 3 million. Some of the nations caught in the crossfire sustained casualties greater than most of the belligerents—most notably Poland (5.8 million), China (20 million), the Philippines and Yugoslavia (1 million each), French Indochina [Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos] (1.5 million), India (2.6 million), and the Dutch East Indies [Indonesia] (4 million). Perhaps 80 million died in all.

On top of the direct deaths, we must note the tens of millions of people injured, driven from their homes, and who suffered disease or hunger. Plus the incalculable weight of grief and other emotional traumas. On top of the human casualties, we must also note the deaths of domestic and wild animals plus the immense damage done to the physical environment. I am aware of no estimates of these costs. One notable fact about the death toll of World War II is the astounding number of non-fighting civilians who lost their lives. Eighty percent of the deaths caused by the War were noncombatants. Perhaps one reason Americans can call this a “good war” is that only 1,700 American noncombatants were killed. A high percentage of deaths came to people who lived in nations who were not partisans in the conflict. For example, the number of British, American, and Japanese war deaths combined were fewer the war deaths suffered by Indonesians. India suffered six times the deaths that Great Britain did. Was the alleged good that resulted from this war possibly worth their deaths?

Let me very briefly touch on three other costs of this war. The Holocaust was an atrocity totally to be lain at the murderous feet of the Nazis. However, the war itself made the Holocaust possible. This is the conclusion of Holocaust historian Doris Bergen: “War...exponentially increased the numbers and kinds of victims....War provided killers with both a cover and an excuse for murder; in wartime, killing was normalized, and extreme, even genocidal measures could be justified with familiar arguments about the need to defend the homeland. Without the war, the Holocaust would not—and could not—have happened.”⁷ Bergen’s assertion cannot be proved—but she reminds us that violent means generally tend to increase the situation’s violence.

Then there was the spread of Communist totalitarianism in Central and Eastern Europe and Eastern Asia. We cannot imagine the creation of the Warsaw Pact and the “Iron Curtain” except for World War II. The U.S. supposedly went to war for the sake of democracy and

⁷ Doris L. Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, 2nd edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), vii.

disarmament. As far as Central and Eastern Europe and Eastern Asia were concerned, in relation to these purposes, the War was a failure.

Another cost may be seen in the war's impact on American democracy. President Roosevelt, in his quest to move the country in the direction he desired, often ignored the will of the people and Congress. He subverted democracy, engaging ever more in clandestine behavior and public misrepresentation of the facts. Americans, prior to World War II, would enter a war, mobilize, and then at war's end demobilize and return to a civilian-centered, more democratic political economy. Not this time. Directly linked with Roosevelt's desire for more unhindered power, American military leaders desired to leave behind the limits to military power that characterized the U.S. in the 1930s. Due to key unilateral presidential actions that did not pass through the legislative process, and without informing the public, the United States moved seemingly irrevocably from a democracy to a "national security state."

A key step was the construction of the Pentagon, which expanded to become the true center of power in the U.S. government. The centralization and tremendous expansion of military power in the United States were central costs of the War. Another key structure of militarism was the nuclear weapons program. It absorbed enormous amounts of resources—all hidden from Congressional scrutiny. This program was so top secret that Vice President Harry Truman knew nothing of it until after Roosevelt's death and he ascended to the presidency. Truman then made his secret decision to drop two nuclear bombs on Japan with no input from Congress. The decisions to expand the American nuclear arsenal and to share nuclear capabilities with various countries have all been made outside of democratic processes.

In the late 1930s, the U.S. had a relatively small military. The president felt constrained by the Constitution and democratic accountability to rely on a formal declaration of war by Congress before committing American forces to war. By the end of the War in 1945, both of these elements of American politics were gone forever.

The War's long shadow

In understanding World War II's moral legacy, we need to ask not only about the 1940s but also the long-term impact of that war, especially on how the U.S. has related to the rest of the world since 1945. We may call this legacy the War's "long shadow". At the end of the War, the U.S. stood as the world's dominant power economically and militarily. The American political system had unmatched prestige in the world. More than any other time in American history, the nation was in a position to

move the world toward the stated ideals the war effort was based on—self-determination, disarmament, genuine democracy.

The U.S. also had a monopoly on the most powerful weapon the world had ever seen. In the months after August 1945, Secretary of War Henry Stimson advocated that America treat its nuclear capability as a kind of global trust. The U.S. should ask the Soviets and the British to join them and have joint stewardship over this new mega-weapon. In the end, those who wanted to expand the American nuclear arsenal and retain their monopoly defeated this proposal.⁸

Up until 1947, the U.S. had a War Department. This name implied a role that would come into prominence only in the rare instances where America found itself at war. After 1947, it was the *Defense* Department, with ever-expanding prominence. The country always needs to pour major resources into defense. So, World War II bled into the Cold War which bled into the War on Terror, never-ending war footing fueled by war-oriented agencies permanently expanded by World War II: the Pentagon, the C.I.A., and the nuclear weapons program.

In 1947, President Truman announced what came to be known as the “Truman Doctrine.” This doctrine locked America into an adversarial path in relating to the Soviet Union. It said, in effect: Anywhere in the world where Communism arises, it constitutes a direct threat to the security of the United States and must be met with force. This doctrine led to interventions against many peoples’ efforts at self-determination worldwide, since virtually all such efforts would be labeled “communist.” Soon, the doctrine was invoked to justify massive military engagement in faraway Korea, in which about 4 million Koreans lost their lives; 75% of whom were non-combatants. Many military interventions were more covert—such as overthrowing democratically elected governments in Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954. Both interventions led to decades of violent, authoritarian, anti-democratic governments.

Another intervention begun in the 1950s ultimately became the greatest American foreign policy disaster ever—the war in Vietnam. Throughout the 1960s, the U.S. expanded its military role. This war brought down both President Johnson and President Nixon. It resulted in 50,000 American deaths and millions of deaths in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Finally in 1975, the Vietnamese drove the U.S. out. The 1970s and 1980s also saw massive American-generated violence in the Western Hemisphere, from the CIA-engineered coup in Chile to the U.S.-sponsored Contra War in Nicaragua—justified by the Truman Doctrine.

⁸ James Carroll, *House of War: The Pentagon and the Disastrous Rise of American Power* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 2006), 111-22.

However, in the late 1980s, came an unexpected turn. Led by Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union withdrew from the Cold War. Though it wasn't Gorbachev's intent, he presided over the peaceful dismemberment of the Soviet empire. With Gorbachev taking the Soviets out of the Cold War, the U.S. emerged again as the world's one superpower. As in 1945, the U.S. stood in a position to exert immense influence in moving the world toward genuine peace. And, as in 1945, the actual choices of American policy makers moved the world in the opposite direction.

By the summer of 1990, many hoped for a new era. One symbol of this hope was the clock of *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. This clock, using minutes to the midnight of nuclear war, measured the world's danger. When the clock was first created, in the late 1940s, it showed just six minutes until midnight. It got as close as two minutes. But in 1990, it showed *seventeen* minutes until midnight. Even though George H. W. Bush supported militarism, he faced increasing pressure to draw down. And he seemed to relent. However, just days after major American military cuts were announced, Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein, who had operated for years with American support, invaded Kuwait. This problem could have been resolved diplomatically. But Saddam's move presented the war forces with an opportunity not to be missed. Early in 1991 the Gulf War erupted, resulting in a great victory for the U.S. military—especially in reversing the movement toward disarmament.

Ten years later, the attacks of September 11, 2001 provided more opportunities for the forces of militarization to expand their power, to the point that about a year and a half later they could lead the U.S. into a war of naked aggression on Iraq.

World War II permanently enhanced American militarism. It led to new, powerful structures devoted to sustained dependence on force: the Pentagon, the CIA, and the nuclear weapons regime. Most recently, President Obama, elected as a peace candidate, has expanded military spending, even in face of huge budget deficits and a general economic crisis. In a nutshell, we may characterize the impact of World War II on America's way of being in the world this way: it powerfully pushed U.S. policy-makers to view problems that arise in international affairs as problems to be solved mainly through the projection of force. Military might worked well in the 1940s—and that success seems to justify trying the same kind of approach over and over....

Reflecting theologically on the War

I suggest the most elementary step in a theological response to World War II is to say we apply stable or objective values in assessing that event.

We assume that these values apply to our side as well as the other actors. When we do this, we come up with a result that is disconcerting for Americans. The war effort violated the Americans' stated values and aims, and it violated the generally accepted values of the just war tradition—not only the values of pacifists. The U.S. war effort transformed the nation, and it made the stated war aims of political self-determination and disarmament “everywhere in the world” impossible to attain. To come to such a conclusion is not about passing judgment on the past. What is done is done. But it challenges today's assumptions that this was a just or necessary war that in some powerful sense validates our present wars and preparations for war.

Still, if we reflect theologically on its World War II's damaging legacy, probably our key step will be to challenge negative fatalism. We do not live in a closed, iron-cage like universe. So, as we look at World War II, we ask for signs of life.

The story evokes an image I learned from my friend, Andy Schmookler. This image is what Andy calls the parable of the tribes. Imagine several tribes living as neighbors. Then one tribe wants what another has and takes it by force. The attacked tribe has two options, both tragic: fight back and be like the attacking tribe or flee and allow the attacking tribe to get what it wants. In either case, violence wins. This initial attack, Andy says, sets off a dynamic in social evolution that leads to a continual victory for violence and force, and becomes the ever-expanding dynamic of human social life.⁹

So, we have an ever-growing momentum toward un-freedom, increased coercion, movement toward the abyss. Well, I want briefly to mention a theme that counters the fatalism and despair of this story. This is a counter-narrative, an alternative story to the story of American militarization that exists side-by-side with it over the past seventy years. While clearly the alternative story is tiny and marginal compared to the dominant story, it does provide a basis, when seen with eyes of faith, for possibilities for what visionary David Korten calls “the great turning.”¹⁰

The alternative story

The alternative story has roots in World War II as well. It is, you could say, the minority report on the moral legacy of that war. Some 16 million Americans served in the military during this war—and about

⁹ Andrew Bard Schmookler, *The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Social Power*, 2nd edition (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994).

¹⁰ David Korten, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2007).

18,000 formally refused to serve (that includes 12,000 who performed legally accepted alternative service and 6,000 who went to prison as draft resisters). So, for every potential soldier who said no to participation in this war, nearly one thousand said yes.

However, this tiny group of objectors provided the spark, provided inspiration, and certainly provided people power for the emergence of powerful efforts to construct a different kind of legacy than ever-expanding militarization and unending violence, a different vision of politics, a method of seeking self-determination and disarmament directly, rather than indirectly through the state's coercive force. The key starting point that unites all who take part in the counter-narrative is simply to refuse to consent to the warring state—in the 1940s and ever since.

There were two distinct tendencies among most of the objectors: those with predominantly “servant tendencies” who focused more on works of service to address hurting people's needs and those with “transformer tendencies” who focused more on social change. These tendencies may be seen in two different types of activity in the postwar years—though they complement each other and many have embodied elements of both. The transformer tendencies, for example, may be seen in direct action for social change such as civil rights and peace movements.

Examples of servant emphases may be seen in the relief, development, and witness efforts of several organizations that emerged from World War II primed for peace work in a severely damaged world. Three “servant” groups are the American Friends Service Committee, the Mennonite Central Committee, and the Catholic Worker. Quite different from each other in many ways, they nonetheless share an emphasis on caring for people in need, a grounding in faith traditions and communities, and a desire to impact the surrounding world in ways that remain consistent with their core nonviolence-centered values.

These two peacemaking streams, the servants and the transformers, have contributed in major ways to the emergence of a tremendous amount of ferment around the world—the possibilities of people power, the world's other superpower, the civil society movement, a force more powerful, world and local social forums. These movements have created possibilities for a different kind of story, a different kind of moral legacy that could yet emerge from the rubble of World War II.

In conclusion, let me mention the book of Revelation. Chapter 13 gives us as vivid an image of the spiritual power behind World War II and the momentum towards the abyss as we could ask for: “A beast rising out of the sea” with heads, and horns, and crowns, the epitome of

militarist violence. “Who is like the beast, and who can stand against it?” Indeed, as we look at the last seventy years of American foreign policy from the perspective of peace, we can’t help but join in this question. “All the inhabitants of the earth will worship it”—the power of the sword reigns supreme.

But Revelation then shows a counter-vision. “I looked, and there was the Lamb!” The imagery here is complicated, but I believe that we are being shown, standing with the Lamb, multitudes from all nations who trust in his way instead of the Beast’s. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes, even in the face of the mighty power of the Beast. They are the ones who trust in “the force more powerful,” the force of love and compassion, of human solidarity and the rejection of weapons of war.

Those who said no to the “good war,” small as their number may have been, witnessed to this force more powerful. We see this force emerge even in the face of the seemingly all-powerful story of redemptive violence that is generally taken to be World War II’s moral legacy. This other moral legacy, one of genuine peace, can become history’s final verdict on those terrible events that marked the twentieth-century.

8. A critique of just war thought

[Unpublished paper written in May 1986 with the following Preface from 2012: This paper was written in the latter days of the Cold War. Hence, it has a context that is quite different from our contemporary setting. As well, it focuses on the generation of just war thinkers that came of age in the midst of the nuclear arms race and Vietnam War—most of whom have passed from the scene (though Michael Walzer and James Turner Johnson are still active). Also, the paper does not, of course, take into account the recent flurry of writing on the just war: see, for example: Daniel M. Bell, Jr., Just War as Christian Discipleship (Brazos, 2009); Mark Allman, Who Would Jesus Kill? (Anselm, 2008); W. Michael Slatterly, Jesus the Warrior? (Marquette University, 2007); A. James Reimer, Christians and War (Fortress, 2010); J. Daryl Charles and Timothy J. Demy, War, Peace, and Christianity (Crossway, 2010); and Andrew Fiala, The Just War Myth (Rowman and Littlefield, 2008). However, I believe the issues I address here are perennial issues and the perspective I offer remains relevant.]

Historical introduction

From the time of Augustine until now, the so-called “just war theory” has been the more-or-less official Christian doctrine regarding involvement in warfare. I say “more-or-less official” because the just war theory did not begin as a system in the strong sense of a group of thoughts that hang together. It was never adopted by a church council. It was not until the Reformation in the 16th century that it is mentioned in church confessions, and then only in passing. This is to say that the “just war theory” was the norm *in practice* though not formally for the vast majority of Christians; it was the assumed position.

Ambrose, the late fourth century church leader, was the first to articulate a Christian “ethics of war”—before him it was always an ethic *against* war. He furnished two of the ingredients of the Christian theory of the just war: that the conduct of the war should be just and that monks and priests should abstain from fighting. What Ambrose roughly sketched, his student Augustine amplified. However, Augustine never systematized his thought on warfare. There was no debate among the

church leaders of Augustine's time about a coherent proposal for a Christian ethic of war that could be either accepted or rejected. Since this was the case, there was no official acceptance of criteria that could lead to a clear decision as to whether the war was justifiable or not.

Rather, what happened is that the events occurred, wars happened, and church leaders followed along, responding in an *ad hoc* fashion. The acceptance of war and of just war philosophy simply happened. No one ever directed it. There was no debate, no votes taken. So, it was not that Augustine provided the church with a clear system of criteria that must be met for a war to be considered justifiable. Rather, he provided the theological justification for the move that had already been made regarding the acceptance of Christian involvement in warfare. He also provided some specific, though random, ingredients that much later came to be included in the systematization of the just war theory.

The theological justification included a somber view of human nature that saw peace on earth as impossible. Swords never had been beaten into plowshares and never would. So pacifism is not a realistic possibility. Also, outward violence could be justified because right and wrong were seen to reside not in acts but in attitudes. Killing and love could the more readily be squared by Augustine because in his judgment life in the body is not of the highest importance. What matters is eternal salvation.

The ingredients that Augustine provided for what later became systematized into the just war theory were mainly taken over from Plato and Cicero, with a few Christianizing additions. But they were never stated in anything approaching a systematic fashion. Rather, he mentions one criterion here and one criterion there, as they seemed appropriate.

The factors mentioned by Augustine included these: the war must be just as to its intent—which is to restore peace. The war must be just in its disposition—which is Christian love. This is not incompatible with killing, as love and non-resistance are *inward* dispositions. The war must be just as to its auspices—waged only under the authority of the ruler. The conduct of the war must be just, and only those in public authority may take life. Private citizens may not defend themselves because they cannot do so without passion, self-assertion, and a loss of love.

Augustine actually made no allowance for how these criteria might work in a negative way leading to the rejection of particular wars that violate the criteria. He essentially tried to provide advice to the political leaders to help them decide whether their war would be okay. Once they decided that it was okay (as they invariably did), the individual soldier was obliged to go along. He had no responsibility to decide on his own. When a soldier killed on order, he was not guilty of murder, and if he refused an order to kill, he was guilty of treason.

It was from within this just war tradition that the Crusades in the Middle Ages found justification. The Crusades were not justified wars in the sense that they were intended to follow Augustine's criteria, in particular the criterion that the conduct must be just. But they were "just wars" in the sense that those who fought them believed they were fighting for a just cause. The medieval theologians were not aware that the Crusades had written a new chapter in the ethics of war. They could accommodate the Crusades to the doctrine of the just war, because by common assent the Crusades were not fought to convert the infidel but only to protect the passage of pilgrims to the Holy Land. This at any rate was the initial objective. There was latent a fundamental difference, however. The purpose was not to recover stolen goods nor to repel an invasion, but to vindicate a right of religion under a foreign jurisdiction. This was after all a war of faith. This non-rational sense of a direct calling from God to do battle is one which has surfaced often since then, but it never is articulated as part of the general Christian ethic of war.

However, two elements from the Crusades remain in our inheritance in the West. They keep the crusade model alive in our culture, even though it is not in our most careful thinking. One is that a transcendental cause justifies downgrading the rights of the enemy. If we are fighting for God, then the communists have no rights because their denial of the true God forfeits their claim to humanity. That element from the crusade era remains in western thought about any big battle. The other element of the crusade mentality is what you might think about yourself in regard to the absolute value of martyrdom. It is meaningful to die, even to fail or to die defeated if it is in a crusade.

It seems that the main thrust of the just war theory in history is similar in some ways to the crusade idea in that it has more contributed to a mood or attitude toward war than provided a universally agreed upon set of criteria which has in practice been relevant to whether specific wars should be fought or not or how they should be fought. Essentially, the idea of just warfare has been used to make it morally justifiable to fight wars after they have already begun. And because of the church's acceptance of the just war theory that make it okay for Christians to fight in wars, few Christians decide *ipso facto* that they will not fight. And, in practice, it has almost universally been the case that Christians have considered any war their nation is fighting in to be a just war—even German Christians during the Nazi era.

However, since World War II, three things have made the just war theory more than a convenient means of making it morally justifiable to fight in wars. They are the development of nuclear weapons, the trials of Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg, and the Vietnam War.

With the advent of nuclear weapons, many people are becoming “nuclear pacifists.” That is, they believe that it is conceivable that there could be a war that meets the criteria for a just war, but that it is impossible for a war fought with nuclear weapons to be just. By definition, a nuclear war would violate the criterion of proportionality (or limited means). A nuclear war would be too devastating ever to be just. Therefore, nuclear war must always be opposed—as should preparation for nuclear war. This is a use of just war criteria to say “no.”

The first actual war in which large numbers of people in the US applied just war criteria and came up with a “no” answer was the war in Vietnam. Many war resisters were not absolute pacifists, but rather selective conscientious objectors who objected to a specific war. This occurrence is significant because it marked the end of the assumption that if the nation’s leaders say a war is just the people in that nation are to agree. The selective objection to the Vietnam War meant that people were acting on a belief that they had a different and more authoritative basis for determining the difference between a just and an unjust war.

The principle supporting this perspective was strongly articulated in the Nuremberg trials, when Nazi leaders were tried and convicted of “crimes against humanity” following World War II. The people tried there were told that they should have told their government “no” and not been involved in a clearly unjust war.

So it seems that the just war theory has new life, that it is finally beginning to function in a critical way, in a way that actually leads people to say “no” to specific wars.

Just war thought and the nuclear threat

The general issue of the validity of just-war thought with regard to nuclear war is a dividing line between two quite distinct general approaches to just-war ethics, which I will call “realist” and “nuclear pacifist,” and helps uncover their diverse goals for the use of just-war thought. The realists want to regulate war, including nuclear war, and the nuclear pacifists want to prevent and even eliminate war.

The realists, authors such as William O’Brien, James T. Johnson, Paul Ramsey, and John Courtney Murray,¹ seek to apply just-war

¹ James T. Johnson, *Can Modern War Be Just?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984); John Courtney Murray, *Morality and Modern War* (New York: Council on Religion and International Affairs, 1959); William V. O’Brien, *The Conduct of Just and Limited Wars* (New York: Praeger, 1981); Paul Ramsey, *War and the Christian Conscience: How Shall Modern War Be Conducted Justly?* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1961).

thought to the regulation of warfare. They hold two assumptions inextricably together: (1) war is inevitable (it is seen to be utopian and even dangerous to try to eliminate war itself—hence they reject pacifism) and (2) war must be limited, carried out according to moral rules (hence they reject the idea of total war and the goal of unconditional surrender). John C. Murray’s famous quote represents this general line of thought: “Since nuclear war may be a necessity, it must be made a possibility.”

The central goal is to apply just war thought to nuclear war and to make a “just” nuclear war conceivable. These thinkers reject the notion that nuclear weapons make all conceivable wars utilizing them *ipso facto* unjust. To think so is a failure of thought, not a recognition of inevitable reality. These people would certainly believe that nothing in the modern world has changed significantly regarding causes for going to war (the so-called *jus ad bellum*—“just cause”). What would make a just nuclear war inconceivable today would not be a change in the applicability of just-cause criteria, but a belief that just-action criteria (the so-called *jus in bello*—“just means”) of proportionality (that the damage done by the means of war do not cancel out the good the war is seeking to accomplish) and discrimination (that innocent people not be directly attacked) cannot help but be violated. To make such war conceivable, therefore, requires much attention being paid to these criteria and sophisticated argumentation holding that they would not always be decisively violated by nuclear war.

It is an important move for such people in this discussion to assert that the just war principles, while valid and essential to thinking morally about war, do not all have to apply at all times. In his detailed discussion of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, O’Brien underscores this when he declares American involvement in all these wars to be just, on balance, even though many rules were violated. They also emphasize that while the criteria are traditional, they evolve. Part of the underlying motive here is to make sure that the criteria are not overtaken by the means of modern warfare and thereby yield only an uncompromising (and therefore irrelevant) “No!” to modern war.

For the “nuclear pacifists” (here I refer to several Catholic moralists, bishops, and popes—not all admittedly overt nuclear pacifists, but all sharing a general line of thought—and Protestant moralists such as Robert McAfee Brown and ecumenical groups)² the purpose of using

² Robert McAfee Brown, *Religion and Violence* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973); James E. Dougherty, *The Bishops and Nuclear Weapons: The Catholic Pastoral letter on War and Peace* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1984); Robert Heyer, ed., *Nuclear Disarmament: Key Statements of Popes, Bishops, Councils and Churches* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982); David Hollenbach, *Nuclear Ethics: A Christian Moral Argument* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983); Philip Murnion, ed., *Catholics and Nuclear War*

just-war thought is essentially to keep war, especially nuclear war, from happening. There is some diversity here as to the potential for actually eliminating war from history, but the basic thrust, quite different from the realists, is toward keeping nuclear war from happening at all. This is not, ultimately, an assertion that the conditions for just war thinking are no longer present, even though it might, in effect, be an assertion that the conditions for the actual waging of a just nuclear war are not present.

This way of thinking uses just-war categories of thought to reject nuclear warfare. It uses just war criteria to say no before nuclear war starts, so it could be seen to say that just-war criteria are no longer valid for determining how nuclear war can be fought, since such a war cannot stay within the limits set by those criteria.

Both perspectives in general hold that it is at least theoretically possible to apply just-war criteria to conceivable modern conventional war. All of these thinkers allow for national defense in theory, though there is great diversity over how possible it would be in practice to carry out such wars justly even if nuclear weapons are not used.

An example of this diversity can be seen in discussion of the Vietnam War. For O'Brien (and, in less detail, Ramsey and Johnson), a close examination of both just-cause and just-action criteria in conjunction with looking at what happened leads to the conclusion that the US had just cause to fight and fought justly—all things considered. It follows from this for these writers that other similar kinds of wars could be just. They would all need to be regulated, of course. For Michael Walzer,³ Robert McAfee Brown, and many US Catholic bishops, the application of just-war criteria led to a rejection of that war as unjust. Walzer sees the existence of the just-war tradition as essential to the ability of the anti-war movement publicly to oppose the war and argue tellingly against it. People had an awareness of right and wrong with regard to war.

There is, especially on Brown's part, a concomitant suspicion that the US could ever conceivably fight a just war. The only kind of conceivable just war is a non-nuclear, totally defensive war. Thus, the US could not fight a just nuclear war, nor could we likely fight a just interventionist war elsewhere in the world in defense of our geo-political and economic interests. And any chance of another country literally invading us is virtually nil. Brown and J. G. Davies,⁴ however, assert that while the US

(New York: Crossroad, 1983); Thomas Shannon, ed., *War or Peace? The Search for New Answers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980).

³ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

⁴ J.G. Davies, *Christians, Politics, and Violent Revolution* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976).

as a nuclear imperial power could not conceivably fight a just war (and use just war thought to so argue), third-world revolutionists could conceivably fight just wars. Both (Davies in more detail) argue that such wars must (and can, though not automatically) generally adhere both to just-cause and just-action criteria.

So, basically, the “nuclear pacifists” are non-pacifists. As such, they still accept some kind of just-war thought and use traditional criteria to argue for (or at least accept) the possibility of justifiable wars and the regulation of these justifiable wars. Many also use just-war thought to reject certain (though not in principle all) wars. The extent of the rejection ahead of time of certain wars is somewhat unprecedented in the just-war tradition, but this is only partly due to nuclear weapons. It is also due to aversion to total conventional war as witnessed in our century and the growth of anti-imperialistic sentiment. But it is undeniable that the spread of nuclear weapons has changed the way just-war thought has been used, even if such thought has not been seen as rendered invalid.

At the same time, several pacifist authors have argued that nuclear weapons reinforce their rejection of just-war thought (among this group would likely be several who attribute their embracing pacifism to nuclear weapons). But, at least for Gordon Zahn and John Howard Yoder,⁵ one would have to say that nuclear weapons have not been decisive in their rejection of just war thought—though they indeed play a part in the arguments. Both Yoder and Zahn perceive a general tendency throughout the history of just war thought for it to have little or no effect on the actual practice of militarism and warfare. Zahn makes a special point of looking at Nazi Germany and the Catholic hierarchy’s failure to declare Hitler’s wars to be unjust as an example of how just war thought has little practical value. Yoder bases his implicit arguments against just war thought in his book *When War is Unjust* on the tradition’s inability to say no or even to prepare ahead of time for the possibility to say no.

If the basic assumption of the just war tradition (as argued by both realists and nuclear pacifists) is actually against violence, it seems to Yoder that the burden of proof then would not be on the citizen who refuses to fight, but on the state that argues that war is necessary and truly a last resort. And holders of just war thought would demand that the state convincingly prove its assertions or just-warriors would become conscientious objectors. The fact that such a demand for proof that the war is okay does not happen renders just war thought suspect for Yoder much more than the recent advent of nuclear weapons.

⁵ John Howard Yoder, *When War Is Unjust* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1984); Gordon C. Zahn, *Vocation of Peace* (Baltimore: Fortkamp Publishing Company, 1992).

Those who reject just war thought do not generally do so because of nuclear weapons, though they may refer to nuclear weapons. Non-pacifists generally either reject nuclear weapons based on their use of just war thought itself (perhaps, as argued by some, thereby actually validating the applicability of just-war thought) or, using just war thought, attempt to regulate nuclear warfare.

Just war thought and the restraint of violence

The main expressed goal of William V. O'Brien (*The Conduct of Just and Limited Wars*), James Turner Johnson (*Just War Tradition and the Restraint of Warfare* and *Can Modern War Be Just?*), and Paul Ramsey (*War and the Christian Conscience: How Shall Modern War Be Conducted Justly?*), as indicated even in the titles of their books, is that moral reflection within the context of the just war tradition and the application of that reflection to public policy serve to restrain modern warfare. They all focus on the conduct of war and seek to argue for restraint on that conduct consistent with the main elements of the just war tradition.

All three authors assume that war is necessary to protect certain central values. This is so much of a given that none of them devote much space to elaborating on those values or explaining how it is that war protects and even enhances them. With these givens, what is actually at stake is how war can be controlled in such a way that those values can be protected without disproportional and indiscriminate means being used. These values are not protected by unrestrained warfare. Because of the ultimate significance of these values and the fact that they are not protected by unrestrained warfare, restraint becomes a moral imperative.

O'Brien, Johnson, and Ramsey are generally in agreement on this discussion, especially as it relates to policy recommendations and judgments on recent American wars. Just war thinkers who see the purpose of just war thought being that of preventing war rather than regulating it, spend little time discussing restraint. They seem to hold that in practice war, at least nuclear war, is unrestrainable on the basis of moral strictures or at least if it can be restricted, such restrictions are largely academic given the extent of the damage done. But I am aware of very little written on the subject by these people. They focus on means of preventing war, not on whether and how it can be restrained.

I will focus on O'Brien, because his work is the most thorough on this issue and most directly addresses the question of the history of modern warfare—something pertinent to the issue of whether in practice modern war can be restrained. However, everything I say about O'Brien's perspective is also largely true of Johnson's and Ramsey's as well.

O'Brien assumes, that war *must* be restrained. Because of restraint's necessity, O'Brien assumes it is possible. He does not make a detailed argument based on cases that moral restraints have been a significant reality in modern warfare. In fact, he seems to believe that modern war has not been restrained enough, hence the importance of this discussion. O'Brien even admits that in the case of a particularly significant instance of morally problematic practices—e.g., saturation bombing of German and Japanese population centers and the use of nuclear weapons in World War II—just war moral concerns of proportionality and discrimination never even came up in the discussions of policy makers. He emphasizes however, that none of these choices were inevitable. Human beings have control over the means by which they will fight their wars, and if they have the moral fiber to choose to use just means they can. This is where just war thinking can and must make a contribution.

It becomes clear in O'Brien's discussion (more so than in Johnson and Ramsey because O'Brien is more historically-specific regarding American twentieth-century wars) that many traditional just war criteria have been relativized as the tradition has evolved and been applied to modern wars. Some of the relativizations include:

(1) The need for a formal declaration of war has been more or less jettisoned. This is the case because requiring such often gives the enemy the unfair advantage of being warned ahead of time.

(2) The overriding priority on self-defense, especially in a situation where one's nation incorporates just and significant values that would be lost in event of its defeat, means that the need for there to be a strong probability of success before one fights is waived. Just nations owe it to the world to resist aggression even if they have little hope of success.

(3) Proportionality is extremely difficult to determine. It is virtually impossible to tell ahead of time whether our response to unjust aggression will cause more damage to humankind than our being defeated would. Therefore, little accountability is possible here.

(4) Discrimination has become more of an ideal; it has more to do with intent than with results. What matters is that we not intentionally attack non-combatants. Due to the power of modern weapons in practice it is impossible to avoid completely hurting civilians even when military targets are attacked. Also, military targets have become so entwined with the civilian infrastructure of societies that they cannot be resisted without damage to others. But, if such resistance is necessary (as it is, given the assumption regarding the necessity of warfare), then damage to civilians is inevitable--not that it should not be minimized as much as possible.

(5) The power of modern first-strike capabilities is such that a nation holding too strictly to the no-aggression rule will be at a disastrous

disadvantage. There has to be clear evidence that aggression is coming before a preventative attack can be launched, but one need not wait until one's borders are literally crossed.

(6) The notion of last-resort, if literally followed, would lead the US to be at the mercy of an ineffectual and biased United Nations.

(7) It is essential to discern the differences between political systems. O'Brien and others argued that the likely effect of Soviet dominance of the world shape the way that the US would relate to just war criteria.

This list of relativizations of traditional just war criteria makes it clear that the priority on restraint is very general. These authors assert that only limited, restrained wars can be just wars and that when limited, restrained wars are fought for good causes they are by definition just. But certain wars fought with little restraint but for a good enough cause (e.g., World War II) can still be just. These writers assert, nevertheless, that the goal of just war thought is restraint. The best way to insure that war will be restrained is to follow certain pre-war policies, making them an intrinsic part of our military system.

Just war thought rejects Mutual Assured Destruction as the heart of our nuclear deterrent strategy in favor of first-strike weaponry. It is immoral to intend to destroy our enemies' civilian centers. We should target military objectives exclusively. Restraint requires this. We should also enhance our conventional military capabilities as a means of preparing to fight limited wars instead of all out nuclear wars.

We should emphasize the need for strict military discipline with leadership that is well-educated concerning the requirements of just-action and strongly committed to avoid atrocities and the like.

The principle of restraint demands that we seek to discern ahead of time how to fight limited wars and that we be prepared to do so. We must prepare for war and we must prepare for fighting just, i.e., restrained, wars. Here we, of course, can see again the big difference between these "realists" and "nuclear pacifists" who see the goal of just war thought not that of preparing for war but of preventing war.

O'Brien's discussion of recent American wars indicates that in reality, though, restraint secondary for him, as it must be anyone who asserts that war is inevitable and that it is essential that our nation win. The unrestrained war against Germany and Japan and American violations of the just-action in Korea and Vietnam do not overrule the justice of our cause in those wars. O'Brien considers all three to have been just. So just cause takes priority over restraint when the rubber meets the road, especially when we discern between political systems and determine ours to be necessary for the world's wellbeing. O'Brien's admits that "moral" restrictions that hinder one's ability to win the war can be overridden.

This tension between restraint on the one hand and the need for a (that is, *our*) just cause to prevail on the other puts into question the assertion that the main focus of just war thought must be on the need to impose moral restraints on warfare and reject total war. These restraints cannot mean that the just side be forced to lose to the unjust side.

So, to say the least, O'Brien, Johnson, and Ramsey have not shown that modern war *can* be restrained. Johnson, for one, admits that restraint on tactics has in the past largely been based on inherent limitations on fighting capabilities, not moral strictures. He asserts that now the only possible restraints on the destructiveness of war are now those set by purposeful human choice. That may be true, but it in no way is evidence that it is conceivable that this *will* happen.

To say that since war *must* be restrained, therefore it can be, is not really much different from saying (as "utopian" pacifists do) that war *must* be eliminated, therefore it can be. Little, if any, evidence exists of overt just war morality having a role in restraining modern wars. Theoretically, perhaps it can. But it could be argued that once the necessity to win at war is assumed (as it surely must be if people are to pay the price that war demands), then restraint becomes expendable and just war thought becomes every bit as utopian as pacifist thought. Maybe in this situation, just war thought is more utopian and more dangerous in assuming that after allowing for war, it can then impose rules which might keep a nation from winning. These rules are sure to be disregarded, and just warriors are left with nothing but an unjust war they helped bring about with their (albeit, qualified) initial "yes."

Just war thought and nuclear deterrence

In *Nuclear Ethics*, David Hollenbach describes two perspectives on nuclear deterrence that he uses as extremes between which to situate the middle of the road perspective of the U. S. Catholic Bishops and other "nuclear pacifists" such as himself.⁶ These are the perspectives of total pacifism and what I have earlier called "realism." While I am not totally in agreement with Hollenbach's use of these categories, I do find them useful in mapping the current debate.

Hollenbach, like most typologists who set up two extremes, opts for a middle, mediating perspective that, in his view, recognizes the complexity of historical existence in a fallen world while at the same time not

⁶I use the term "nuclear pacifist" as a kind of shorthand term, following Hollenbach but recognizing that it is somewhat of a misnomer. "Nuclear pacifists" reject any military use of nuclear weapons but are not total pacifists and often accept conditional possession of nuclear weapons.

jettisoning Christian morality. Without accepting the superiority of Hollenbach's own position, we can still agree that he has made a helpful distinction, one that highlights not only differences regarding deterrence, but also even more fundamental differences regarding the meaning and usage of just war thought in general.

For the total pacifists who discuss deterrence (e.g., Raymond Hunthausen and Gordon Zahn), both principle and pragmatism enter into their rejection of deterrence as a legitimate moral stance with regard to nuclear weapons. On a general level, it is seen simply to be wrong to threaten to kill millions of people and to develop the capability of doing so. It would seem that all people who think morally about modern war would agree, though pacifists also reject the idea that other wrongs might make this wrong a lesser one. Namely, for these pacifists no potential loss of freedom or violation of human rights is as bad as killing millions of innocent people (or "guilty" people either, for that matter). This is why these pacifists reject war in general and why rejection of deterrence is part of a broader rejection of war and just war thought altogether.

On a more pragmatic level, for Hunthausen the risks of unilateral disarmament are less than the risks of the present balance of terror that deterrence imposes on the world. He does not elaborate much on why he might think this. Zahn, however, sees anti-communism as an American idolatry used to justify evil and unnecessary armament buildups. For him, the view that unilateral disarmament is less risky is at least partially based on a view that the Soviet threat is overrated. For these pacifists, like the realists (though with very different consequences) but unlike the nuclear pacifists, the possession of nuclear weapons cannot be separated from the intent to use them. Both are evil and both totally rejected.

This position is used mostly as a foil by people in the other two camps. However, it is the logical conclusion for nuclear pacifists who both reject all use of nuclear weapons and think that it is wrong to threaten to do that which is wrong in itself to do. The reason that many nuclear pacifists do not go all the way in rejecting all possession of nuclear weapons is, partly, due to fear that unilateral disarmament would lead to war and/or loss of freedom and human rights (this fear being predicated on the assumption that the Soviet Union needs deterring). Another reason is fear on the part of nuclear pacifists that if they went this route they would become marginalized and lose any potential for influencing public policy.

Realists (e.g., Michael Novak, James Finn, James T. Johnson) also reject (or at least strongly question) deterrence based on Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), that is, based on threats to bomb population centers. They do so largely for two reasons: just-action considerations and the belief that such deterrence might not work. The just-action concerns

stem from an assumption that nuclear weapons might indeed need to be used. This is part of their general assumption, much different from the nuclear pacifists, that the purpose of just war thought is to make just wars *possible*. However, massive intentional destruction of cities is immoral and irrational and cannot morally be done. So we need a different kind of deterrence that would be morally possible.

The goal for these realists is not disarmament but justice. Justice here has to do with freedom, human rights, democratic political structures, all the various things that make our system morally superior to the Soviet's and that make it worth fighting a nuclear war for. But a MAD-kind of nuclear war would not serve those ends. It would be out of proportion even to these almost transcendent values. In order to save those values, we must figure out how to fight a non-MAD kind of nuclear war.

For these realists, like the total pacifists, possession of nuclear weapons cannot be separated from the intent to use them. Thus they have to be usable in a limited way that would not decisively violate the just-action criteria. And they have to be usable in a way that will effectively serve as a deterrent. Deterrence, in Johnson's view, is based on perceptions. If the threat is utterly irrational, then it loses its force. It is not useable and thereby rendered ineffective. Novak asserts that there is no credible deterrent without the realistic threat to use it. Thus, the attempt to justify deterrence as something that must not actually be used is rejected. The threat must be useable to be credible.

A credible threat is needed because the Soviet danger is so strong. The Soviet Union is perceived by these realists as an embodiment of power-imperialism that must be effectively resisted or it will conquer the world. MAD turns out to be only a bluff which if called would effect disastrous consequences. An alternative is needed, or the Soviets might not be resisted effectively enough. Therefore it is necessary to consider a limited and discriminatory use of nuclear weapons in the face of this ever-present danger of massive totalitarian aggression against democratic societies. Deterrence strategy needs to be based on a limited-war fighting capability. The goal of deterrence is most decidedly not disarmament. As Finn puts it, the presumption of just-war thought is *not* first of all in favor of peace, but first of all in favor of justice. In a fallen world, there can at best be but partial peace. More specifically, as long as the Soviet Union exists, justice demands force—i.e., an effective, useable deterrent.

A limited-war capability is necessary to strengthen deterrence by showing our adversary that we are serious, that we will fight if necessary and not just emptily threaten. Such capability is also necessary for our nuclear weapons policy to adhere more closely to the just-action criteria of proportion and discrimination—something MAD does not do.

In response to this perspective, nuclear pacifists doubt that any nuclear war can be limited. However, even if some could be, they would still be seen to inevitably surpass the just-action criteria. They could not be limited enough. Too many innocent people would be destroyed. The realist approach goes exactly counter to the nuclear pacifist goal of disarmament in its attempt to make nuclear war fighting possible.

Nuclear pacifists (e.g., David Hollenbach, Richard McCormick, the Bishops' Letter, to some degree Michael Walzer—who sees deterrence as totally wrong, but provisionally acceptable as a kind of “supreme emergency” until something better able to prevent nuclear war comes along) are not trying to be totally logical. They recognize a fundamental paradox that is only bearable because, unlike the other two perspectives, they assert that one can separate possession from intent to use.

Hollenbach admits to logical inconsistency since, in this position, intention (nuclear war prevention) goes in the opposite direction from action (preparation for nuclear war). The only way this paradox can have even interim validity is with a basic commitment to disarmament. Deterrence serves to preserve peace only until multi-lateral disarmament is achieved. The ultimate goal is total abolition of nuclear weapons. They cannot under any circumstances be used morally. The key point in this position is that until abolition occurs, nuclear war must be prevented. From this follows the conditional acceptance of deterrence since it is seen to contribute to that prevention. The implicit assumption, of course, is that the Soviet Union would attack if we disarmed.

Pacifists and realists question whether this fundamental commitment to disarmament in fact does, or even could, exist. Nuclear weapons were built for a reason—and it was not disarmament. For the realists, they are said to have been built for protection against the intrinsic Soviet will to power. In the eyes of many pacifists, they were built as instruments of American world dominance. Neither would be convinced that these motivating forces are now non-existent. Nuclear pacifists will need to choose which story is more believable. To a large degree this will depend upon their view of Soviet intentions.

The nuclear pacifists' dilemma is that of holding to both an extremely negative view of nuclear weapons and of the Soviet Union. One view must change. The only way I see to resolve this dilemma is to ask more critically if we genuinely have anything to “deter.” It might be more possible to think that we do not if we look at what other factors might have fueled our nuclear buildup. This would necessitate a historical look at how US decisions regarding nuclear weapons construction and deployment have actually been made. Such a look might indicate that politics and economics were much more decisive than any genuine need

to deter the Soviet Union.⁷ Even if this suggestion is true, unilateral disarmament would be risky. But the threat would not come from the Soviet Union, it would come from those in our country who profit too much from things as they are now to let peace break out.

Theological assumptions and just war ethics

I will focus on three viewpoints in this section. J. G. Davies articulates a theology sympathetic to justifiable revolution close to liberation theology. Paul Ramsey writes as a Christian realist, being heavily influenced by Augustine, Luther, and Reinhold Niebuhr. David Hollenbach operates out of a natural law framework.⁸ In discussing these three thinkers, I will focus first on their differences and the theological roots of those, and then look at a few areas of agreement.

In a broad sense, these three thinkers are very different. They come to significantly different policy conclusions and, while all three accept the possibility of just wars, each sees just war applying to significantly different situations. Ramsey is very sympathetic to the possibility of a country such as the US fighting just wars of intervention as well as defense. Hollenbach sees national defense as virtually the only possibility for any one's just war. Davies would implicitly see the US as incapable of fighting a just war; the only kind of just war the US could be part of would be one where Americans were on the side of the unjust oppressors.

More specifically, for Ramsey God is on the side of political order. War is just when it is fought, using just means, against threats to this order—especially aggressive outside threats but also internal subversive threats. Ramsey's God approves status quo wars. For Ramsey, unlike other "realists," theological realities are applicable to the public realm.

Davies' God approves primarily wars that overturn an unjust and oppressive status quo and is on the side of the poor and oppressed. The motivation for wars is not to maintain public order but to establish justice and liberation for oppressed and poor people. Davies shares with Ramsey the notion that God is a political God having direct relevance for the public realm. But these are two very different Gods indeed.

Hollenbach's position, typically for an overt natural law orientation, has little to say about God and God's relevance for public life. To talk

⁷A popular level attempt to do this is Alan Wolfe's *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Threat* (Boston: South End Press, 1983).

⁸Paul Ramsey, *War and the Christian Conscience: How Shall Modern War Be Conducted Justly?* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1961); David Hollenbach, *Nuclear Ethics: A Christian Moral Argument* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983); J.G. Davies, *Christians, Politics, and Violent Revolution* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976).

about public policy, Christians must talk general, natural law language and not bring their God into it. More than earlier natural law thinkers, he emphasizes the place of Christian virtues and conscience in shaping the attitude and actions of Christians—but these do not have an overt place in the public realm. Thus, for Hollenbach, the major virtue at work in just war thinking is justice, not love as it is with the others. Justice is a lowest-common denominator virtue in a pluralistic society. It is to uphold justice amidst mixed motives and wills to power that the exception to the norm of nonviolence is made and justifiable wars are fought.

Davies equates love and justice and sees them together as the bases for Christians' support for just revolutions. Love in history means caring for victims of oppression. Thus it takes the shape of justice for these people, that they get what is due to them as human beings. Love for oppressors also takes the shape of justice for the oppressed, since it is only when the oppressed receive justice that the oppressors are truly liberated and enabled themselves truly to be humanized.

Ramsey, uniquely, argues that the basic motivation for Christians fighting just wars is love, not justice. It is not some "rigorous alien natural-law principle drawn from some source outside Christian morals," but rather love itself. This love leads Christians to act on behalf of their innocent neighbors who are victims of unjust aggression. It is love for neighbors that accepts the validity of public defense, even while rejecting private self-defense. And it is love even of enemies that leads to limitations on the means of warfare. The Christian hates no one, but fights with a clear conscience, knowing that serving the public good through justifiable warfare is a true reflection of God's love.

It follows from this that Ramsey, distinct from the others, sees fighting in just wars a positive *good*, an act of love, not an exception in which the call to love is suspended due to the need to defend justice. It is not the lesser of evils, but a good thing in and of itself. There is no presupposition toward nonviolence in Ramsey—the presupposition is toward the good of the neighbor, the public good, which by definition includes the morally good possibility of just wars. On the other hand, Hollenbach strongly emphasizes the notion that war is the exception and is never morally good. It is only the lesser of evils. His notion of the state of nature is apparently one within which violence is not intrinsic. Violence does not cause good to happen, it only prevents greater evil from occurring.

Davies basically agrees with Hollenbach here. Violent revolution is justifiable only when the potential evil of war is outweighed by the existence of an even more evil unjust status quo. It is not a good to fight, though it may be the right thing to do if it is truly the least of evils. Davies does agree with Ramsey, though, in seeing justifiable violence as in some

sense a potential act of love—love for the oppressed people needing justice and even love for the oppressor needing release from that state. But the actual killing of an oppressor is never an act of love for the person killed. It is always in that sense an evil, albeit at times necessary, act.

As already mentioned, Hollenbach sees nonviolence as the norm for Christians, the basic perspective from which exceptions must be made. He admits that natural law thinkers have not always emphasized this truth, but he asserts that it is at the very heart of the Catholic tradition. Thus, the goal of just war thought for him is the abolition of nuclear weapons and even of war itself. Ramsey, of course, rejects that notion. He follows Luther in seeing nonviolence as only personal. I should not violently defend myself, at least when no one else is depending on me. But as a citizen, a neighbor, perhaps a parent or spouse, I have no legitimate recourse to nonviolence. It is wrong-headed and even dangerous to see the elimination of war as a goal. What is needed instead is war that is possible, that can be regulated to be just.

Davies' bottom line is neither violence or nonviolence, but liberation. Nonviolence can certainly be a tactic for revolution. In fact it is the preferred tactic when it works. But violence is endemic wherever injustice and oppression reign, and an absolute principle of nonviolence can only lead to an implicit complicity with that violence.

Davies's strong notion of God's kingdom means the "hermeneutics of the kingdom" is to make the world a better place, i.e., to work for liberation. A just and successful revolution, though rare, manifests God's kingdom in history. Neither Hollenbach nor Ramsey has a notion of the kingdom literally experienced in history. Hollenbach simply does not allude to it at all. For Ramsey, taking after Augustine, the kingdom of peace and justice is atemporal, eschatological in a totally future sense. Ramsey's realism leads him to reject notions such as Davies' as utopian.

In questions of approving justifiable wars, the benefit of the doubt for Ramsey goes to the government. This follows from his priority on public order and upholding the status quo. Conscientious objectors must prove their case and even then, in effect, sue for exemption, something that is not theirs by right. Individuals simply do not generally have the capability to discerning just-cause. They should take their government's word for it, secure in the knowledge that God does not hold them accountable for the wrong choices of their leaders.

Hollenbach would seem to place much more priority on the conscience of the individual Christian. The benefit of the doubt, if one starts with the assumption of nonviolence, should go to the conscientious objector, unless compelling reasons are given for fighting. For Davies, the benefit of the doubt goes to the poor and oppressed. What ultimately

matters is their need. In practice, this would go toward the conscience of the individual, perhaps in conjunction with the discernment of the community of resistance regarding probable success and last resort. If the government is on the side of oppression (as is usually the case), then it is not to be trusted in claiming that resistance to the revolution is just.

This discernment process for Davies has a lot to do with human experience. It is out of the experience of oppression that notions of the need for and appropriate tactics of justifiable revolution arise. He recognizes the validity of the just war tradition for providing criteria for just causes and tactics. But the initial step of hermeneutical suspicion flowing out of the experience is crucial. Following Kant, Ramsey holds to the opposite. “You cannot do morality a greater disservice than deriving it from experience.” He focuses on principles, in particular the principle of noncombatant immunity and the general love command that determines everything for him. Hollenbach focuses on reason tempered by conscience, with particular emphasis on reason in history. His argument in favor of nuclear pacifism is that, while not totally logical, it corresponds best to historical realities.

Despite all these fundamental differences, these three thinkers also have significant agreements, agreements that could be seen as fundamental common ground for all people holding to just war thought. These include the need for Christians to take responsibility for the public realm, seeking to act effectively in influencing the social order; the assertion that the conduct of war, to be just, must be controlled by just-action criteria; and the belief that “justice” (whatever exactly that means—for each one it is in some sense a “secular” notion) is the prerequisite for peace meaning that the violence of war can serve the end of peace.

9. Anabaptist faith and American democracy

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Heirs of the Radical Reformation continue to face basic questions about citizenship. What does it mean to be “in the world and not of it” (John 17:14-17)? What in our lives should we give to Caesar and what should we give to God (Matthew 22:15-22)?

Anabaptists living in the United States are challenged by these questions in complex ways. We find ourselves, on the one hand, in the land of freedom. The first Anabaptist generations in the 16th century, facing severe persecutions, sought desperately for safety; many groups migrated widely in this quest. Beginning in the late 17th century, many established communities in the United States. Despite periodic flaring of wartime persecutions, we may now look back with gratitude for our forebears’ opportunity to find a safe home in America.¹

We have a great deal to be grateful for in terms of religious toleration. We also, not coincidentally, have opportunities totally unimaginable for the 16th century Anabaptists to participate in political life in one of the world’s pioneering democracies. That is, not only are Mennonites tolerated, we may vote, run for office, speak out, serve on school boards, be fully participating members in American democratic processes.

On the other hand, American Mennonites are also tax-paying citizens in one of the world’s greatest-ever empires, if we define “empire” in terms of a country’s exercise of domination over many other parts of the world. Perhaps the US does not overtly possess foreign colonies in the

¹ I use “America” (reluctantly) in this essay to refer to the United States. I like the neologism “USAmerica,” coined, so far as I know, by Mary Louise Fringle in her essay, “We’re Number *What?* Winning as a Cultural Icon” *Word & World* 23.3 (Summer 2003), 285. However, “USAmerica” seems a bit too new to communicate effectively. I recognize that the USA is not the only country in “America.” Perhaps the ambivalence we may feel about using “America” as a synonym with the USA is appropriate for an essay that attempts to address the ambivalence Anabaptist citizens of the USA currently feel about that citizenship.

manner of old empires such as Great Britain. However, in terms of the actual expression of power over others, the US surely greatly surpasses even the largest reach of the British Empire. America is now the world's one great superpower, spending more on our military than just about all the rest of the world's countries combined.

The Anabaptist tradition early on expressed a strong suspicion of empires, power politics, and trust in the sword. Present-day Mennonites surely are being faithful to that tradition when we refuse to participate in, or even support, the wars of America.

However, what about the “good America,” the America of religious freedom and participatory democracy? Is the traditional Mennonite “two-kingdom” stance adequate for determining our understanding of citizenship today? In our time, people throughout the world plead for participants in American civil society to seek to influence American foreign policy to be more peaceable. Do American Anabaptist Christians have responsibility aggressively to seek to take their pacifist convictions into the public square in a way that might influence our government?

I want to suggest we have *three* distinct stories to take into account in reflecting on these questions. The first story I will call the story of Anabaptist faith. The second story, the story of the “good America,” talks of the America that welcomed migrating Mennonites and that has served as a beacon of hope for self-determination and freedom for people around the world. We may call this the “Democracy Story.” And the third, the story of the “other America,” is a story of conquest, domination, and widespread violence, the “Empire Story.”

As pacifist followers of Jesus, those adhering to the Anabaptist Story surely do appropriately seek to distance themselves from the Empire Story. Does such distancing also require of present-day Anabaptists a deep suspicion of the Democracy Story?

Anabaptist faith

A great deal of recent writing on 16th-century Anabaptism highlights the extreme diversity of the first fifty years of the Anabaptist movement—without making clear why this movement is worthy of such attention. Such writing helpfully corrects simplistic generalizations about Anabaptist uniformity. However, unfortunately, it provides little clarity for those who would find it useful to draw upon the radicality of that movement for help in negotiating our current citizenship challenges.

If we want to go beyond the portrayals that focus on Anabaptist diversity, how might we draw upon the Anabaptist legacy as we seek to discern how to respond to the citizenship issues I am raising in this essay?

As a way of approaching this question, I suggest a parallel. Scholars of the “historical Jesus” point out that one incontrovertible “fact” about Jesus that is not dependent upon the biases of reports from his followers is that Jesus was executed by the Roman state as a political criminal.² They argue that whatever else we might want to ascertain about Jesus’ life and teaching, it needs to be understood in light of that one fact. So, they assert, we must ask what in Jesus’ life and teaching led to his execution.

Perhaps we may want to follow a similar path in seeking to understand the Anabaptists—as a means of better appropriating their legacy today. Amidst their diversity—the differences we see among the Swiss and the South Germans, the Hutterites in Moravia, the Dutch and North Germans, and the various other communities—they all have one undeniable commonality. *Each* movement, *each* leader, was looked upon with suspicion, usually hostility, by the state governments and churches of Western Europe. Just about all the Anabaptists were at times hunted; many were imprisoned, even killed. The diversities among Anabaptists pale when compared to this profound common ground. “Anabaptist faith” does have some coherence, contrary to the implications of recent foci on diversity. What is it about these diverse movements and personalities that led to just about all of them being enemies of the state? The answer to this question may provide us with a core of convictions to be carried on and applied to various times and places.

This is what I identify as making up this core, recognizing that not every point applies equally to each Anabaptist group or leader. However, they apply widely enough to be seen as characteristic of the movement as a whole. The Anabaptists understood themselves as committed, above all else, to following Jesus’ way in all areas of life. As they confessed him as Lord, they sought to follow him. As a consequence of that central commitment, they found themselves in conflict with the states and state churches of Western Europe.

(1) By establishing themselves as a *free* church the Anabaptists asserted an unprecedented (and unacceptable) level of independence from the state and challenged the top-down social uniformity political and religious leaders understood to be foundational for social order. They refused to accept the Prince as ultimate authority; that is, they gave *God’s* call for how to live their ultimate loyalty, not the government’s.

(2) By asserting that it is *never* God’s will for Christians to fight (and likely, as a rule implying that it is never God’s will for *anyone* to fight), the Anabaptists challenged governmental appeals to God as the basis for

² See, e.g., N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 106-9.

war. Such governmental appeals in the 16th century—and down to the present—have played a crucial role in Western nations in garnering citizens' support for warfare.

(3) By rejecting the domination of political and religious hierarchies, the Anabaptists pointed toward *an upside-down notion of social power*. In their view, the gathered community of believers provided the best context for hearing Jesus. So, genuine power does not flow from the top of the social pyramid down, nor through the use of the sword. Discernment of God's will for human beings is not filtered through establishment mediators such as a prince or bishop. It comes directly to the community that then determines its own approach to faithfulness.

(4) By insisting on *an alternative approach to economics*, separating themselves from worldly materialism by advocating simplicity, economic sharing, mutual aid, and, in a few famous cases, common ownership of all property, the Anabaptists challenged the emerging economic basis for the Empire Story. Probably the central driving point behind the nascent Spanish conquest in the Americas, which began at the same time as the Reformation, launching the great European empires, was the quest for gold and other sources of material wealth.

These core Anabaptist convictions—the church as free from state control, the refusal to fight, the affirmation of upside-down social power, and the commitment to alternative economics present Anabaptist faith as contrary to the core convictions of the Empire Story. The opposition to warfare and exploitative economics clearly apply to our present context. So, too, do the value of upside-down social power and the commitment to forming a counter-culture that would remain clear about and committed to the convictions Anabaptists saw as central to their identity as followers of Jesus—even should such commitment be costly.

What, though, about Anabaptist convictions in relationship to the Democracy Story? Do we gain direction from these core convictions that would also support deep suspicion toward active participation in political life? Are the Anabaptist Story and the Democracy Story by necessity two totally separate, even incompatible, stories?

The first Anabaptist generations, while certainly suspicious of the powers that be and willing to separate themselves from activities, such as bearing the sword, that they saw directly contradicting the way of Jesus, seem nonetheless to have operated with assumptions that they could *directly* speak to prince, bishop, and all others in their society. They understood that they spoke a common language with others; hence, they could proclaim their convictions and the religious basis for those convictions without apology – and they expected their interlocutors to be able to understand their proclamation just fine.

A question we cannot answer is how the Anabaptists would have responded to living in the type of democratic society Americans live in today. Possibly, they would have shrunk back from active involvement, believing that their commitment to the peaceable way of Jesus precluded taking leadership roles in a society invariably resting on the power of the sword. Just as plausible, though, would be to imagine at least some Anabaptists grasping the opportunity to proclaim their core convictions as widely as possible and to seek to implement their vision for a society following Jesus' will as far as they would be allowed to—the limits to their proclamation, thus, not coming due to Anabaptists' self-imposed restrictions but due to the society at some point stopping them.

John Howard Yoder hinted at this latter possibility when he wrote that the main difference between the more widely active Quakers and the more withdrawn Anabaptists lay not so much in different core convictions as in different sets of opportunities. Quakers had more freedom to express and implement their convictions in their social context than Anabaptists did.³

In North America, Mennonites found a great place for toleration after several generations of severe persecution in Western Europe. They became a part of the multi-faceted religious mosaic of the United States and Canada. From its beginning, the US had no established state church and made allowance of some sort for conscientious objection during times of war. Mennonites have experienced (and helped foster⁴) the

³ John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes Toward War, Peace, and Revolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 238-9.

⁴ I would like to suggest, for example, that in their steadfast quest for legal recognition for their conscientious objection to the wars of America, Mennonites have made a very significant contribution to the practice of democracy in the United States. Conscientious objection has not been so much a gift from a respectful government as a demand stemming from implacable convictions that meant that Mennonite pacifists would suffer a great deal rather than take up arms. Mennonites' perseverance in their peace convictions, even at the cost of great hardship (including, in a few cases, death), in time played a major role in widening the compass of legal recognition for conscientious objectors.

This widening in turn, during the Vietnam War era, led to an extraordinarily large number of claims for CO status (reportedly over 50% of draftees by 1973). It would not seem to be a stretch to argue that the popularity of the conscientious objector option played a major role in the decision by the US government to end the draft and ultimately withdraw from Vietnam. And, perhaps, we could also say that this "threat" of widespread claims for conscientious objector status has played a large role in preventing the reinstatement of the draft and, in turn, has had a restraining impact on US military activities.

America standing for tolerance, freedom of religion, economic opportunity, protection of rights, free speech—the stuff of the Democracy Story. And for this we must be grateful. Do we Mennonites, in turn, have the responsibility to speak out openly and assertively in contributing to democracy by playing a role in the public conversation by which our society arrives at governmental policies?

The two Americas: The Democracy Story and the Empire Story

In reflecting on our responsibilities to participate in public policy conversations, a distinction between the Democracy Story and the Empire Story might help. While over-simplified, this distinction helps us think about participating in democracy as a separate issue than being complicit in militaristic state violence. The Democracy Story/Empire Story distinction reflects the thought of many observers of American society. As well, this distinction fits with a common refrain spoken to Americans traveling abroad from citizens in other countries around the world: “We love the American people and the ideals you stand for, but we do *not* like what your government does with its foreign policy.”

The essayist and historian Walter Karp, in his essay “The Two Americas,”⁵ drew the distinction between “the American republic” (that has sought to embody the ideals expressed, for example, in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights) and “the American nation” (that has sought dominance, wealth, and power throughout the world). Karp believed that these two are “deadly rivals for the love and loyalty of the American people.”⁶ He characterized the “nation” as a “poor dim thing, assembled as a corporate entity, sustained by an artificial patriotism, and given the semblance of meaning only when puffed up with the parade music of a foreign war.”⁷

Noam Chomsky, perhaps the foremost critic of the Empire Story writing in the United States today, while condemning the Empire Story with extraordinary analytical prowess, also affirms that the United States is the freest society in the world.⁸ The main hope Chomsky offers his

⁵ In Walter Karp, *Buried Alive: Essays on Our Endangered Republic* (New York: Franklin Square Press, 1992): 13-26.

⁶ Karp, *Buried*, 14.

⁷ Walter Karp, *The Politics of War: The Story of Two Wars Which Altered Forever the Political Life of the American Republic, 1890-1920* (New York: Franklin Square Books, 2003 [original edition, 1979]), ix.

⁸ Noam Chomsky, *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 268-9.

readers, in face of the extremely destructive power of the Empire Story, lays in the expansion of the Democracy Story. He cites solidarity movements in mainstream America that developed in the mid-1980s in response to U.S. wars on Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador, international solidarity organizations, the unprecedented worldwide demonstrations opposing the U.S. war on Iraq, and global justice movements that gather annually at the World Social Forum as elements of this needed expansion. Chomsky asserts, “the planet’s ‘second superpower,’ which could no longer be ignored in early 2003, has deep roots in these developments, and considerable promise.”⁹

Journalist Jonathan Schell, whose book *The Fate of the Earth*, inspired the Nuclear Freeze Movement in the early 1980s, also draws the contrast between the Empire Story and the Democracy Story in *The Unconquerable World*. “For Americans, the choice is at once between two Americas,” an “imperial America” and a “republican America.”¹⁰ Schell also uses the image of the world’s “second superpower.” Schell links these two “superpowers” with two kinds of power, drawing on Gandhi’s distinction. “‘One is obtained by the fear of punishment,’ [Gandhi] said, ‘and the other by acts of love.’” Schell calls these “cooperative power” and “coercive power.”¹¹ His book demonstrates the viability of this second kind of power, and it presents the case for harnessing cooperative power for the sake of overcoming the destructiveness of coercive power.

Environmental writer Richard Nelson in recounting his evolution toward thinking of himself as a patriot highlights our distinction between the two stories. During the 1960s, he joined movements opposing the Vietnam War, the denial of civil rights, and the power of corporations. He found himself uncomfortable with the idea of patriotism.¹² More recently, though, Nelson has come to understand that the conservation work in the United States that he is involved with requires engagement with and affirmation of the process of democracy. As he sees positive results from citizen engagement in democratic movements to protect the environment, he has grown in his gratitude for the U.S. political system. That is, he has felt “a growing sense of patriotism.”¹³ He explains:

⁹ Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003), 235-6.

¹⁰ Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003), 346-7.

¹¹ Schell, *Unconquerable*, 226.

¹² Richard Nelson, “Patriots for the American Land,” in Richard Nelson, Barry Lopez, and Terry Tempest Williams, *Patriotism and the American Land* (Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 2002), 10.

¹³ Nelson, “Patriots,” 10-11.

EMBODYING PEACE

By this I do not mean zealous loyalty toward a flag, veneration for a governmental system, or blind faith in “my country right or wrong.” I am simply acknowledging the blessed good fortune to live in a democracy, a place where citizens can substantively influence decisions about society and land. And I am expressing my growing sense of allegiance to this living nation.¹⁴

Writers loyal to the Democracy Story insist on making the *distinction* between their loyalty to America as a democracy and to America as an empire. The first loyalty provides the basis for denying the second loyalty.

Given the extent the current American empire impacts the entire world, the “death struggle” between our Empire Story and our Democracy Story has tremendous significance far beyond our country’s borders. Indian novelist and social critic Arundati Roy speaks for many around who seek to resist the destructive impact of US imperialism. She argues that the people with the most potential effectively to challenge this imperialism are the citizens of the Empire itself.

The only institution more powerful than the US government is American civil society. The rest of us are subjects of slave nations. We are by no means powerless, but you [Americans] have the power of proximity. You have access to the Imperial Palace and the emperor’s chambers. Empire’s conquests are being carried out in your name, and you have the right to refuse. You could refuse to fight. Refuse to move those missiles from the warehouse to the dock. Refuse to wave that flag. Refuse the victory parade.”¹⁵

To the extent that Roy’s perceptions are accurate, Anabaptist Americans are faced with a direct challenge. As members of our “powerful” civil society and as pacifists with theological convictions and a long history that point toward a rejection of the Empire Story, do we have a special responsibility to become active politically as an expression of our Anabaptist faith?

Faith and citizenship in a democracy

Let us grant Roy’s assumption that American people have an indispensable role to play in fostering world peace through the mechanisms of our democratic system. How does this call toward active participation in public affairs fit (or not fit) with our Anabaptist convictions that we must not compromise in our commitment to follow

¹⁴ Nelson, “Patriots,” 11.

¹⁵ Arundati Roy, “Seize the Time,” *In These Times* 27.16 (July 7, 2003), 17.

the way of Jesus? May we do *both*, participate in American public affairs *and* remain consistent in our adherence to Jesus' way?

A discussion among two prominent religious ethicists helps illumine our reflection on these questions. Jeffrey Stout, in his recent book, *Democracy and Tradition*, offers a challenge to Anabaptist Christians to seek to find a way to participate in American democracy even while maintaining our abhorrence of war and Empire. He does this by engaging the thought of social ethicist Stanley Hauerwas. Hauerwas explicitly affirms Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder as having a profound influence on his social ethics and has famously categorized himself as a "high church Mennonite."¹⁶ So, to some extent, at least, Stout's challenge to Hauerwas is a challenge to American Anabaptists.

Stout also makes a clear distinction between the two Americas:

We tend to confuse the civic nation—the people—with the nation-state. In this book, I have been encouraging identification with the civic nation, with the community of reason-givers constituted by the democratic practice of holding one another responsible. This implies no affection for the massive institutional configuration of the nation-state, of which we should always remain suspicious. The American nation-state has proven itself especially worthy of suspicion in recent decades.¹⁷

Stout uses the term "democracy" for the "civic nation" of the US that he is passionately seeking to help thrive. Central to this democracy for Stout lies the practice of public conversation, wherein citizens take an active role in reasoning together to shape their society.¹⁸ "Citizens" are characterized as those who accept some measure of responsibility for the condition of society¹⁹—and in a genuine democracy, this possibility is available to all, regardless of wealth, ethnicity, gender, and class.

Stout seeks to make the case that the authentic democratic conversation welcomes all conversing citizens openly to express whatever premises ground their claims.²⁰ That is, for example, Christians should

¹⁶ See Hauerwas's contribution to a symposium where 13 non-Mennonite theologians reflected on the Mennonite tradition, "Confessions of a Mennonite Camp Follower" in John D. Roth, ed., *Engaging Anabaptism: Conversations with a Radical Tradition* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001).

¹⁷ Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 297. Unfortunately, this clear statement of such a crucial distinction comes near the end of Stout's book. If he had placed it earlier, his argument would have been made even more clear.

¹⁸ Stout, *Democracy*, 6.

¹⁹ Stout, *Democracy*, 5.

²⁰ Stout, *Democracy*, 10.

not bracket their faith-based convictions insofar as these convictions lead to certain social perspectives. The goal of democracy is to bring as many groups as possible into the conversation, to encourage each group to be honest and straightforward in making their case for their particular perspective, to make sure to allow voice to each perspective, and then to seek to arrive at the best possible public policies.²¹

This conversation is difficult, even under the best of circumstances, because the participants do not share a common agreement on how the most important values should be ranked.²² However, Stout believes in practice that this has never been an insurmountable problem in the United States. Analogously to how informal groups of athletes play sandlot baseball or street soccer without umpires or referees, our democratic society without a monolithic authority recognized by all, still makes sense of commitment, and adjudicates right and wrong.²³

Stout's passion for defending democracy stems from his sense that US democratic practices are presently at risk. The growth of the power of corporations and the national security state has directly challenged the sustainability of hard-earned democratic traditions in the US. Stout believes that all people of good will must join together in efforts to protect and reinvigorate these democratic traditions. Hence, what he perceives to be antipathy toward the practices of democracy on the part of influential thinkers such as Stanley Hauerwas greatly troubles him.

Stout believes that Hauerwas's stated antipathy toward "liberalism" often translates into implicit hostility toward the civic nation and, hence, toward conversational or reasoning democratic practices.²⁴ This antipathy, then, pushes Christians who identify most centrally with their faith community *away* from engagement with participatory democracy in the broader society—at precisely the moment when such engagement has become particularly important, in our age of anti-democratic responses to "terrorism" and corporate domination of civic life.

As read by Stout, Hauerwas, in his focus on a Christian ethics that emphasizes the difference between Christians and non-Christians, tends to foster suspicion toward those outside of the church.²⁵ In seeing his particular religious tradition as seeking to be a community of virtue over against the sinfulness of the surrounding world, Hauerwas undercuts Christian identification with the Democracy Story.²⁶

²¹ Stout, *Democracy*, 226.

²² Stout, *Democracy*, 201.

²³ Stout, *Democracy*, 271-2.

²⁴ Stout, *Democracy*, 118.

²⁵ Stout, *Democracy*, 146.

²⁶ Stout, *Democracy*, 84.

Hauerwas's approach, as interpreted by Stout, leads to a lessening of concern about justice issues in the broader culture. Stout recognizes that Hauerwas tends toward provocative rhetoric that does not always reflect the nuances of his actual arguments. While the subtitle of Hauerwas's book *After Christendom?* asserts that justice may be a "bad idea," in the book itself Hauerwas's argument more subtly focuses its critique on a certain, narrow, Enlightenment-shaped notion of justice abstracted from faith convictions.²⁷ However, in Stout's view, the rhetoric itself is significant, and comforts to those in the churches who are relieved to hear a message that they are to be concerned with the church's internal life and not with the risky task of seeking justice in the wider world.²⁸

Hauerwas wasted no time writing an extensive response to Stout's critique.²⁹ He actually affirms much of Stout's argument. Most of the areas where he debates Stout's critique are not really central to our concerns here, such as Hauerwas taking issue with Stout's account of the chronology of the influence of moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre on Hauerwas's critique of liberal democracy. Hauerwas does affirm the value of Christians being involved in what Stout calls the "civic nation." "I see nothing that prohibits Christians from using anything they find helpful—such as the kind of democratic conversation Stout desires—to engage in the work of living in a more peaceable and just society."³⁰ He agrees with Stout's distinction between what Stout calls the "civic nation" and the nation-state "that we both believe is anything but 'democratic'."³¹ Hauerwas cites his own involvement in the public debate prior to the 2003 U.S. war on Iraq as evidence that his approach is certainly not "withdrawal" from the democratic conversation.³²

Hauerwas does disagree with Stout's assertion that by focusing on the internal life of the church, he refuses to care adequately for the wider world. He learned from Yoder that the church may make a genuine contribution to American political life by being "itself." Two key ways the church does this are by making sure to hear the voice of the "weakest member" and by engaging in "democratic conversation" due to its commitment to nonviolence.³³ Hauerwas rejects a view of the church

²⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 58.

²⁸ Stout, *Democracy*, 158.

²⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 215-42.

³⁰ Hauerwas, *Performing*, 237.

³¹ Hauerwas, *Performing*, 238.

³² Hauerwas, *Performing*, 239.

³³ Hauerwas, *Performing*, 227, 229.

that would imply that its concern with its internal life is an end in itself. “The call for the church to be the church is meant as a reminder that the church is in the world to serve the world.” He denies believing that “the boundary between the church and world is impermeable.”³⁴

So, Hauerwas seems to agree with Stout’s call for Christians to take their convictions into the public square—as Christians. Both reject the idea articulated by liberal theorists such as John Rawls that Christians and other religious people should leave their faith convictions behind when they join the democratic conversation. Hauerwas, however, seems to remain more fearful than Stout about the capabilities of Christians to join this conversation wholeheartedly and still remain truly Christian in their ways of thinking. He implies that, at some point in the public conversation, Christians likely will reach the end of their ability to remain intelligible about their convictions to those who do not share their bases for those convictions. At that point, Christians are tempted to leave out those bases—and then lose the distinctive content of their convictions.

Hauerwas quotes one of his earlier writings to make this point:

Big words like “peace” and “justice,” slogans the church adopts under the presumption that even if people do not know what “Jesus Christ is Lord” means, they will know what peace and justice mean, are words awaiting content. The church really does not know what these words mean apart from the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. It is Jesus’ story that gives content to our faith, and teaches us to be suspicious of any political slogan that does not need God to make itself intelligible.³⁵

In this essay, I do not have the space to delve further into Hauerwas’s thought. My main point here is to point to Stout’s critique of Hauerwas’s reluctance to affirm Christian participation in the public discussion with the enthusiastic commitment to the Democracy Story that Stout would wish for. Hauerwas acknowledges disagreement with Stout about the appropriate level of commitment to the Democracy Story even while agreeing with much of Stout’s concern for the need to work for peace and justice in the world. Hauerwas seems to see more tension than Stout between working for peace via enhancing faithfulness within the church on the one hand, and via intentional overt participation in public affairs on the other hand. Stout asserts that Christians may do the latter without seriously compromising the former; Hauerwas is not so sure.

³⁴ Hauerwas, *Performing*, 231.

³⁵ Hauerwas, *Performing*, 229, quoting Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 38.

Two distinct languages?

Since my concern in this paper is most of all with Mennonite understandings of citizenship, I want to turn to a Mennonite writer who has recently addressed the issues I am discussing. While not directly mentioning Hauerwas, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary peace studies professor Ted Koontz, in his essay, “Thinking Theologically About War Against Iraq,”³⁶ echoes Hauerwas’s concern about Christians proceeding too far into public policy discussions. Koontz expresses these concerns in a characteristically Mennonite framework.

While expressing support for Mennonites who publicly opposed the US war on Iraq “largely in terms of pragmatic or secular considerations” (such as just war reasoning, national self-interest, and general humanitarian concerns),³⁷ Koontz argues for the importance of Christian pacifists thinking and speaking in explicitly Christian terms. Koontz makes a distinction between what he calls pacifist Christians’ “first language” (the language of faith, most centrally based on our fundamental convictions about God and Jesus Christ) and our “second language” (the language of pragmatic or secular considerations).

He gives four reasons why using the “first language” is so important. First, because “Christians should always reject all wars” even when there are not strong “second language” reasons for doing so, we may at times have to rely on our “first language” reasons in order to remain committed to pacifism. Second, if we spend too much time speaking and thinking in our “second language,” we may actually lose our “first language.” Third, we do best to speak from our strength—few Christian pacifists are experts in the “second language.” “We likely will make more of an impact speaking our first language than speaking ‘their’ language with a foreign accent.” Fourth, we likely have allies who speak what is our “second language” as their “first language” and thus have much more expertise than we do to speak against war on pragmatic grounds.³⁸

Koontz has obviously done a great deal of serious and perceptive thinking stemming from his own impressively wide-ranging set of experiences. His distinction between “first” and “second” languages helps us with our need to be clear about our convictions and articulate in communicating them.

However, as presented in his essay, Koontz’s “first language/second language” distinction is not very coherent. On the one hand, he states

³⁶ Ted Koontz, “Thinking Theologically About War Against Iraq,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 77.1 (January 2003), 93-108.

³⁷ Koontz, “Thinking,” 93.

³⁸ Koontz, “Thinking,” 95-96.

that the “first language” includes “all those who name themselves Christian.”³⁹ But, then, when he helpfully tries to flesh out core Christian doctrinal convictions, he sounds specifically Anabaptist. To give just one example, under “salvation” he writes that “our calling is to offer this message of salvation to all, particularly those who resist or reject that offer. This winsome offer is incompatible with killing them.”⁴⁰ Clearly, the vast majority of Christians have not understood their soteriology to forbid their use of deadly force. This “first language” Koontz articulates seems to be only the “first language” of *pacifist* Christians.

On the one hand, Koontz claims all Christians speak the same “first language” because they all share a common confession concerning Jesus Christ. Yet, when he articulates his christology, it is strongly pacifist in a way that most Christians would not agree with. From another angle, Koontz’s implication that public policy actors are not Christians (since they cannot understand our “first language”) ignores the fact that the vast majority of US Presidents and legislators have been and continue to be professing Christians. And at least two of the main advocates for the Empire Story, presidents Woodrow Wilson and George W. Bush have been especially explicit in professing overtly Christian commitments.

If we were to use the “two language” motif, might it not be more helpful to distinguish between those who speak the language of Empire and those who speak the language of Democracy? Or those who speak the language of Pacifism and those who speak the language of Just War? If we did, though, we will have Christians on both sides of the distinction—and Koontz’s use of his distinction will lose much of its relevance.

A second question arises from Koontz’s assertion that “often our ‘first language’ of Christian theology will be unintelligible or unacceptable to our neighbors and our policymakers.”⁴¹ Besides my point that this kind of comment seems to assume that U.S. policymakers are not Christians, we also need to reflect on why (if Koontz is indeed correct) our language of Christian theology would be “unintelligible.” Koontz seems to imply that there is something about Christian theology that cannot be understood by people who are not Christians. It is possible to catch a whiff of Gnosticism, here, wherein only those with special epistemological gifts are capable of making sense of the rationale for “insider” convictions.

Perhaps, instead, if Christians do indeed have a problem with their convictions being intelligible, it is due to this so-called “first language” of Christian faith being for many Christians wrapped in jargon. The jargon creates an artificial divide not related to the intelligibility of our

³⁹ Koontz, “Thinking,” 96.

⁴⁰ Koontz, “Thinking,” 99.

⁴¹ Koontz, “Thinking,” 94.

convictions so much as our own inability to speak clearly and concretely about them. As Gabriel Josipovici argues about the Bible in general,⁴² and as is especially clear with Jesus, the core writings of Christian faith do not share this jargon-created “unintelligibility.”

The model of Jesus, who presented his core theology in concrete, accessible language, provides us with a different kind of challenge. Christian pacifists need not construct a first language/second language distinction that may have the effect of inhibiting our engagement in the much-needed conversation in our broader culture concerning issues of war and peace. Rather, we should learn better how to speak of our faith convictions in the same kind of concrete, accessible way that Jesus did – to anyone who will listen in any context where we can.

Koontz worries that if we do not make a careful distinction between our “first language” and our “second language,” and focus our energies on the former, that we run the risk of losing our “first language.” Again, granting his premise, in this case that Christian pacifists do commonly lose their “first language” (and, he appears to be implying, their pacifism with it), we still must wonder about the reasons for this loss.

Perhaps there are other reasons for the loss of pacifist convictions in relation to broader identification with public policy makers. One of these reasons may actually be that what Koontz calls our “second language,” the language of public policy, is corrupted by many people in power. Through the use of propaganda (such as the current talk about establishing a “democracy” in Iraq when obviously the major actors in the Bush Administration despise genuine democracy, as seen in their extreme hostility to the leaders of potential US allies such as Germany and Turkey who listened responsively to their citizens who strongly opposed the US war on Iraq), public policy actors often act in ways that actually contradict the stated values of the “second language” world itself.

That is, were public policy actors seriously to seek to act according to values such as democracy, humanitarianism, genuine national and global self-interest for the majority of the people, and human rights, they would not lead the US into the kinds of hegemonic violence that has characterized our foreign policy since World War II. The stated values of the US public policy world are not inherently antithetical to Christian pacifism. The value system of public policy could support the thorough rejection of warfare.⁴³ The likelihood of that happening is lessened by the kind of self-imposed inhibitions Koontz seems to be calling for, as they limit the involvement of voices that could support such a rejection.

⁴² Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁴³ See Schell, *Unconquerable*, for evidence supporting this assertion.

If we do not have a clear sense for how our theologically-based convictions *link* with pragmatically and humanistically grounded convictions we will be more likely to toss them aside when they are challenged. We all know stories of people who “lose their faith” when they encounter a wider world that their narrow “first language” has not prepared them to deal with.

Koontz argues that one of the reasons for cultivating the “first language” is so we will still have grounds to oppose war even when we do not have strong “second language” bases for doing so, citing World War II as a case where *surely* “pragmatic and humanitarian considerations did not line up clearly in opposition to war.”⁴⁴ However, we must ask how viable a Christian pacifism ultimately can be when it grants that there are not strong real-world reasons for opposing war. Such an admission may lead to a kind of fideistic pacifism where our rejection of war becomes merely a “leap of faith.” In fact, many people did oppose World War II on pragmatic and humanitarian grounds—to them it was clear even if they did not have Jesus’ commands to fall back on.⁴⁵ It would seem that simply the fact that the War left *eighty million* people dead would be pretty strong humanitarian grounds for opposing it.

To grant Koontz’s point that for some wars we do not have strong “second language” reasons for opposing may well lead to Christian pacifism becoming primarily a “vocational” matter for people who agree that their core convictions are not normative for the wider world. That is not a position that will be very attractive either for those who do feel a strong sense of responsibility for being a positive influence in that wider world nor for those who seek a sense of integration between their Christian convictions and their beliefs about social life.

Fortunately, many outside of Koontz’s “first language” circle have been doing excellent work over the past century in articulating and putting into practice pacifist or near-pacifist convictions that have great

⁴⁴ Koontz, “Thinking,” 94-95.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Theodore Grimsrud, “Saying No to the ‘Good War’: An Ethical Analysis of Conscientious Objection to World War II,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 1988). Chapters four and five consider two significant groups of COs who grounded their opposition to the War in “second language” considerations, “resisters” who had the stereotypical unyielding conscience that forbade using violence and “transformers” who sought to effect social change toward a warless world. Such pacifists tended to be articulate and hence have left an extensive literature accounting for their convictions. A couple of representative books include James Peck, *We Would Not Kill* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1958) and Franklin Zahn, *Deserter From Violence: Experiments with Gandhi’s Truth* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1984).

relevance to the wider world we live in. We may, most obviously, cite Mohandas Gandhi and those influenced by his work. However many others also have been working at understanding the world in ways that are fully compatible with Christian pacifism providing evidence that *all* wars are illegitimate on pragmatic and humanitarian grounds.⁴⁶

Perhaps this is not Koontz's intent, but his argument implies a less than full engagement for Christian pacifists with the call (and opportunity) to have an impact on public policy as *citizens* of the United States. In his focus on the integrity of our "first" language he seems to echo Hauerwas's focus on the "church being the church" as our main social responsibility. Both Koontz and Hauerwas argue that we should hope to impact our larger society on issues of war and peace; both abhor the classic "two kingdom" notion that the wars of the world are of no concern for followers of Jesus. Nonetheless, they seem ambivalent about taking up Jeffrey Stout's implied challenge to seek actively to enter the public square as *Christian pacifists* and challenge American foreign policy head on—with the language of citizenship and democracy.

However, if we take seriously the distinction I have discussed between the Empire Story and Democracy Story, and accept Stout's claim that the American democratic conversation does allow for us to remain fully committed to our faith convictions and for us to express those convictions openly and without watering them down, then we may affirm full and active participation in public debate as Anabaptist Christians.

"Seek the welfare of the city" (Jeremiah 29:7)

If we were to seek to combine a strong and overt commitment to our core Anabaptist convictions with a boldness in participating fully in the

⁴⁶ A few years ago, I developed a class on violence and human nature, in part stimulated by Walter Wink's short discussion of human nature in *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). I was not able to find much material from a *Christian* pacifist perspective. However, I did find several quite insightful "secular" texts that point to the case Christian pacifists should also work on that human beings are not inherently violent. These include James Gilligan, *Violence: Our Deadly Epidemic and Its Causes* (New York: Putnam, 1996); Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1984); Ashley Montagu, *The Nature of Human Aggression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), and Andrew Bard Schmoekler, *The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Evolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984). At least in terms of understandings of human nature, these four books are much closer to the "first language" of Christian pacifism insofar as that pacifism reflects biblical anthropology than probably most of Christian theology since Augustine.

democratic conversation of the American civic nation, with a special concern for resisting the supremacy of the Empire Story in our culture, what might we say and do? Let us return to the four core 16th-century Anabaptist convictions that I spoke to above: the church as free from state control, the refusal to fight in wars, the affirmation of upside-down social power, and the commitment to an alternative economics.

Self-consciousness as a community of faith free from state control in the 16th century did not simply lead to institutional independence, where the church could name its own leaders, but signified the affirmation of a different worldview, centered on a different set of values. The way of Jesus took precedence over the way of Caesar.

The Mennonite tradition has tended, though, to draw some distorted applications from the free church principle. Abraham's calling in the ancient Near East centered on the faith community being a light to the nations (Gen 12:3).⁴⁷ However, his faith descendants have tended to see their election as the called people of God as being about their own security and existence as an end in itself rather than as being about their calling to be a light to the nations (Gen 12:3). In parallel fashion, the embrace of a free church approach is best understood as being a means for people of faith having a more creative and profound impact on their wider world ("the nations"), not as a warrant for withdrawal and separation. We could say, in our context, then, that as a free church we should be in a strong position to perceive the difference between the Empire Story and the Democracy Story. We should be in a position to discern how the best of the Democracy Story draws on the best of the biblical tradition and deserves our strong support. Likewise, we should also be in a position to offer penetrating critiques of the Empire Story and its concomitant commitment to the myth of redemptive violence.

In relation to the rejection of participation in warfare, the same challenge offered above concerning the meaning of election applies. Certainly, as Koontz powerfully argues, we need to devote great energy and creativity to sustaining our Anabaptist peace position. However, our "treasure" may turn to dust if we are not testing it, strengthening it, and applying it in the world around us. Our pacifism is not given to us merely so that our own children may remain safely behind when the servants of Mars send their children off to spend their lives in war.

From the perspective of this essay, part of what our pacifism should be helping us to do is joining the public discussion and helping our non-

⁴⁷ See Ted Grimsrud, *God's Healing Strategy: An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Bible* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press US, 2000) for a popular-level presentation of an argument that this calling of Abraham serves as the best overall rubric for understanding the Bible as a whole.

pacifist neighbors better to see how the Empire Story in contemporary America subverts the Democracy Story we all profess to affirm. I fear that Koontz's concern about keeping the "first and second languages" distinct and Hauerwas's concern about "the church being the church" may be selling the potential power of our pacifist witness way too short.⁴⁸

The Anabaptists' convictions about upside-down social power challenge top-down political and ecclesial domination characteristic of the modern era. As articulated by Schell, perhaps the major global political dynamic in our post-colonial time is that people in countries throughout the world desire to be free from the domination of outside powers.⁴⁹ Anabaptists should support such movements, perceiving them as a sign of great hope that the Empire Story may be resisted. However, we are challenged to enter the discussion by asserting that these drives for self-determination dare not become merely new versions of the Empire Story. We certainly must draw upon our Anabaptist tradition in offering a theological critique of violence and domination in all of its forms. However, we also should consider offering this critique in conjunction with affirmations of the Democracy Story in providing a vision for self-determination that is humane and life-enhancing.⁵⁰

Finally, I would like to broaden the point about fostering an alternative economics a bit, maybe simply by using the term "economics" in the sense of "household" or "community." Our "alternative economics" may be seen as constructing an alternative community. We *are* called to live as a people of faith shaped by God's mercy whose common life embodies that mercy. This calling likely will lead people of faith to live *differently* from their wider culture.

My argument in this essay is meant to reinforce our Anabaptist sense of the importance of foster our faith communities existing as contrast societies pointing to a new way of life. The Anabaptist commitment to

⁴⁸ I appreciate Koontz's story at the end his essay about his own witness to his Christian pacifism in his lecture to a conference of public policy thinkers ("Thinking," 104-8). It strikes me, though, that his story illustrates why we are better off not to think of our "first language" as being "unintelligible or unacceptable to our neighbors and our policymakers" (94). Rather, it seems more to me to illustrate that all humans speak the same basic language (which is why Jesus' style of teaching is so effective) and that the best thing we can do is articulate our pacifist convictions and their policy ramifications to any and all who will listen (as Stout would have us do).

⁴⁹ Schell, *The Unconquerable World*.

⁵⁰ On this point, engagement with liberation theology might be fruitful. For an earlier, and quite interesting, beginning conversation see Daniel Schipani, ed., *Freedom and Discipleship: Liberation Theology in an Anabaptist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

share life together in practical ways as a means of sustaining their witness to the way of Jesus remains central to the possibilities of genuinely living faithfully. Present-day Anabaptists must not simply allow ourselves to acculturate and be absorbed in the broader American culture. However, I am trying to suggest that our task of fostering a sense of separation from the “world” (i.e., “domination system”) is *for the sake of* constructive engagement with the “world” (as the object of God’s love—John 3:16).

Hauerwas and Koontz surely capture an essential Anabaptist insight when they challenge the church to devote energy to being clear about its distinctive beliefs, and to insist that those beliefs must always govern Christian social involvement. However, I do not find them clear enough in articulating how this work of developing clear theologically-based social ethics serves Christians’ calling to be fruitful instruments of God’s in helping to heal the nations and transform even “the kings of the earth” (Rev 21-22).

Jeffrey Stout has given Anabaptists a good challenge. We may see continuity between the core convictions of the Anabaptists and our potential today in the United States to make a creative contribution to making the world a more peaceable, humane place. We must take seriously the potential we have through our nation’s democratic processes to resist Empire as a way of life. Stout gives us hope that it is indeed possible (and necessary for our sake as Anabaptist Christians and for our sake as a citizens of the oh-so-powerful country) for us boldly to enter America’s public conversation as citizens and as Anabaptist Christians—recognizing that we would not be faithful to either calling were we to separate them.

10. Rethinking the “church/sect” typology

[This essay was first published in Ted Grimsrud, Embodiment of the Way of Jesus: Anabaptist Convictions for the Twenty-First Century (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007), 215-33. It was originally written in 1986.]

Most discussions of the relationship between Anabaptists and the wider world over the past several generations have been profoundly shaped by the work of Ernst Troeltsch, a German theologian and politician who died in 1920. In particular, Troeltsch’s magisterial work, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, set forth the definitive church/sect typology that has influenced all subsequent analyses of Christianity and culture. Now, about a century after its first publication, Troeltsch’s analysis still provides the starting point for thinking about church and culture issues. I will suggest that, perceptive as Troeltsch was, his influence has left us with a barrier that must be overcome for more fruitful thinking about the Anabaptist tradition and culture.

“Sectarianism” in the *Social Teaching*

Troeltsch attempts through historical reconstruction to understand interrelationships between Christianity and the wider world, and thereby to help Christians know better how to relate to current social problems. He identifies the basic religious impulse of Christianity and traces its interaction with “secular” or “social” institutions such as the economy, the family, and the state. The basic Christian “idea” is independent of these social institutions in Troeltsch’s view. It is not totally determined by these institutions, nor is it unaffected by them. Christianity’s is a history of constant interaction of the religious impulse with secular structures. Troeltsch sees this interaction as the story of the continual compromise of the pure religious impulse in the churches’ efforts to influence the world, coupled with continual rebellions against these compromises. “Sectarianism” emerges from these rebellions against compromise.

The early church was not a sect *per se* because sectarianism as a type was not possible until the church-type fully emerged many centuries

later. The early church was founded on the “religious idea,” with its inner dynamic independent of social and historical forces.¹ Jesus founded a new religion based on a “purely religious” message. His first followers leaned toward simple conditions of living and saw the community of faith as a united whole independent of the state. They regarded the “world” as evil, made the love ethic central, had strong eschatological expectations, and emphasized a non-sacramental and purely ethical gospel.²

Not surprisingly, later manifestations of “sectarianism” pointed back to the early church as their ideal since the core characteristics began then. In Troeltsch’s view, though, from at least the time of the Apostle Paul the sectarian impulse was joined by a church-type impulse.³ The early church was never purely sectarian. So the church-type can also point back to early developments indicating its authenticity as well. The seeds of the church-type can be found in Paulinism. Troeltsch sees the movement of the early sect-like church to the church-type as inevitable. The early naive vital religious content very early on began to fuse with the religious forces of the surrounding intellectual milieu.⁴

Early Catholicism implemented a key element of the church-type by centralizing salvation, making it unattainable outside of the sacraments that required a duly ordained priest.⁵ As time went on the church became increasingly urbanized and lost its expectation of a soon end to history. It became more conservative and drew ever closer to the state.⁶

The pure “religious idea” did not (perhaps could not) die out. It lived on, even in the church, with the ideal of sanctification and brotherly love that, though bound up with sacramental ideas, remained always capable of a vital release.⁷ The main embodiment of the sect-type was found in monasticism. As the church-type became solidified, monasticism increasingly served as a “safety valve” for the power of the sectarian impulse. Monasticism arose as the church found rapprochement with Roman society and ultimately took charge of all genuine Christian social work maintaining close identification with the love ethic of the gospel.⁸

¹Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, translated by Olive Wyon (New York: Harper, 1930), 48.

²Troeltsch, *Social*, 44, 86, 97, 101.

³Some of the church-type impulses in Paul, according to Troeltsch, included: (1) objective salvation, (2) submission to the state, (3) rich people welcomed into the church, (4) urban location.

⁴Troeltsch, *Social*, 68.

⁵Troeltsch, *Social*, 95–6.

⁶Troeltsch, *Social*, 186.

⁷Troeltsch, *Social*, 161.

⁸Troeltsch, *Social*, 329.

The full-fledged church-type found its embodiment in the reign of Pope Gregory VII in the 11th century and its fullest intellectual articulation in the theology of Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. Here we have Troeltsch’s “unity of civilization,” where the church dominates the entire social order. Concomitant with the establishment of the mature church-type came the first emergence of the more-or-less pure sect type, the eleventh-century Cathari, who shared many characteristics with movements that were to follow:

Free lay-preaching, the criticism of the Church by the laity, the intimate fellowship of the scattered members, the practical example of poverty, indifference towards the state and the ruling classes, the rejection of the official church and of its priesthood, the refusal to swear in a court of law, or to have anything to do with the administration of justice, or with force, the abrogation of duties and tithes, the independent study of the Bible, and the habit of testing everything in church life by the standard of the primitive church.⁹

Various movements followed the Cathari over the next few centuries. These included Waldensians and Franciscans of the 13th century (the latter being assimilated into the Catholic church and soon losing its sect status), Lollards in England in the 14th century, and Hussites in central Europe in the 15th century. This latter movement split into two groups embodying two types of sectarianism, Taborites and Czech Brethren. The former were an “aggressive sect,” arguing for and practicing violent revolution. The latter were a “passive sect,” favoring withdrawal and pacifism. Troeltsch asserts that the 16th century Anabaptists constituted the last “pure” manifestation of the sect-type.¹⁰

Characteristics of “sectarianism”

Troeltsch follows the stream of history. Numerous times he lists the characteristics of “sectarianism,” and lists are not always the same. His first and most extended discussion comes up in chapter nine of the larger section “Medieval Catholicism” entitled “The Absolute Law of God and of Nature, and the Sect.”¹¹ Here Troeltsch focuses on the early sectarian groups, especially the Cathari, Waldensians, and early Franciscans. The various characteristics listed by Troeltsch here become definitive of what he means by “sectarianism.” The central ones include:

⁹Troeltsch, *Social*, 209.

¹⁰Troeltsch, *Social*, 366–7.

¹¹Troeltsch, *Social*, 329–47.

(1) Indifference and even hostility toward the world and toward secular social institutions and toward the authority of the state and ruling classes.

(2) Made up of comparatively small groups, often appearing in the form of love communism. The sects rejected dominating the masses but gathered a select group of the elect. They expected that all of the people in these small groups would follow the radical demands of the gospel.

(3) Membership is strictly voluntary.

(4) Connected with the lower classes.

(5) Contact with God not mediated through sacraments or church hierarchy. Members are referred directly to the supernatural aim of life. Essentially lay movements. Critical of the official spiritual guides and theologians of the church. The office of the ministry is based on religious service and can therefore rest entirely upon lay people.

(6) All members expected to be ascetic, not so much of rejecting the sense life and normal day-to-day life like monks, but in the sense of general detachment from the world expressed in the refusal to use the law, swear in court, own property, or take part in war.

(7) The appeal is made to the early church and New Testament. "Scripture history and the history of the primitive church are permanent ideals to be accepted in their literal sense and not the starting-point, historically limited and defined, for the development of the church."¹²

(8) Subjective holiness is emphasized, not objective grace. Spiritual progress depends not on the objective impartation of grace through the sacrament but on individual personal effort.

(9) There is no conception of relative elements and gradual evolution of society—absolute contrasts alone existed.

(10) The idea of law is substituted for the idea of the church as the organ of grace and redemption.

In his conclusion to this section, Troeltsch summarizes the elements of "sectarianism": it makes central the principle of subjective truth and unity, and of the evangelical standards without compromise. It renounces universalism. In the sect the individual puts the gospel into practice. The sect is more mobile and subjective. Sectarianism is the truer and more inward principle, because it is at the same time more exclusive and more powerful, and it is firmly based upon the literal interpretation of the gospel.¹³ Another summary comes in the discussion of Protestantism; Troeltsch focuses on four attributes: (1) the Christian character of the social ideal of the gospel should be proved by the group's internal unity

¹²Troeltsch, *Social*, 336.

¹³Troeltsch, *Social*, 381.

and the practical behavior of the members, not by objective institutional guarantees; (2) because secular institutions, groups, and values are sinful, sects radically reject secular life and its works, seeking to create a social order based purely upon the principle of the gospel; (3) the sect-type rejects the idea of nature as the “complement” of grace and the corresponding goal of dominating the masses, confining its influence to small circles of the committed and rejecting “fallen nature” altogether as something which could not possibly be harmonized with grace at all; (4) Christ is seen as the law-giver, divine example, and source of all immediate influence and activity.¹⁴

Troeltsch sees Anabaptists as the paradigmatic sect. Their views closely parallel the Medieval sects: adult baptism, implying the voluntary principle; church discipline and “a pure church;” the Lord’s supper as a festival of Christian fellowship; detachment from the state; endurance of persecution; mutual aid; the impossibility of carrying out the law of Christ in the world; Sermon on the Mount; rejection of the oath, war, law, and the state’s authority; equality of all church members; selection of church leaders by congregations; and in general the whole movement springing from the lower classes.¹⁵

The sect, in Troeltsch’s view, separates individuals from the world by conscious hostility to “worldliness” and by ethical severity, binding them together in a voluntary fellowship, established upon mutual control and penitential discipline, laying upon individuals the obligation to follow the example and submit to the authority of Christ.¹⁶ The sect-type is in close touch with the basic “religious idea” that was responsible for Christianity to begin with. Thus it is important as a source of dynamism and life for the church-type, which all too easily sinks into mere conformism with the wider world. However, because the mission of the church in the modern world, as it was in the medieval world, is that of being a “political and civilizing agency,”¹⁷ the church-type is superior to the sect-type in terms of Christianity’s responsibilities for the real world.

The church preserves the religious elements of grace and redemption; it makes it possible to differentiate between divine grace and human effort; it is able to include the most varied degrees of Christian attainment and maturity, and therefore it alone is capable of fostering a popular religion which inevitably involves a great variety in its membership.¹⁸

¹⁴Troeltsch, *Social*, 461–3.

¹⁵Troeltsch, *Social*, 695–6, 703.

¹⁶Troeltsch, *Social*, 743.

¹⁷Troeltsch, *Social*, 222.

¹⁸Troeltsch, *Social*, 1007.

Troeltsch's method

Troeltsch attempted an inductive historical study, claiming that the results of his study “are genuine results which have been gained from the process of research, not theses which the book was written to support.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, he has methodological assumptions when he approaches the material and that he uses to interpret his data. Three assumptions seem to have particular significance for his discussion of “sectarianism” and for discussions following in his wake. These three are his use of ideal types, the centrality in his discussion of his concept of the “religious idea,” and his posing many of his perceived problems in dialectical form.

1. *Ideal Typology.* The “ideal type” method is important for the study of “sectarianism.” Troeltsch uses this method to explain and characterize various ways Christians have related the basic Christian religious “idea” with the social structures of the secular world. Troeltsch comes up with a typology that provides a model that is able to order and explain the church-world issue throughout the history of Christianity. To a large degree Troeltsch’s types grow out of the historical reality of medieval Christendom. When the defining characteristics are applied to later eras the danger of a reification of the types arises. Troeltsch’s own historical descriptions throw into question the applicability of “sect-type” to phenomena as diverse as, for example, the Cathari and Methodists.

In Troeltsch’s treatment of “sectarianism” the ideal type “sect” comes to be perceived as an independent unit, despite it being a contextual synthesis. Varying characteristics are selected as significant, depending on the context in which the type is being used. Since “sect” does not have to correspond with any particular historical reality, there are fewer checks against it being used in a manner conforming with pre-existing biases—whether the sociologist is overtly trying to be normative or not.

2. *The “Religious Idea.”* The “religious idea” is an important assumption of Troeltsch’s that greatly affects his method. He argues that religion grows out of the autonomy of mind or “spirit” over against nature. Religion must, primarily, be considered to have a validity of its own. It cannot be explained in terms of some other human phenomenon. It must be understood in its own right, in terms of what is essential to religion as such. Duane Friesen points out that Troeltsch was influenced by Kantian epistemology in his attempt to abstract from reality the *a priori* principles of religion.²⁰ The attempt to construct a rationally valid truth content for

¹⁹Troeltsch, *Social*, 20.

²⁰Duane K. Friesen, “The Relationship Between Ernst Troeltsch’s Theory of Religion and His Typology of Religious Association,” (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 1972), 39–40. I am indebted to Friesen for my entire discussion of

religion presupposes that there is an essential core of religion that can be referred to in abstraction from the socio-cultural context of experience. The religious “idea” relates to a transcendental realm that must then be related to culture. The religious “idea” of Christianity, being at first purely religious and in opposition to culture, must then be synthesized with culture. By definition the core of religion is “beyond” culture. The distinction between the *a priori* and the actual is thus the basis for a fundamental duality that distinguishes religion from culture.

One implication of this perspective is that anyone who has a radical commitment to religion is thus *by definition* “beyond” or opposed to culture. This assumption regarding the total disjunction between radical religious commitment and human culture is central in just about all treatments of “sectarianism” from Troeltsch on.

The special problem for Christianity, as Troeltsch sees it, is how to relate the religious goal of Christianity, by definition a goal oriented “beyond” history, to the basic values and goals inherent within the cultural process itself. He sees the problem of church and world as the problem of relating the absolute to the relative. The purity of the religious idea is defined in relationship to the absolute, a realm of being beyond culture. This establishes a fundamental duality between religion and culture that can only be overcome through compromise.²¹ Though always expressed in culture, a structure of religious consciousness exists beyond culture that itself is not immersed within the historical world. Religion both is set over against culture and at the same time must be expressed within culture or synthesized with culture.

Troeltsch, disagreeing with church historian Adolf Harnack, asserts that in the original form alone we do not find the essence of Christianity. His notion of the religious idea with regard to Christianity is not that of an unchangeable idea established for all times that continues to develop in a variety of manifestations. In Troeltsch’s view, the core of Christianity is a spiritual principle that evolves. Its continuity lies in its spiritual power expressed in various ways.²² For Troeltsch, Christianity’s essence may be found in the integration of the spiritual and driving impulse of the Christian idea with the present cultural situation.

Troeltsch’s religious idea concept shapes his view of the relationship of Christianity and history, Christianity and culture, and thus his

Troeltsch’s methodology. Friesen has updated his critique of Troeltsch in “A Critical Assessment of Troeltsch’s Typology of Religious Association,” in *Studies in the Theological Ethics of Ernst Troeltsch*, edited by Max A. Myers and Michael R. LaChat (Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellon, 1991), 73-118.

²¹Friesen, “Relationship,” 40-1.

²²Friesen, “Relationship,” 137.

typology of the main ways this relationship has been expressed. Friesen argues that Troeltsch's sharp opposition between the Christian idea and history and culture does not allow for an "ethics of redemption." This "ethics" rejects Troeltsch's view of God's kingdom as a realm of absolute ideals beyond history. Rather, it sees the kingdom in relation to a redemptive process happening within history already being realized in Jesus, the church, the church's prophetic witness in the world, and partial expressions of authentic existence in institutions other than the church.²³

This definitional assumption regarding the sharp disjunction between the Christian idea and culture in effect makes it also definitional that those closely identified with the "pure" Christian idea (i.e., "sectarians") are necessarily totally opposed to secular culture. This assumption remains central in the social scientific study of "sectarianism."

3. *Dialectical Thinking.* The third methodological issue is Troeltsch's use of dialectical thinking. Troeltsch expresses his thought in polarities or tensions that must be related to each other. The major questions behind his research in the *Social Teaching* are posed as issues in which opposing principles must be related. He posits a three-part typology (church, sect, and mysticism) that can be seen as a reflection of this mode of reasoning that defines groups in terms of a radical dualism, two extremes with a position in the middle. The sect-type and mystic-type express primarily one-sided values whereas the church-type usually synthesizes the one-sided values expressed in either of the other types with some other value.

The *Social Teaching* seeks to discover the way that the church has been able in the past to harmonize with the basic non-religious forces of the world and achieve a unity of civilization. This historical analysis is necessary in order to solve the normative problem for the modern world. Thus concepts such as "compromise," "unity of civilization," and "harmonization" are used by Troeltsch to describe how conflicting value structures of religious and secular institutions have been bridged in the past and how they may and *ought* to be bridged in the future.

Troeltsch formulates the church/world problem as an opposition that must then be synthesized in various ways by various groups. It is the interplay of religious and cultural values that produce great syntheses of church history. This process may be seen as a process of thesis (the Christian idea)—antithesis (history/culture)—synthesis (compromise between the two) that is the only way the Christian idea can survive in history. After the synthesis comes a reaction fed by the pure Christian idea leading to "sectarianism." Troeltsch writes that the kingdom of God is "an ideal which cannot be realized within this world apart from

²³Friesen, "Relationship," 312.

compromise. Therefore, the history of the Christian ethos becomes the story of a constantly renewed search for this compromise, and of fresh opposition to this spirit of compromise.”²⁴

In its basic religious idea the sect-type revives the radical religious spirit over against the compromises of the church. The pure religious perspective orients humankind toward an objective value beyond the world, leading to an attitude of indifference toward the world. The radical ideal of the sects then either draws them out of the world or involves them in programs of radical reform to transform the world according to their ideal. Thus it asserts religious ideals over against secular ideals, and will not compromise these values with each other.

Troeltsch tends to value most highly those views that best relate the polarities he sees in human existence. The “inadequate” religious views are the one-sided ones that fail to bring together the polarities. The more adequate religious views must assert the radical transcendence of the religious idea (toward the absolute), but only in order to again synthesize with culture (toward the relative). For Troeltsch, the sect-type asserts transcendence without synthesizing with culture, whereas the church-type more adequately relates both with the absolute and historicity.

Friesen argues that this polarity-oriented perspective blinds Troeltsch to the possibility that “sectarianism” is best seen in its discriminating ethic. Sometimes “sectarians” argue that full cooperation with an aspect of secular culture is legitimate, at other times they opposed a certain practice. Troeltsch’s “either-or” dualism cannot allow for a discriminating position.²⁵

Sociologists’ critique of sect typologizing

Many sociologists have expressed criticisms of the sect-typologizing of Troeltsch and his successors largely on methodological grounds. I will focus on three general criticisms.

1. *Ideal Typology*. Critics see great danger of distortion in the use of ideal typology. The ideal types are often formulated with regard to one particular set of data and then applied as is to other *different* data. Paul Gustafson makes this charge specifically with regard to Troeltsch.

The very near proximity of type and “reality” becomes the stumbling block for Troeltsch. The types become readily reified. The new forms of post-Reformation Christianity must be churches or sects. When it becomes impossible to fit them into either category, and this happens

²⁴Troeltsch, *Social*, 999.

²⁵Friesen, “Relationship,” 311.

easily because as realities the new forms vary from the many logically interrelated characteristics of the church and sect, new categories are created. These categories are not consistently related to the original one because they are ad hoc creations, without attention to the originally accentuated characteristics first used.²⁶

Gustafson argues that those who follow Troeltsch in using ideal-typology of churches and sects share the same problem. The Troeltsch typology was constructed with reference to a particular time in the history of Christianity. But that typology has tended to be universalized, even though formulated with regard to particular historical realities. When this universalized type does not directly fit a new particular historical reality, new categories are created. Over time the number of categories proliferates, the original particular historical realities that gave rise to the type are left far behind, and confusion reigns.²⁷

2. *Normativeness.* Troeltsch and his follower H. Richard Niebuhr are accused of being too concerned with what the appropriate relationship between Christianity and the world should be to allow them to be adequately scientific and objective in describing the types. Allan W. Eister makes a clear distinction between Troeltsch studying the churches as a theologian and Max Weber studying them as a social scientist.

Whereas Weber wrote from the perspective of the sociologist, first and last, Troeltsch was *primarily* concerned with Christian ethics—and this has a *very* important bearing on the latter's conceptions of church and sect. Troeltsch chose to emphasize, as the central characteristic of the church, its "acceptance" of the secular order, at least "to a certain extent...in order to dominate the masses." And he implied that this is what the church *desired*—and intended to do. By stressing the "accommodative" character of the church (and the non-accommodative character of the sect)—and by tying these to "compromise" (or non-compromise) of the Christian ethic, Troeltsch introduced what is in effect an open invitation, if not a demand, for subjective, value-laden definitions. For what is "compromise" of an ethic to one believer—or even to a non-believer—is *not* compromise to another.²⁸

Eister is concerned that Troeltsch and his followers use concepts in which judgments regarding notions such as "compromise" are implicit.

²⁶Paul Gustafson, "Church and Sect or Church and Ascetic Protestantism?" *Encounter* 30 (1969), 144–5.

²⁷P. Gustafson, "Church," 147.

²⁸Allan W. Eister, "Toward a Radical Critique of Church-Sect Typologizing," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6 (1967), 87.

These can be built into definitions themselves on the basis of procedures that do not readily lend themselves to explicit specifications. Thus, many scholars may at times be guilty of making value judgments unwittingly and, hence, necessarily also uncritically.²⁹ This uncritical use of value-laden concepts in the service of normative evaluations of the relationship of Christianity and the world distorts the very definitions of the types.

3. *Not Testable.* Critics also argue that Troeltsch and his followers assert too many variant characteristics of “sectarianism” for the concept “sectarianism” to be empirically tested. According to Eister, surveying what is said about “sectarianism” as an analytic concept reveals a list of dozens of separate characteristics that are combined in a variety of ways and presented as “defining traits” of “sectarianism.” Frequently the same author utilizes different definitions within the space of a single article, giving the impression that the writer is not clear as to what conception has been settled for.³⁰

In sociology of religion, in Gustafson’s view, the frame used in the discussion of church and sect varies from person to person, resulting in two problems: (1) the use of the same terms for differing concepts that in the overlap of observable characteristics have frequently been assumed to be identical; and (2) a proliferation of sub-types when the types “church” and “sect” are seen as inadequate to apply to the variety of phenomena. But due to differences in frames, these groups of subtypes vary greatly one from another.³¹ Such diversity of definition and application makes commonly accepted empirical testing and verification nearly impossible.

Sociology of religion simply has not been able to determine a widely agreed-upon definition of the church-sect typology. Thus it also has been unable to establish what the *empirical* correlates of “sectness” are.³² Without empirical testability and testing, the concepts “church” and “sect” are said to lose their potential for illumination. For example, the assumption of a direct correlation between low socio-economic status and “sectarianism” is so widely held that it is difficult to find social scientists who have given this proposition a searching critical examination. Without such testing, this proposition stands in danger of being erected

²⁹Allan W. Eister, “H. Richard Niebuhr and the Paradox of Religious Organization,” in Charles Y. Glock and Phillip E. Hammond, eds., *Beyond the Classics? Essays in the Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 367.

³⁰Eister, “Radical,” 86.

³¹Paul Gustafson, “UO-US-PS-PO: A Restatement of Troeltsch’s Church-Sect Typology,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6 (1967), 68.

³²Erich Goode, “Some Critical Observations of the Church-Sect Dimension,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6 (1967), 76.

into a self-perpetuating stereotype that reveals only what the observer is conceptually prepared to “see.”³³ These criticisms reveal problems that lead Erich Goode to this conclusion:

Too often because of a respectable ancestry, certain concepts and theories have been used, re-used, and have been perpetuated long after their usefulness has come to an end. Church-sect is very much in danger of being in that position. As it stands today, it is a hodge-podge of definition and empirical correlates and empirical non-correlates. It has no power to explain or elucidate. Unless it undergoes a radical revision which is universally accepted by researchers and theorists in the field, church-sect must be seen as a dead concept, obsolete, sterile, and archaic.³⁴

Alternatives to Troeltsch from minority traditions

Several writers who are themselves part of what could be called “sectarian” groups tend to be much more sympathetic and favorable toward this “minority” tradition that Troeltsch calls “sectarian.” They tend to avoid the term “sectarianism.” A term a number use instead is “believers church,” highlighting one of the positive distinguishing characteristics of Troeltschian sects—“membership is strictly voluntary.”

Most of these writers agree that at least two significant problems exist with an unqualified use of “sectarianism” as a label for these groups. One is that throughout church history, “sectarian” has been an epithet used from majority churches for dissenting movements that have been alienated from the established churches. Such pejorative connotations remain in the air, and despite claims by sociologists to be non-normative in their use of “sectarianism,” the term is more often than not used in a depreciating way by them—not to mention the openly judgmental use by some church-related scholars.³⁵ A second problem is that “sectarianism” carries the implication that these groups are best understood in terms of what they are not, in terms of what it is they reject. One of the major theses of the “insiders” is that the “believers church tradition” has an independent, positive orientation and is best understood on its own terms and not as a protest movement merely splintering off the “real” church.

Troeltsch himself used the term “sectarianism” with the claim that it was to be neutral and descriptive of an independent movement. At best,

³³Eister, “H. Richard Niebuhr,” 397–8.

³⁴Goode, “Critical,” 77.

³⁵For an example of how this language has not yet been discarded, see James Gustafson, “The Sectarian Temptation,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society* 40 (1985), 83-94.

he was only partially successful in holding to that usage in the *Social Teaching*. Most who have come after him have been even more value-laden in their usage, claims for “scientific neutrality” notwithstanding.

Writers in the believers church tradition argue for a view of church and culture that differs quite strongly from many Troeltschian assumptions. What follows synthesizes their arguments.

1. *Discriminatory toward the wider world.* These “sympathizers” challenge the notion that the believers church tradition is intrinsically rejectionist toward the wider world. The basic thrust of this tradition’s orientation toward the wider world is one of discrimination. They accept as legitimate things that do not contradict their understanding of Jesus Christ’s will, seeing these as “subsumed in his lordship.”³⁶ They do not see “culture” as totally evil and off limits. But they do reject elements of the wider culture that they believe contradict Jesus Christ’s will. Thus the relative involvement in the wider society by these Christians will vary depending on the characteristics of each particular society.

The believers church tradition fosters critical distance from the wider culture. This distance can facilitate freedom of thought and action and an ability creatively to address human reality. Such Christians may be better able to discern the possibility that people’s minds can be “darkened” by a quite subtle and dangerous temptation, that of being unable to see the truth because of a total involvement in the temporary order.³⁷ They can, in particular, be aware of the encroachments of statist and nationalist ideologies on Christians’ worldviews and a concomitant inability to discern God’s will from the values and self-interests of their society.

With this critical distance, believers church Christians find it possible to influence wider society through a kind of social pressure more critical, more flexible, less conformist, and less patient than the “responsible involvement” advocated by majority traditions. In their concern for the wider society, believers church Christians assume that their best potential for doing good is realized in faithful witness to the love and power of God in their common life—manifested in their community of love open to call comers, their acts of service, their active concern for the poor and needy, and in their refusal to join in nationalistic campaigns of violence. However, these are tactical choices focusing on what is possible for minority, relatively powerless groups to do. They do not reflect in any way a general rejection of the wider world.³⁸

³⁶John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 11.

³⁷Calvin Redekop, *The Free Church and Seductive Culture* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1970), 83.

³⁸Yoder, *Priestly*, 11–2.

“Culture” may be understood too narrowly, and things such as the use of the sword and capitalistic economics identified as definitive of “culture” (with the implication that to rejection the sword and capitalism means to rejection “culture”). Believers church Christians have always utilized and affirmed various types of governance and economics; they have always seen that Christian obedience takes place in this world and hinges on issues such as how people use their money and order their lives together.³⁹ Historically the main cause of alienation between believers churches and the wider world has been the world’s rejection of these Christians, not vice versa.⁴⁰ The core characteristic of this tradition is not rejectionist toward culture but rather is discriminatory—accepting parts and rejecting parts. This takes on a more rejectionist hue only when the particular culture the believers churches find themselves in will not accept their lack of total allegiance to it.

A strictly “phenomenological” view that defines these groups only by specific historical manifestations of alienation between the group and wider society distorts the character of those groups. Such an approach tends to make one historical slice definitive for all time and to make one manifestation of a discriminatory ethic into a ethic of rejection.

2. *Mission and service mindedness.* Rather than being intrinsically otherworldly, the believers church tradition shows deep concern for the world, manifested in its pioneering efforts in Christian mission and social service. The 16th-century Anabaptists were mission-minded at a time when both Catholics and state-church Protestants saw nothing illogical in dividing up Christendom by political agreement.⁴¹ The Quakers in the 17th century spearheaded the first truly inter-cultural mission efforts and became well known for their concern for social service. Missionary witness is structurally incompatible with the sociological and political posture of the established church, since everyone in a given country is already within that church, and in any other state everyone, by the same token, is the responsibility of some other state-church.⁴² Hence, at least in terms of missionary concern, the believers churches have displayed more commitment to more of the world than have established churches.

Whenever they have not been pushed into withdrawal by persecution, believers churches have been extremely active with works of social service such as relief, education, health care, and third-world development in

³⁹Redekop, *Free*, 120.

⁴⁰Yoder, *Priestly*, 34.

⁴¹Franklin Littell, *The Free Church* (Boston: Starr King, 1957), 132.

⁴²John Howard Yoder, “A People in the World: Theological Interpretation,” in James Leo Garrett, ed., *The Concept of the Believers Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969), 267.

more recent years. These types of concerns reflect a strong commitment to being in the world and an assertion that Christian obedience means obedience within present history as a witness to a new order manifested, in part, amidst the old.

3. *Service and "pilot plants."* Their relative freedom vis-à-vis secular culture allows believers churches to be innovative in ministry to the world in ways established churches cannot. This freedom to innovate has transformative potential. These groups may undertake pilot programs to meet unmet needs. Popular education and hospitals were first tried in believers church Christianity.⁴³ The power of these groups follows from their relative freedom of action vis-à-vis their societies' dominant ideologies. Voluntary commitment to a community distinct from the total society provides important resources for practical moral reasoning.⁴⁴

Combined with their freedom is the strength of mutual support in these communities. They provide power for change because people banding together in common dissidence affect a kind of social leverage not provided by any other social form. The believers church community may provide economic and social as well as moral support to individuals standing against the stream who could not stand alone.⁴⁵ Believers churches have the possibility and responsibility create utopian visions that in turn provide the best hope for long-term social change.⁴⁶ There is no genuine hope for society without an awareness of transcendence that is kept alive not on the grounds of logical proof to the effect that there is a cosmos with a hereafter, but by the vitality of communities in which a different way of being keeps breaking in here and now.

4. *Concerned with Christian unity.* These groups did not seek schism but rather to renew existing churches and bring Christians together. The impetus for church division came from the established church side that, with a few exceptions, rejected these renewal impulses and given these groups no choice, either continue their existence as separated groups or give up their new insights and vitality. These minority groups have called all Christians to the ethic to which they see themselves called. They have not seen their position as only for heroes or those who would withdraw from wider society. They have not separated themselves from the church at large, but rather called the church to the quality of commitment that would in effect lead them all to be separated from sinful elements in the world once again in order to be appropriately in mission to the world.⁴⁷

⁴³Yoder, *Priestly*, 92.

⁴⁴Yoder, *Priestly*, 91.

⁴⁵Yoder, *Priestly*, 91.

⁴⁶Yoder, *Priestly*, 94.

⁴⁷Yoder, *Priestly*, 85.

One element of this radical ethic that has facilitated international ecumenism is the rejection of the territorial or state church. The notion that the Christian church is an independent—and, for Christians, more fundamental—entity in relation to any and all nations is an indispensable perspective for there to be any hope for worldwide Christian unity.

5. *Social ethics for the “average person.”* Far from being elitist, this tradition relates to common people. It counters the actual elitist notion of an established church viewpoint that ethics should be approached from the perspective of people in power. History has been told as the history of people in power. The ruler, not the average person or the powerless person, is the model for ethical deliberations. A moral statement on the rightness of truth telling or the wrongness of killing is tested first by whether a ruler can meet such standards. “Social ethics” comes to mean not what everyone should think and do about social questions, but what people in power should be told to do with their power.⁴⁸

In contrast to this, believers churches have sought to articulate an ethic for all Christians.⁴⁹ They have asked, as their most basic question, how ought people live in obedience to Jesus Christ in the everyday. They have assumed that Jesus’ will is knowable to all sincere people, it does not need the mediation of a priest, and that it is do-able. These groups do not envision the faithful Christian as some super-human hero or a monk-like recluse who must escape the world, but a sincere common person who lives day-to-day as part of a community of faith and seeks mundanely to live as Jesus would have him or her live.

Conclusions

Troeltsch’s *Social Teaching* remains a key text due to his insights and the influence of his typology and due to the sheer magnitude of his efforts. As H. R. Niebuhr wrote in his introduction to the English translation to the *Social Teaching*, though “every part can be legitimately criticized by specialists, none has the ability to put all the corrected pieces together in any similar, synoptic view of the whole, nor to stimulate equally the labors of scholars and the exercise of responsible churchmanship and statesmanship.”⁵⁰

Troeltsch’s general approach of closely and objectively examining history in dialogue with pressing present-day concerns is exemplary. The stimulus for his writing the book was a critique he gave of a

⁴⁸Yoder, *Priestly*, 138.

⁴⁹Donald Durnbaugh, *The Believers Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 43.

⁵⁰H. Richard Niebuhr, “Introduction,” in Troeltsch, *Social*, 11.

contemporary book on social ethics that he saw as miserably unhistorical. He insisted that to understand and act appropriately in the present we must understand the past. Likewise, his concern with the past was fueled and shaped by his concern with the present. History is only meaningful when it is studied with present questions in mind. Troeltsch’s historical reconstruction, while certainly open to criticism and correction with regard to many specifics, is remarkable in its sensitivity to the data.

Any attempt to come to grips with what Troeltsch called “sectarianism” must follow in his footsteps, rigorously and objectively doing close historical work while always keeping the present in mind. This approach seems preferable to that of the “neutral” social scientists, whose masking of their own values only makes them uncritical propagators of those values. It is also preferable to ahistorical theology that accepts the types as self-evident and almost transcendent over history in their applicability. Troeltsch himself borders on this kind of ahistorical approach in the conclusion to the *Social Teaching*.

My biggest problems with Troeltsch’s *Social Teaching* have to do with his inability to transcend his intellectual milieu (which admittedly no one can do completely; Troeltsch certainly did better than many) and what one could call his “chastened Constantianism.” The particular aspect of Troeltsch’s milieu I have in mind is his concept of the “religious idea.” He modifies Harnack’s ahistorical “essence of Christianity,” insisting that this essence should be seen as a “developing spiritual principle.” But he still sets it up as being *by definition* the opposite pole from history and culture. Thus those seen to be especially close to the “religious idea” (the sects) are *by definition* opposed to “culture.” This assumption distorts reality; more recent work on the sociology of knowledge and the social setting of early Christianity recognizes the problem.

There has never been a “Christian idea” or any other kind of “idea” that is not socially embedded and not itself thereby a part of “culture.” Thus the “compromise” is not the Christian “idea” compromising with “culture,” but rather a process of discernment as to which parts of one’s wider culture cohere with one’s Christian worldview, which itself is a “cultural” entity. “Sectarians” are not “Christ against culture” but Christians discerning their place in culture—like all other types of Christians, though at times with different answers.

By “chastened Constantinianism” I am referring to Troeltsch’s assumptions regarding Christians’ responsibility to “run the world.” It is “chastened” in that he does not actually seem to be sure that this is possible any more. But he remains a person thinking of ethics for the ruling classes. He still thought within Christendom. To the degree Troeltsch’s contemporary Friedrich Nietzsche was correct to herald the

end of Christendom (which is a large degree), Troeltsch's Constantinian assumptions diminish in significance and helpfulness. And certainly in places in the non-Western world where Christians have always been minorities, Constantinian assumptions have very little relevance.

I propose that the term "sectarianism" be eliminated from serious social scientific, ethical, and theological language. The term is too vague and slippery; all too often "sectarianism" is used either to speak of something held to be self-evident (which in fact is not) or to condemn someone its user does not like. This is not to say that what these people have studied under the rubric of "sectarianism" does not exist. A variety of movements similar to what Troeltsch and others have called "sects" and that "insiders" have called "free churches" and "believers churches" has indeed existed. But these movements fit into several distinct categories and are best not grouped under a single rubric unless that rubric is very general.

One useful quite general rubric may simply be the term "minority traditions." This would recognize what is probably the only characteristic all these groups share in common—that they are small groups, distinct from mainline, majoritarian groups. This term is mostly a descriptive, non-value-laden characterization. It would also recognize that these groups are not merely (or even primarily) deviant, aberrant manifestations of protest and/or escape. They constitute genuine "traditions" with a positive history of their own.

More specifically for Anabaptists, new thinking continues to be needed, integrating Troeltsch's best insights with a positive appreciation for how the Anabaptist tradition has in various ways actually manifested creative and *responsible* engagement with culture.⁵¹

⁵¹ See Duane Friesen, *Artists, Citizens, Philosophers: Seeking the Peace of the City* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000) and James Wm. McClendon, *Witness: Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) for two theologically rigorous attempts to engage culture from believers church perspectives.

SECTION TWO: Social Ethical Essays

11. A pacifist way of knowing: Postmodern sensibilities and peace theology

[This essay was first published in Mennonite Life 56.1 (March 2001). It originated as a paper presented to the Anabaptists and Postmodernity conference at Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio, August 1998.]

In the late 1980s, when I pastored a Mennonite congregation on the west coast, I became friends with a Lutheran pastor. Soon after we met, when he realized I was a Mennonite, he asked (with a glint in his eye), “So you must be a pacifist?” That triggered numerous friendly but intense debates about the theological and practical possibility of Christian pacifism. My friend’s automatic association of Mennonites with pacifism is typical. I well know that the history of pacifism among Mennonites is more ambiguous than my friend realized.¹ However, I affirm the designation of the Mennonite church as a “peace church,” and I believe one of the most important tasks for Mennonite theologians remains that of understanding the full implications of our pacifist convictions for all aspects of our life and thought.

I write this essay as one small attempt to take on the task of Mennonite peace theology. I will set pacifism in the context of the ferment in the contemporary world which many see as characterizing a time of transition between the modern and postmodern eras.² I will do

¹ For example, during World War II, half of the American Mennonite young men who were drafted joined the military.

² My guides include the following: David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in the More-than-Human World* (New York: Vintage, 1996); Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); Wendell Berry, *Life is a Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2000); Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1996); Edward Farley,

this initially through some autobiographical reflections that illustrate the connection between pacifism and critiques of modernity. I will then summarize a few elements of what I will call “postmodern sensibilities” that I believe dovetail with a pacifist perspective on life. I believe that the postmodern situation is potentially friendly to a pacifist way of knowing. Those of us who are pacifist should welcome the deconstruction of the modern worldview, and with renewed commitment, we should seek to think and act in all areas of life in light of our peaceable convictions.

Autobiography

It was in 1976 that I made a pacifist commitment. I believe more all the time that this choice was one of the definitive *personal* commitments of my life.³ Pacifism, for me, meant, first of all, a realization that I could never participate in warfare. In time, my pacifist commitment expanded greatly. I came to understand pacifism to mean a *positive* affirmation of shalom (peace, in a broad sense, as kindness, respect, justice, restoration of brokenness). Ultimately, I came to understand pacifism as a way of knowing, a way of understanding God and all of reality. My church

Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); Gordon D. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Daniel Liechty, *Theology in Postliberal Perspective* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990); Nancey Murphy and George F. R. Ellis, *On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Theology, Cosmology, and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991); Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free Press, 1990); and Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

³I believe that pacifism is a personal commitment. Only by accepting (even embracing) the personal nature of this commitment will we do it justice. I use the word “personal” and not “private” or “individual”. A personal commitment may be understood as a commitment made from the heart, made on the basis of one’s personal identity, made in a “subjective” way—while still being deeply shaped by one’s social context, the tradition one is part of, one’s relationships with others, and open to public discussion and scrutiny. My understanding of the personal and relational nature of all knowledge and commitments has been shaped, by among others, Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribners, 1970); Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); and Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Corporation, 1989).

involvement (becoming a Mennonite), my vocational path (as a pastor for ten years and now as a college professor), my scholarly interests, the focus of my friendships, my family life as a husband and parent, have all been decisively shaped by my pacifist commitment.

I grew up in a loving, vaguely religious home, the fourth of five children. Both of my parents were proud veterans of World War II. They did not espouse pacifism in any explicit way. When I was 17, I became a Christian and began attending the local Baptist church. The ideology I received in my church closely identified God and country. As a young man facing the possibilities of being drafted into a wartime military, I struggled over issues of war and peace. As it turned out, the year I turned 19 was the year the draft ended. However, the issues remained alive for me. Then I came to the unshakable realization that I could never fight in war. I had no awareness of the Christian peace tradition or Mennonites; I was not aware of anyone I knew being a pacifist. I simply knew in my heart that I could never fight in war, that violence toward other human beings was not to be part of my life.

Back then I defined pacifism simply as my knowledge that it would be wrong for me to fight in war. My definition now is still fairly simple: *“Pacifism” is the belief that nothing is as important as love, kindness, and peaceableness.* This belief leads to a rejection of violence under any circumstances. For a pacifist, peaceableness is the central orienting point of life. Nothing else ranks as highly—not the responsibilities of citizenship in a nation-state, not punishing wrong-doers, not using “unavoidable” violence in order to defend people or values. I am a “Christian pacifist.” For a Christian pacifist, this central orienting point of peaceableness is understood in terms of the character of God. The understanding of God for Christian pacifists includes the central affirmation that God is a peaceable God, definitively revealed in Jesus Christ.⁴

In my view, “pacifism” means, above all, a love of peace (peace defined as the Old Testament uses shalom: wholeness, well-being for all people, healing, harmony, justice). Pacifism is a positive concept. Nothing takes priority over shalom. One consequence of this commitment, certainly, is an unalterable rejection of the use of violence. However, when nonviolence is made the core, we still allow violence to set the terms. The peace that pacifists love is not simply a lack of violence. It is wholeness, harmony, restoration of relationships, healing of brokenness.

⁴My thinking about God in terms of a Christian pacifist commitment has been inestimably helped by the work of Gordon Kaufman, most carefully and fully presented in *In Face of Mystery*. See especially chapter 26, “Christ as Paradigm for God and for Humanity.”

Skepticism of the modern worldview

As I look back, I see that my growing in a pacifist way of knowing led to a fairly rapid discarding of various principles of the modern worldview.⁵ I will share several of these to illustrate how pacifism may be seen as fundamentally incompatible with key elements of the modern worldview. The second half this paper will then argue that elements of emergent postmodern sensibilities potentially provide space for articulating and living out a thorough-going pacifist approach to life.

The first principle to fall was that of nationalism. The growth of nationalism in Europe, inherited in the US, corresponds with the emergence of the modern worldview following the disintegration of medieval Christendom. Nationalism was an integral part of Reformation-era Christianity—and was part of the Christianity I was taught after my conversion.⁶ My pacifist commitment *preceded* my rejection of nationalism, but that rejection soon followed. I first became a pacifist, and then in light of that commitment I came to see the Vietnam War and other United States interventions in third world settings as morally corrupt. A pacifist view of life directly undercut my (modernistic) nationalism.

A second principle of the modern worldview that my pacifism soon undercut was the quest for absolute certainty. For me, as a fundamentalist Christian, this quest for centered on an affirmation of the perfect errorlessness (inerrancy) of the Bible.⁷ I accepted the assumption that without an inerrant Bible we could be certain of nothing in the realm of faith, and that without certainty, our faith was but a wisp of vapor. So, when the so-called battle for the Bible emerged among evangelical Christians in the late 1970s, I placed myself firmly in the camp of the inerrantists. However, while reading Harold Lindell's *The*

⁵I have learned a great deal concerning the rise of the modern worldview and then the emerging postmodern worldview from Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*. I do want to be clear that in spite of my criticisms of the modern worldview that follow, I do have a great appreciation for the many tremendous achievements of modernity—including religious tolerance, technological advancements, and social freedom.

⁶ On nationalism and modernity, see Liah Greenfield, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) and David Nicholls, *Deity and Domination: Images of God and the State in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

⁷For discussions of how fundamentalist views of inerrancy actual express the modern worldview see John C. Vanderstelt, *Philosophy and Scripture: A Study in Old Princeton and Westminster Theology* (Marlton, NJ: Mack Publishing Company, 1978) and Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).

Battle for the Bible, my pacifist convictions led me to a major shift in thinking. The harshness of Lindsell's invective shocked me—and made me ask some serious questions about his position. Would one on the side of God's truth (a God I now knew to be unalterably peaceable) need to resort to such verbal violence? This question evaporated the blinders I had been wearing, and before I even finished Lindsell's book I saw many of his arguments as specious or worse.

The falling of this house of cards, ultimately built from modernity's anxiety about certainty (can we know anything if we can't know it for *sure*) was liberating for me. I did not need an inerrant Bible to know God as peaceable, to know Jesus as the Prince of Peace, to know my brothers and sisters as partners in peacemaking. The knowledge of love, of relationship, is not knowledge based on modernistic absolutes.

A third principle that my pacifism soon undercut was the belief in scientific progress as the epitome of human aspiration. This faith in science ran aground in face of nuclearism.⁸ My pacifist commitment, that had freed me from nationalism, now helped me to realize that our society's acceptance of the need to devote incredible resources to expanding and improving our nuclear arsenal was idolatry. My pacifism caused me to reject idealizing scientific progress, and to see that nuclearism was only one expression of many of the modern worldview's idolatry of humankind's domination over and exploitation of nature.

The fourth change in my perspective resulting from my pacifist commitment came with regard to how I understood ethics. Modernity has tended to think of ethics primarily in terms of principles, of objective analyses of right and wrong, of abstract normative standards.⁹ My acceptance of this understanding of ethics faltered in the late 1970s due to my early encounters with the issue of homosexuality. In, say, 1978, I had no doubts about the truthfulness of the principle that homosexuality was wrong, that it was counter to the clear standards of Christian faith, especially as found in the Bible. However, my pacifism led to a major crisis of faith for me when I was confronted with the personal dynamics of this issue. The key turning point for me came when my hometown, Eugene, Oregon, experienced an intense, controversial campaign in which voters ultimately repealed the city council's anti-discrimination

⁸ An important book for me at the time was Barry Commoner, *The Poverty of Power: Energy and the Economic Crisis* (New York: Knopf, 1976). An important recent essay challenging scientism is Wendell Berry, *Life is a Miracle*. On the development of nuclear weapons as the triumph of science, see Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986).

⁹ See the critique of James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, volume one (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), especially pp. 47-75.

law, that had explicitly forbidden discrimination based on homosexuality. I was shocked and thrown into a crisis of conscience by how my fellow evangelical Christians displayed such hostility toward gays and lesbians.

My crisis of conscience, among other things, focused on the tension, even contradiction, between my peaceable heart and my ethics-as-principles mind. Ultimately, in confusion, I did not vote on the ballot measure. However, out of my need for coherence within myself I soon realized that any approach to ethics that placed principles above people, that would justify the type of hostility and verbal violence I had seen in the name of ethical principles, was inherently incompatible with my deepest pacifist convictions. I came to see that, indeed, Christian ethics are based on normative standards. But these standards are relational, not abstract. As Jesus taught, “the law is for human beings, not human beings for the law.” The normative standards for Christians are those practices which foster peace and healing broken relationships.

So, within four years of my conversion to pacifism, I had undergone a major shift in my worldview. I came to reject at least four aspects of the modern worldview—nationalism, the quest for certainty, idealizing scientific progress, and ethics as principles—as a direct consequence of my pacifist commitment and my emerging pacifist way of knowing. My graduate studies, first at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in peace studies and then at the Graduate Theological Union in ethics furthered this movement. My direct encounter with two brilliant thinkers and teachers, John Howard Yoder at AMBS and Robert Bellah at the GTU, was crucial. However, probably even more significant was simply my own efforts to think consistently as a pacifist and push the implications of that core commitment as far as I could in my studies.

When I first heard the term “postmodern” applied to philosophy and theology in the mid-1980s I found it attractive, as I had come to understand myself as having rejected many aspects of the modern worldview (as sketched above). The postmodern sensibility seemed to me to contain several elements which supported, or at least made space for, a genuinely pacifist way of knowing. I remained committed to the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. My pacifist convictions had led me to conclude that in many ways the modern worldview was incompatible with Jesus’ way. In the postmodern critique, I saw hope for making room for a reappropriation of Jesus’ message of peace.

I never found the extreme skepticism of some postmodern thinkers attractive. Postmodern sensibilities seemed to me to be a *tool*, a basis for critique making possible the appropriation of non-modern notions of truth as relational and peaceable. Richard Tarnas argues that postmodernity sees all traditions and assumptions as temporary, as steps

along the way—but never as final destinations or unchanging absolutes.¹⁰ This questioning of authority includes religious dogma (a questioning certainly characteristic of the modern worldview as well), but also a questioning of other sources of authority including modern science, which Tarnas believes replaced Christianity as the supreme world-defining authority for the modern worldview and modern philosophy.

Agreeing with Daniel Liechty, I ascribe my attraction to postmodern suspicion of authority to my pacifism. In sketching a process similar to my own, Liechty writes of how his grappling with the issue of theological authority followed from his desire “to work out a consistently pacifist theology.” He sought a theology that placed living peaceably with the entire world at the center of “the theological frame of reference itself, and not simply one among other options reserved for the section on ethics.”¹¹ Postmodernity potentially provides a clearing away of coercive structures of authority and an unprecedented opportunity for a pacifist way of knowing to find expression. I want to discuss four ways in which postmodern sensibilities make a pacifist way of knowing more possible.

Crumpling of the house of authority

Edward Farley, in *Ecclesial Reflection*, presents a sharp critique of the “house of authority” as the basis for theology. Farley does not explicitly focus on physical violence in his discussion, but we may see implications for pacifism. The top-down authority Farley critiques is inherently coercive. For many generations the association between the enforcement of theological “truth” and physical coercion was close. The “house of authority” is the traditional Christian approach to truth, based on what Farley calls “the logic of triumph,” which follows from the “royal metaphor” used of God—that God is like a great king with unlimited coercive power whose will is inexorably done.¹² And, of course, human kings often wielded the sword as agents of the will of the King on High.

Logically, if God is all-powerful in this way, God’s communication of “His” will to human beings must be infallible, even irresistible and unquestionable. The “house of authority” was set up to assure that this would indeed be the case. There were basically three steps necessary to assure continued certainty about God’s communication. First, teaching directly from God was written down, the absolutely accurate and trustworthy Holy Scripture. Second, Christian leaders developed

¹⁰Tarnas, *Passion*, 396.

¹¹Daniel Liechty, *Theology in Postliberal Perspective*, xi.

¹²Farley, *Ecclesial Reflection*, 35.

authoritative doctrines to provide absolutely accurate and trustworthy interpretations of Scripture—the Creeds. Third, arose a definitive institution as the guardian and interpreter of Scripture and the Creeds—the Church. The “house of authority”—Scripture, Creeds, Church.¹³

Theology practiced within the “house of authority” followed what Farley calls “the way of authority” and was essentially a matter of citing revealed, absolute Truth—already given once and for all. This theology brooked no opposition since it claimed divine warrant, hence Augustine’s support for the harsh persecution of heretics.¹⁴ We see here the obvious incompatibility between pacifism and the “house of authority.” As a consequence of dwelling in the “house of authority” (and Farley argues that Protestantism’s rejection of the Catholic hierarchy did not fundamentally change its dwelling place), the church has been willing to do and be many terrible and violent things in its own name and for its own defense. Once a historical *human* institution is given divine status, whatever means necessary to protect that institution become justifiable.¹⁵

The way of authority could not endure, however. Its death blow came with the rise of historical consciousness. Historical consciousness could not accept the “house of authority,” because this “house” was based on profoundly ahistorical (even anti-historical) assumptions. The modern and postmodern embrace of historical consciousness, thankfully for Farley, has fatally damaged the “house of authority.” As a result, Christians now have the potential to approach their faith in terms of actual life and not a rigid grid of authoritarian dogma.¹⁶

Farley points out that the early church essentially functioned without a “house of authority” for its first two hundred years.¹⁷ From a pacifist framework, it is not coincidental that that period of time was also the only time in Christian history that most Christians were pacifist. The fall of the house of authority provides new possibilities for an approach to faith oriented first of all around faithful living. Thus, the uncertainties of

¹³Farley, *Ecclesial Reflection*, 49.

¹⁴Augustine propounded the *principle* that Christian rulers were duty-bound to use their power and authority to punish those whose views on doctrine or church organization are seen as heterodox by church leaders. He did not advocate the death penalty for heresy (not so much because he did not believe heresy worthy of death as because he did not want to give the Donatists any more martyrs), but it certainly did not take much development before heresy would indeed be seen as a capital offense (see Herbert Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1963], 172-220)..

¹⁵Farley, *Ecclesial Reflection*, 167-68.

¹⁶Farley, *Ecclesial Reflection*, 172-3.

¹⁷Farley, *Ecclesial Reflection*, 68-9.

the postmodern situation are not a threat to a pacifist Christian faith but rather provide hopeful and exciting possibilities.

Failure of rationalism

In philosophy, post-*modernism* refers in part to the collapse of coercive rationalism—no more reliance upon arguments which, as Robert Nozick describes, are adequately defended only if they “so powerful they set up reverberations in the brain: if the person refuses to accept the conclusion he dies.”¹⁸ Coercive rationalism basically was the new “house of authority” erected by modern philosophy in the 17th century (led by pioneers such as Francis Bacon and René Descartes) to replace the Christian “house of authority.” This new “way of authority” also contained within it great potential for violence. It was based on a desire for control and domination—and coercion of any element (human or natural) which resists that control.

Albert Borgmann, in *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, portrays the “modern project” as the coalescing of the insights of modern philosophy, seen particularly in Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and John Locke. One major fruit of modernity has been the control of the natural world, fueled by the dominance of modern science. “The modern domination of nature was...a violent campaign of conquest.” Borgmann links 15th and 16th century voyages of discovery, expansion of trade routes, extensive harnessing of wind and water power, and development of sophisticated record-keeping methods and large-scale financial institutions.¹⁹

The campaign to subdue nature eventually led to integrating all efforts human beings were making to control and dominate. “Baconian aggressiveness began to acquire the complement of Cartesian order,” Borgmann argues. “At length Cartesianism asserted itself through sciences and industry.”²⁰ The main tool for this has been modern corporations. They have grown large and powerful enough to mobilize the resources necessary to conquer what had been a wild, gigantic North American continent.²¹ The corporation, the quintessential expression of modern rationalism—impersonal, everything quantified, operated by market dictates—led to what Borgmann calls “hypermodernism.”²²

¹⁸Quoted in Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel: The Language of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 295.

¹⁹Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 27.

²⁰Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, 34-5.

²¹Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, 36-7.

²²Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, 78-109.

“Hypermodernism” is characterized by brilliance, disposability, glamour, superficiality—in a word, *unreality*. As such, the consequences inevitably are alienation and isolation. The rationalism of modern philosophy and the hyper-rationalism of contemporary global corporations are by definition coercive and alienating.²³ Their efforts at control and dominance, though, invariably fail. The unity and uniformity they proclaim are invariably illusions.

As philosopher Richard Rorty has made clear, modernism’s fantasy of certainty and control was always based on an illusion. Rorty has shown how, for many of the major modern projects, whatever was advanced as cogent and fundamental was invariably based on the *agreement* of a community of speakers. This agreement was a consequence of *human* conversation, always debatable and never based on an absolute foundation.²⁴ Rorty’s notion of philosophy, even rationality, as a process of conversation rather than a quest for absolute certainty before which everyone must bow is clearly much more compatible with a pacifist way of knowing.²⁵ The absolutes of rationalism are always coercive.²⁶

G. K. Chesterton once wrote, “Reason is always a kind of brute force; those who appeal to the head rather than the heart, however pallid and polite, are necessarily [people] of violence. We speak of ‘touching a

²³I am not saying that reason or rationality *per se* are coercive. The issue, from the point of view of pacifism, is *how* we use reason. Do we use reason to construct arguments that *obligate* the other to change, or do we use reason as *one* (surely integral) part of our conversation in our mutual seeking more understanding?

²⁴Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, 50.

²⁵See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979). Rorty’s alternative to coercive modernism is “edifying philosophy”: “The point of edifying philosophy is to keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth. For the edifying philosopher the very idea of being presented ‘all the Truth’ is absurd, because the Platonic notion of Truth itself is absurd. It is absurd either as the notion of truth about reality which is not about reality-under-a-certain-description, or as the notion of truth about reality under some privileged description which makes all other descriptions unnecessary because it is commensurable with each of them.... To see keeping a conversation going as a sufficient aim of philosophy, to see wisdom as consisting in the ability to sustain a conversation, is to see human beings as generators of new descriptions rather than beings one hopes to be able to describe accurately.... If we see knowing not as having an essence, to be described by scientists or philosophers, but rather as a right, by current standards, to believe, then we are well on the way to seeing *conversation* as the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood” (377-8, 389)

²⁶ See the various accounts of the out-workings of coercive rationalism in public policy related by Scott, *Seeing Like a State*.

[person's] heart, but we can do nothing to his head but hit it."²⁷ With the acceptance of other styles of discourse, conversation rather than coercive rationalism, the possibility increases of a true pacifist way of knowing.

Openness to a plurality of voices

In the postmodern situation, with the breakdown of the various houses of authority, with the overthrow of Reason as the only key to truth, we see an affirmation of a plurality of theological and philosophical voices. Many perspectives now share in the conversation, in contrast with times past. Gordon Kaufman sees this plurality of voices as an asset in the task of making for peace. In times past, Kaufman argues, denial of plurality has had the direct consequence of severe inter-human violence—as we think that *our* truth is the *only* truth and those who disagree may justifiably be coercively stopped. To overcome such violence, “we must learn to understand, appreciate, and respect the attitudes, practices, and beliefs of those who live and think very differently from ourselves.”²⁸

The acceptance of the plurality of human perspectives is important, though, not simply as a necessity for overcoming inter-human conflicts. Such acceptance is also important as a means for each of us to grow closer to God and God's world. Kaufman believes that the central message of Jesus is that we learn to know God by living openly and generously toward all varieties of people.²⁹ The postmodern acceptance of a plurality of voices in the conversation concerning life's big issues is important for a pacifist way of knowing certainly as a key part of growing in respect for and peaceable coexistence with others and as an expression of harmony with God. However, it also has the practical benefit that in our day pacifist voices, for the first time since before the era of Constantine, are receiving a respectful hearing.³⁰

²⁷G.K. Chesterton, *Twelve Types: A Collection of Mini-Biographies* (London: Arthur L. Humphries, 1906), 98.

²⁸Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 101.

²⁹Gordon D. Kaufman, *God—Mystery—Diversity: Christian Theology in a Pluralistic World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 123.

³⁰For example, even as long ago as the mid-1980s, a number of the member seminaries (three of which were Roman Catholic) of the Graduate Theological Union used John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* as a required text for their introductory ethics courses which were required for all Master of Divinity students. Another example is the extraordinary success of Walter Wink's *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, consistently one of the best-selling books for the preeminent North American publisher of theological literature (Fortress Press) and the basis for a condensed version, *The Powers That*

Pacifism rests on trust that God does not require coercion to be known. A pacifist way of knowing rejects extreme relativism. It is confident of the existence of truth—but understands this truth to be accessible only through a process of respectful conversation and listening to *many* voices.³¹

Hope for encountering “eloquent reality”

Many people have characterized the 20th century as a century of deep alienation and brokenness, at least partly resulting from the logical consequences of the impersonality of modern philosophy and modern science. However, as Tarnas argues,³² the notion of the universe that science constructed is a *human* interpretation. The picture of the universe that science and modern philosophy constructed is a result of methodological assumptions. It is a view that resulted from the limits placed on analysis and understanding by the beginning assumptions. So, to a large extent, we can say that the problem of meaninglessness and a soulless universe is a problem *within* the human mind—not a problem with the universe as it truly is. The Cartesian-Kantian philosophical paradigm that governed the modern worldview was constructed as an understanding based on what their assumptions allowed. The scientific worldview by definition excluded from its consideration other aspects of understanding, other ways of perceiving reality.

Ironically, Tarnas continues, it was precisely as philosophy felt it broke free from human projections of human characteristics onto the world, free to be objective and to understand reality as it actually is, that the world in fact most decisively became a human construct. Philosophy denied inherent intelligence and purpose and meaning to the other-than-human world – claiming these only for the human mind. The other-than-human world was labeled “machine.” This is, in Tarnas’s view, the ultimate act of attributing human characteristics to the non-human world. What we have is “a man-made machine, something not in fact ever found in nature....The modern world’s own impersonal soullessness that been projected from within onto the world.”³³

Be: Theology for a New Millennium, in hard-cover, by Doubleday, one of the largest “secular” presses.

³¹ Mohandas Gandhi provided a paradigmatic model of a pacifist who combined convictions about the reality of truth with an open, listening mind. See Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).

³²Tarnas, *Passion*, 431-2.

³³Tarnas, *Passion*, 432.

The postmodern sensibility recognizes that this modernistic interpretation of the universe is only one particular *perspective*. Other perspectives are possible—ones that are less controlling and deductive. Albert Borgmann proposes a framework for what he calls “postmodern realism,”³⁴ an approach to life that provides alternatives to coercive modernism. Postmodern realism respects what Borgmann refers to as “eloquent reality.” Eloquent reality is that in this life, this world, which is genuinely beautiful, healing, soulful, invigorating. Reality understood thus is not totally orderly, objective, controllable, or quantifiable. Borgmann writes of communal celebrations, wilderness, crafts, friendship. We may speak of life rooted in places rather than ideas.

Essentially, a pacifist way of knowing calls upon human beings to find their “angle of repose” in this actual world of eloquent reality. Violence is a result of a stance toward reality of resistance, seeking control, fear, and anxiety. Martin Buber argued that the world in which we live is where we will encounter our peaceable God. “I know nothing of a ‘world’ and of ‘worldly life’ that separate us from God. What is designated that way is life with an alienated It-world, the life of experience and use. Whatever goes out in truth to the world, goes forth to God. Only he that believes in the world achieves contact with it; and if he commits himself he cannot remain godless. Let us love that actual world that never wishes to be annulled;...in all its terror, [daring] to embrace it with our spirit’s arms—and our hands encounter the hands that hold it.”³⁵

In his career-crowning opus, *In Face of Mystery*, Gordon Kaufman profoundly and painstakingly articulates a pacifist way of knowing in relation to the big issues of God and the world. Seeking for peace on earth—what Kaufman calls a “humane order” characterized by love, justice, creativity, mutual respect, goes *with the grain* of the universe. Reality is not soulless, arbitrary, meaningless. “The world in which we live is a humane-seeking order. We can give ourselves whole-heartedly to responsible life and work within it.”³⁶

Ultimately, a pacifist way of knowing is intimately connected with a worldview that understands God to be peaceable, the universe to be peaceable, and the human task to be to live in tune with this fundamental peaceableness—following the way of the paradigmatic human being, Jesus Christ. From the book of Genesis on, the Bible tells of a God who made what is in love—and continues to seek, nonviolently, to foster such creative love in a world that all too often suffers from fearfulness and

³⁴Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, 110-147.

³⁵Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Walter Kauffman (New York: Scribners, 1970), 143.

³⁶Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 338-339.

alienation. The Christian era has at least since the time of Constantine often rather consistently distorted this fundamental biblical message. The disintegration of Christendom and now the disintegration of modernity provide Christian pacifists with unprecedented possibilities.

The postmodern era promises to provide new opportunities for the articulation of this way of understanding. In the postmodern era, violence-enhancing aspects of the pre-modern and the modern are being exposed—the house of authority, coercive rationalism, universalizing particular perspectives. With the ensuing disillusionment concerning modernism, people with pacifist convictions have the opportunity to be heard—and the responsibility to think and communicate clearly so that what is heard might actually help people to align themselves with the underlying peaceableness of God and God's universe.

12. A pacifist critique of the modern worldview

[Published in Ray Gingerich and Ted Grimsrud, eds. *Transforming the Powers: Peace, Justice, and the Domination System: Engaging Walter Wink* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 53-64.]

I have been learning from Walter Wink for years, going back half my lifetime to when I read his little book *The Bible in Human Transformation*¹ that came at a crucial time for me as I was emerging from the literalistic fundamentalism I had been taught as a young Christian. In the early 1980s I eagerly awaited his books on the Powers—I had been fascinated by John Howard Yoder’s work on the Powers in *The Politics of Jesus*² and was delighted when I learned Wink would develop the analysis further. I was not disappointed. *Naming the Powers*³ took the exegetical work done by Yoder and others to new depths, and *Unmasking the Powers*⁴ provided new and exciting applications to social and psychological issues. However, impressed as I was by these books, I still could never have imagined the kind of book with which Wink would conclude his Powers trilogy.

That book, *Engaging the Powers*,⁵ has energized me ever since I first read it in 1992, and more than any book I can think of has directed my own thinking and research in the last number of years. Wink’s analysis provides two especially crucial insights. The first is that one of the main effects that the fallen Powers have in the modern world is *concealment*; that

¹Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973).

²John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972).

³Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

⁴Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

⁵Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

is, they distort and hide from us the true nature of reality, the true nature of what binds us, and the true sources for our liberation. And the second is that the best criterion for discerning what is truth and what is deception in the swirl of ideas and values and theories and biases in which we are immersed in our world is *nonviolence*.

In this essay I reflect on the way we *look* at the world around us (our worldview) as a major expression of “concealment” in our culture today. Using the criterion of nonviolence (or, my preferred term, “pacifism”), I suggest that our culture’s very worldview itself alienates us from truth and life. Perhaps we fragile human beings feel the power of the fallen Powers most profoundly in the concealed assumptions of our worldview that lead to violence—violence against human beings, for sure, but even more fundamentally, violence against creation itself. I conclude from this analysis that one of the major tasks of pacifists is simply to bring that which is concealed to awareness. That is, we are challenged to foster disillusionment with the modern worldview. We are challenged to discern how this worldview distorts and disguises and conceals and to expose such distortions for all people of good will to see. Such work plays a crucial role in human transformation and the healing of creation.

A metaphor for the modern worldview

I want to begin with a story that comes from the book *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, by political scientist James C. Scott. Scott, a writer of deep humanity and unique insight, gives us a metaphor for illuminating the modern worldview.

By the late 18th century, the scientific revolution was in full sway in western Europe. The change in consciousness that we call modernity found expression in the human relationship with the natural world, one example being how people related to the forests of western Europe. A monument to modernity, Diderot’s encyclopedia, produced in mid-18th-century France, in its entry on “forests” reflects the new thinking of the time. This entry focuses almost entirely on the economic value of forests—the commercial products that could be extracted from the forests, possible tax revenues, ways forests could be exploited to yield profits. “Forests” are no longer thought of as places where a whole variety of life-forms live in ages-old harmony and balance.⁶

The change in the perception toward the natural world in general (which also applies specifically to forests) can be seen simply in shifts in

⁶James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 5.

vocabulary. “Nature” becomes “natural resources,” with the emphasis on the usefulness of nature for human usage. Trees that are understood to have economic value become known as “timber,” while those without such value are labeled “trash trees” or “underbrush.”⁷

“Scientific forestry” emerged at this time and exerted a profound influence on the landscape of western Europe, with major repercussions still felt today. Scientific forestry began among Germans. In the late 1700s, foresters began to remake German forests. They hoped to create a more easily quantified forest through careful cultivation. They cleared the underbrush, reduced the numbers of species (often to monoculture), and did planting simultaneously and in straight rows on large tracts. Eventually, the old-growth forests were transformed into truly “scientific forest,” i.e., neat and tidy mono-cultural, even-aged forests.⁸

The initial results from remaking Germany’s forests were spectacular. Certainly, on an aesthetic level, the regularity and neatness of the appearance of the new forests resonated deeply with the values of modern Europe. At first, the new forests provided rich economic rewards as well. The Norway spruce became the tree of choice due to its hardiness, rapid growth, and valuable wood.

Because trees are long-term crops, it took some time for the full effects of this approach to forestry to become apparent. Only after the planting of the second rotation of the spruce did it become clear that something was wrong. The first generation had grown excellently because it could reap the benefits of the rich soil left behind by the old-growth forest in all its diversity. However, after that deposit of nutrients had been exhausted, the output of the forest shrank dramatically. A new German term was coined—*Waldsterben* (forest death)—to describe the effects. Several of the practices of “scientific forestry” directly led to the problems. By clearing the underbrush, “trash trees”, deadfalls, and snags, in the name of neatness, foresters greatly reduced the diversity of insect, mammal and bird populations so crucial for soil-building. By transforming old-growth bio-diversity into a monoculture of same-age species, foresters made the forests much more vulnerable to massive storm damage and infestation of “pests” specialized to Norway spruce.⁹

Scott uses this story of the transformation of Germany’s forests as a metaphor for the havoc wreaked by modern attempts to dismember “exceptionally complex and poorly understood set[s] of relations and processes in order to isolate a single element of instrumental value.”¹⁰ In

⁷Scott, *Seeing*, 13.

⁸Scott, *Seeing*, 15.

⁹Scott, *Seeing*, 20.

¹⁰Scott, *Seeing*, 21.

a similar way, this story may serve as a more general metaphor symbolizing the modern worldview as a whole, and particularly, for the purposes of this paper, symbolizing the impulses toward coercion and even violence characteristic of this worldview. I will begin with some provisional definitions, then illustrate further my critique of the modern worldview by considering several aspects of that worldview, and conclude with a brief outline of an alternative way of looking at the world, what I call a pacifist way of knowing.

A pacifist basis for critique

For all my appreciation for his profound insights, I do have one disagreement with Walter Wink—over the use of the term “pacifism.” I do not have space here to discuss this difference beyond acknowledging it. I do suspect Wink would not be happy being associated with “a *pacifist* way of knowing,” as he rejects this term as a characterization of his position.¹¹ All I can do here is briefly justify my usage. “Pacifism’s” root is the Latin *pacis*: “peace” (not “passivity”). I understand “pacifism” to mean the love of peace, making peace the highest value. The “-ism” connotes *ultimacy*; “peace” is an ultimate value. Now, placing ultimate weight on “peace” could be problematic, depending upon what we mean by it. If “peace” means avoidance of conflict, then Wink surely correctly rejects pacifism as a useful term (the avoidance of conflict as the ultimate value may accurately describe some so-called “pacifists”—but is actually a quite unhealthy and ultimately violence-*fostering* approach to life).

I argue for a *different*, biblically-oriented understanding of “peace”—or “shalom.” I see peace as a holistic concept best understood in relation to a constellation of concepts such as the well-being, wholeness, health of the entire community on all levels. We may think of respect and harmony in relationships among human beings and between human beings and the rest of creation. Pacifism, then, is a positive concept, reflecting a vision for how life can and should be. For pacifism, nothing is as important as love, kindness, restorative justice, healthy relationships with all of creation. A pacifist approach to life privileges holistic peace above any other value or goal—be it economic wealth, the nation-state, moral purity, or the survival on any particular human institution.

Consequently for pacifists, violence of any kind is not acceptable since there are no values that take priority over holistic peace. *Nonviolence* is certainly part of the pacifist commitment. However, to me, the term “nonviolence” is less broad and positive than “pacifism”. The vision of

¹¹ Wink, *Engaging*, 227.

life I am trying to comprehend and articulate centers not primarily on the absence of violence but on the positive reality of holistic peace.

As we seek to critique and overcome ways our modern worldview serves the Powers' efforts at concealment and delusion, pacifism becomes a central criterion of discernment. We evaluate values and practices in terms of how they do or do not foster peace. The presence of violence serves as a warning, tipping us off that something is wrong with the system—similarly to how the death of the songbirds tipped people off concerning the devastating effects of DDT on the ecosystem. The presence of violence indicates for the pacifist that penultimate values are being given too high a priority. And we assume that when this happens, many other problems undermining the wellbeing of life will arise.

The “modern worldview”

Numerous historians argue that the “modern worldview” can best be seen as emerging in its fullness in the early 17th century. They pinpoint the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern era in the West at the period from the late 15th to the early 17th centuries. Columbus, Luther, and Copernicus provided the final blows that ended the medieval period with their respective discoveries of the New World, a new doctrinal system freed from Church control, and the solar system.¹² Less than a generation later, the modern era began with the laying of a theoretical foundation for a new worldview. Francis Bacon was a key initiator of this new worldview, followed by René Descartes and John Locke. All three thinkers pled for a new order and derived much energy from their indictment of medieval disorder, the duress of daily life, the deadwood of tradition, and the oppression of hierarchy and community. They urged a new fundamental agreement, one that razed the tottering and constricting medieval structures and began anew on a solid fundament.¹³

Richard Tarnas, in *The Passion of the Western Mind*, provides a helpful synopsis of the modern worldview. The modern view contrasts with the medieval in seeing the cosmos as “an impersonal phenomenon, governed by regular natural laws, and understandable in exclusively physical and mathematical terms.” In the medieval view, a personal and all-powerful God ruled the cosmos. The modern cosmos has more autonomy.¹⁴ Science came to be the central intellectual authority, dethroning religion

¹²Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 21-2.

¹³Borgmann, *Crossing*, 22-3.

¹⁴Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (Boston: Ballantine Books, 1990), 285.

as the “definer, judge, and guardian of the culture world view.” In the scientific approach to truth, reason and observation take the place of revelation and doctrine. Religion evolves to be more a matter of personal and subjective sensibilities, leaving public knowledge to scientifically verifiable understandings. Faith and reason are sharply divided.¹⁵

With the modern view, the cosmos is comprehended by human rationality alone. Other aspects of human nature—emotional, aesthetic, relational, imaginative—are no longer seen as relevant for genuine understanding of the world. The universe is known through sober impersonal scientific investigation. Such knowledge results “not so much in an experience of spiritual liberation but in intellectual mastery and material improvement.” The domination of nature becomes the goal of intellectual activity.¹⁶ The final aspect of the modern worldview emerged with the integration of the theory of evolution and its multitude of consequences in other fields. Now, human origins and the processes of nature’s changes were seen as exclusively attributable to natural causes and empirically observable processes. With this step, the change from seeing earth no longer as the center of creation but simply as another planet was followed by seeing the human being also no longer as the center of creation but simply as another animal.¹⁷

Critique of three aspects of the modern worldview

To illustrate problematic aspects to the modern worldview, I will briefly discuss three inter-related elements in that worldview—the view of the universe as impersonal, the quest to dominate nature, and the impact of rationalism on how we approach life. I do not mean this critique to be a whole scale rejection of modernity, nor of our Western way of life. I am simply seeking to gain some orientation. I am deeply troubled by the pervasiveness of violence and alienation in our society and believe that a big part of our problem stems from how we view the world. This concern pushes me to ask questions and to try to make connections between my pacifist convictions and the violence toward human beings and nature that seem to be so much simply of the air we breathe in our world.

Even if we might wish we could, we cannot (and probably, when it came down to it, would not want to) return to the pre-modern world or to the non-modern world of the small, marginalized aboriginal cultures in our world now. However, I do think we might learn much from pre-

¹⁵Tarnas, *Passion*, 286.

¹⁶Tarnas, *Passion*, 287.

¹⁷Tarnas, *Passion*, 288-9.

and non-modern cultures. By drawing on their wisdom, we may find help as we seek to make adjustments in the culture of which we are all a part. There is no long-term future for the dominating, totalitarian, inherently violent modern worldview in the West over the past four centuries. Either it will be transformed into a more sustainable, holistically peaceable worldview or it will lead to the destruction of human life as we know it.

Perhaps a starting point in challenging the concealment of this worldview is to deny the assumption that the rapid pace with which western society has depleted the natural order is an inevitable product of human evolution. In fact, human beings lived for tens of thousands of years in an essentially steady-state harmony with the rest of creation.¹⁸ Only with modernity, did human culture declare widespread war on the natural order. That is, what changed were human consciousness and the worldview of a large enough group of people to have a major impact. I believe that this consciousness can change again. We are not trapped in a suicidal worldview. But while the first step in breaking free from this suicidal spiral of violence may be simple, it is anything but easy. This first step, I think (following Wink), is simply *seeing* what's going on.

Impersonal universe. David Abram, in *The Spell of the Sensuous*,¹⁹ argues that the key for human well-being in the world is to find the way somehow to restore our mutuality with the “more-than-human world.” The objectification of the world was a move with profoundly destructive effects. For Abram, one of the key aspects of this separation between human beings the world, and with that separation the attributing of consciousness only to human beings, came with the emergence of an abstract written alphabet. As cultures shift to printed letters, “the stones fall silent.” As our senses focus their enlivening perceptions on the written word, “the trees become mute, the other animals dumb.”²⁰

This shift began with the Greeks, gaining impetus when Christianity (with its Greek scriptures) spread throughout the Western world. The advent of the printing press allowed this process to shape an entire civilization as it led to the Enlightenment with its deeply detached view of the more-than-human world—the view that came to characterize the modern period.²¹ A particularly influential tenet of the Enlightenment along these lines found expression in Descartes' explicit separation of the thinking mind, or subject, from the non-human material world—that

¹⁸Andrew Bard Schmookler, *The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Evolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 17-8.

¹⁹David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in the More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage, 1996).

²⁰Abram, *Spell*, 131.

²¹Abram, *Spell*, 138-9.

Descartes understood to be the world of “things”, or “objects”.²²

Such a separation turned the world into an impersonal entity, understood primarily in objective, impersonal physical and mathematical terms. No longer were the inner mind and the outer world understood as inextricably related, wherein understanding in one realm heightened understanding in the other. They are separated, seen to be operating on different principles.²³ This separation between human consciousness and the other-than-human world and the consequent redefinition of nature, opened the gates to massive disregard for other forms of life in the world. The collapse of complex ecosystems, the poisoning of waters, the extinction of species all stem from our forgetting our human inherence in a more-than-human world.²⁴ Abram points out that for at least 10,000 years prior to 1492, human cultures had continuously inhabited North America. These peoples “gathered, hunted, fished, and settled these lands without severely degrading the continent’s wild integrity.” The relatively brief time since Columbus has seen the destruction of much of the natural wealth of this continent.²⁵

The destructive impact of western settlement transformed the Australian continent much more quickly even than North America, as European cultures came to dominate Australia about 300 years after the settling of North America. We find an illustration of the costly consequences of how the notion of the universe as impersonal and human beings as separate that is characteristic of the modern worldview filtered down to common people in Robert Hughes’s book *The Fatal Shore*, an account of western European settlement of Australia.

Hughes tells of the unimaginable abundance of aquatic life in the southern ocean, the previously undisturbed sanctuary for the black whale, the sperm whale, and the fur seals. Focusing on the fate of these sea mammals, he tells how every season, millions traveled north from Antarctica to mate and calve along the coasts of New Zealand and Australia. These animals had no natural enemies and knew nothing of human beings. They had economic value, and they were defenseless. Tens of millions of them were wiped out in less than thirty years.

The new European settlers exploited these sea mammals without mercy, killing them year-round, clubbing their prey to death. The sealers never stopped, leaving no off-season for mating and pupping time. Pregnant seals were killed by the thousand, and the pups were left

²²Abram, *Spell*, 31.

²³Kevin Bradt, *Story as a Way of Knowing* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1997), 74.

²⁴Abram, *Spell*, 260.

²⁵Abram, *Spell*, 94.

milkless on the rocks to starve. “Disturbed in their ancestral rookeries, which soon became bogs of putrefaction—for the sealers took only the skins and left hills of flayed carcasses behind—the seals stopped breeding and abandoned their haunts.”²⁶ In time, several of these species ceased to exist. They had simply been a resource to extract from the earth. The western worldview understood nature as having no intrinsic value or spiritual connection with human beings, but simply part of the impersonal, clockwork universe.

Domination of nature. Once human beings depersonalize and objectify nature, they easily think of their relationship with nature as one of domination. At the very beginning of the modern era, Francis Bacon, one of the founders of the modern worldview, gave voice to this dynamic. In his book, *The New Atlantis*, Bacon spoke of torturing, exhorting, and subjugating nature for human benefit. In doing so, he sets to the tone for the modern approach to reality, to daily life, and to the physical world.²⁷

Albert Borgmann, in *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, argues that the successful quest to dominate nature began with the voyages of discovery at the beginning of the modern period. The Baconian philosophy found expression in the Herculean efforts of western culture to advance in the face of nature’s resistance. Borgmann cites several examples—the voyages of discovery beginning at the end of the fifteenth century, the extensive harnessing of wind and water power, the establishment of manufacturers of mass consumption, and the development of bookkeeping methods and financial instruments. “In each case, expansion faced major barriers—which were overcome by force.”²⁸ Dynamite, massive construction equipment, pesticides, herbicides, modern mobilizing of financial and physical resources all are examples of the use of brute force to subdue, control, and dominate nature.

Borgmann uses the building the railroad across the US as a metaphor of the quest to dominate and subdue nature. One barrier builders faced was gaining right of way for the tracks, and at least in parts of Montana this land was simply taken from Native American reservations with the threat of military force. Another barrier was geographical. Getting through the mountains in western Montana into Idaho required massive and brutal force. This force came from both heavy use of dynamite and use of human laborers. The chief had nearly 2,000 workers, most of whom were Chinese, “fresh from the steerage of immigrant ships who

²⁶Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia’s Founding* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 331-2.

²⁷Borgmann, *Crossing*, 23.

²⁸Borgmann, *Crossing*, 27-8.

“were used for construction and discarded when no longer needed.”²⁹

The massive amounts of earth that had to be moved were unprecedented. The development and application of explosives for such work was a prerequisite for the transcontinental railroad. Human beings no longer had to be deterred by geographical barriers. The domination of nature required that distance and terrain, weather and season, be subdued. An extraordinarily aggressive attitude toward reality propelled this conquest. And this attitude has rarely been questioned in the face of assumptions about the necessity of safe, cheap, and dependable transportation to fuel our nation’s economic development.³⁰

Ironically, 100 years later, the work of the railroads is mostly over. Borgmann mentions the Milwaukee Road that used to span the continent and went bankrupt and had its line dismantled. The Northern Pacific merged with the Great Northern and the Burlington. Eventually, the line through Missoula, Montana was sold to a local businessman.

The major legacy that the Northern Pacific left to Missoula is a threat to its water supply. Since the 1950s, when locomotives were switched from steam to diesel, tens of thousands of gallons of fuel were spilled in the train yard. They soaked into the soil and now float on the water table. Pesticides, paint, and solvents are working their way down to the community’s source of drinking water.³¹

Following the building of the railroad, in the late 1950s the US government embarked on another exercise in taming the continent, building the interstate highway system that in many places in western mountain ranges parallels the railroad. “A four-lane, controlled-access highway is a much broader and more massive structure than a railroad. Hence highway construction was even more aggressively intrusive on the land than its railroad predecessors.”³²

Rationalism. Ultimately, the modern worldview may be best seen in terms of its understanding of rationality. At the beginning of the modern era, scientists in the 17th century established that “rationality” would be understood in a narrow manner: limited, in Stephen Toulmin’s words, “to theoretical arguments that achieved a quasi-geometrical

²⁹Borgmann, *Crossing*, 31. Cf. also, David Haward Bain, *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Viking, 1999).

³⁰Borgmann, *Crossing*, 32.

³¹Borgmann, *Crossing*, 34.

³²Borgmann, *Crossing*, 34.

certainty or necessity.”³³ This rationalistic form of knowledge and control requires a narrowing of vision. Such tunnel vision brings into sharp focus certain limited aspects of an otherwise far more complex and unwieldy reality. This focus makes the phenomenon at the center of the field of vision legible and more easily and carefully quantified, analyzed, and controlled. This “rational” method “purifies” the work of reason by separating this work from particular historical and cultural situations.³⁴

James Scott labels the practical implementation of rationalism “high modernism,” with its commitment to consistent movement forward (progress), absolute truths, and rational planning of ideal social orders under standardized conditions of knowledge and production.³⁵ High modernism’s problematic elements follow from its claim that it is backed by the authority of scientific knowledge in its quest to “improve” the human condition. Also, high modernism uses this authoritative claim to silence competing sources of judgment.³⁶ But the use high modernism makes of science is narrow and totalitarian. “*Nothing* is known until and unless it is proven in a tightly controlled experiment.” Knowledge gained through other means is not taken seriously. “Traditional practices, codified as they are in practice and in folk sayings” simply do not matter. They exist under the radar of modernity.³⁷

Scott provides an example of how this imperviousness to context has exacted a high toll in recent years. In the 15 years following World War II, people in the high modern mindset sprayed enormous quantities of DDT to kill mosquitoes and control mosquito-born diseases. In preparation for these actions, scientific experiments focused only on determining the dosage concentrations and application conditions required for eradicating mosquito populations. Within that framework, DDT worked quite well. It did kill mosquitoes and significantly reduce diseases. But the experimental framework left important considerations out—with tragic consequences. It gradually became apparent that DDT had a devastating ecological impact. Residues were absorbed by organisms all along the food chain, with deadly poisonous effects.

Side effects multiplied. “A first-order effect—say, the decline or disappearance of a local insect population—led to changes in flowering plants, which changed the habitat for other plants and for rodents, and so on.” Secondly, scientists had examined the effects of DDT on other

³³Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free Press, 1990) 20.

³⁴Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*, 104-5.

³⁵Scott, *Seeing*, 377.

³⁶Scott, *Seeing*, 93.

³⁷Scott, *Seeing*, 305-6.

species only under experimental, not field, conditions—even though its application occurred in the latter context. Scientists “had no idea what the interactive effects of pesticides were when they were mixed with water and soil and acted upon by sunlight.”³⁸

The problem with DDT shows how the narrowness of rationalistic vision does lead directly to violence against the world. We could cite innumerable other examples, including many practices in modern warfare such as chemical defoliation and the use of landmines.

One early critic of rationalism, Blaise Pascal, raised a concern that remains apropos today. The great failure of rationalism is “not its recognition of technical knowledge, but its failure to recognize any other.”³⁹ Three elements of the modern worldview, seeing the universe as impersonal, dominating nature, and privileging rationalistic science as determinative of acceptable knowledge, combine to foster a tremendous amount of violence. Yet, they are simply part of the air educated people in the West breathe. What is required is some major *dis-illusionment*.

A pacifist way of knowing

As an alternative to an uncritical living within the modern worldview, I want to propose a pacifist way of knowing. Let me repeat what I mean by pacifism: a holistic concept understood in relation to a cluster of concepts such as the well-being, wholeness, health of the entire community on all levels. We can think of respect and harmony in relationships among human beings and between human beings and the rest of creation. Pacifism is a positive concept, reflecting a vision for how life is meant to be. Nothing is as important as love, kindness, restorative justice, healthy relationships with all of creation. A pacifist approach to life privileges holistic peace above any other value or goal. In concluding my essay, I want briefly to mention two elements of a pacifist way of knowing that specifically respond to what I have been saying about the inherent violence of the modern worldview.

The web of life. The first aspect recognizing the *interconnectedness* of all of life. Native American philosopher Gabriel Horn writes of the contrast between two ways of knowing. The first coheres with what Horn calls “our Original Intention.” “Take only what you need, live in harmony and balance with your environment, love the Earth. Such a thought process does not allow artificial extensions, like the tools we create or even the weapons we make, to become actual extensions of the

³⁸Scott, *Seeing*, 291-2.

³⁹ Quoted in Scott, *Seeing*, 340.

self.” People whose thought processes follow this path do not believe they are superior to other life forms. All things are necessary parts of wholeness.⁴⁰

The other way of knowing “travels on an asphalt road.” For this path, our artificial extensions, on which we increasingly depend, are linked with our very identity. This leads to an ever-widening separation not only from non-Western peoples but also other life forms. The wheel is no longer something sacred but simply as an instrument for moving faster.⁴¹

Wendell Berry argues that we must resist the modernist urge to reduce everything to abstract classifications. “Without some use of abstractions, thought is incoherent or unintelligible, perhaps unthinkable. But abstraction alone is merely dead.”⁴² Instead, we must see ourselves as intimately connected with the other-than-human world. “If we are to protect the world’s multitude of places and creatures, then we must know them...with affection, ‘by heart,’ so that in seeing or remembering them the heart may be said to ‘sing,’ to make a music peculiar to its recognition of each particular place or creature that it knows well.”⁴³

Eloquent reality. The second aspect of a pacifist way of knowing is openness to the richness of life, what Borgmann calls “eloquent reality.”⁴⁴ Many people have characterized the 20th century as a century of deep alienation and brokenness. Such alienation follows from a worldview that has abstracted from the non-human world all conscious intelligence and purpose and meaning and then projected onto the world a soulless machine. Tarnas writes, “this is the ultimate anthropomorphic projection: a [human]-made machine, something not in fact ever found in nature. From this perspective, it is the modern world’s own impersonal soullessness that has been projected from within onto the world.”⁴⁵

A pacifist way of knowing argues that this modern interpretation of the universe is only one particular *perspective*. Other perspectives are possible. “Eloquent reality” is that in this life, this world, which is genuinely beautiful, healing, soulful, invigorating. Reality understood thus is not totally orderly, objective, controllable, or quantifiable.

Martin Buber articulated an understanding of the world focused on relationships as the core of what is most real – in contrast to the world of

⁴⁰Gabriel Horn, *Contemplations of a Primal Mind* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1996), 28.

⁴¹Horn, *Contemplations*, 28-29.

⁴²Wendell Berry, *Life is a Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2000), 136.

⁴³Berry, *Life*, 137-8.

⁴⁴Borgmann, *Crossing*, 110-47.

⁴⁵Tarnas, *Passion*, 432.

use, control, and exploitation (the “It-world”). Buber argued that the world we live in is where we will encounter our peaceable God.

I know nothing of a “world” and of “worldly life” that separate us from God. What is designated that way is life with an alienated It-world, the life of experience and use. Whatever goes out in truth to the world, goes forth to God. Only he that believes in the world achieves contact with it; and if he commits himself he cannot remain godless. Let us love that actual world that never wishes to be annulled;...in all its terror, [daring] to embrace it with our spirit’s arms – and our hands encounter the hands that hold it.⁴⁶

Gordon Kaufman is another who profoundly and painstakingly articulates a pacifist way of knowing in relation to the big issues of God and the world. Seeking for peace on earth—what Kaufman calls a “humane order” characterized by love, justice, creativity, mutual respect—goes *with the grain* of the universe. Reality is not soulless, arbitrary, meaningless. “Our deepest human aspirations are not alien to this ecological-historical order into which we have been born: the world in which we live is a humane-seeking order. We can give ourselves wholeheartedly to responsible life and work within it.”⁴⁷

A pacifist way of knowing, then, makes two strongly counter-modern assertions. First, all of life is interconnected. We are called to respect that interconnectedness and to seek harmony with all of creation. Second, life *in* this world is where we encounter the divine. Let us love this actual world, and in that way we will be loving the God who made it and enlivens it.

⁴⁶Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribners, 1970), 143.

⁴⁷Gordon D. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 338-9.

13. Martin Buber for peacemakers

[From sermons preached at Eugene (Oregon) Mennonite Church, Spring 1994]

Old Testament scholar Perry Yoder believes that Mennonites need to learn more from Judaism. “Judaism...can furnish valuable alternative models for the construction of hermeneutics, ethics, and theology....Some Mennonite theologians express a growing sentiment that...Mennonites should integrate their theology more fully with that of Christendom.” However, “perhaps there are other traditions which might be equally helpful theologically for a dissenting tradition, such as Judaism. It is urgent before going too far down the road the road of Christendom that other options and theological goals be tested.”¹

I agree with Yoder’s argument. He makes a persuasive case. My purpose in this essay is to support Yoder’s argument in an area he does not directly address, spirituality. If Mennonites are increasingly receptive to the concerns of Christendom in theology and ethics, this is even more the case in spirituality. Like with those other areas, also with regard to spirituality Mennonites are running the danger of neglecting and even rejecting some of the particular strengths of their tradition in their appropriation of the practices of Christendom.

Mennonite spirituality has traditionally been concrete and practical, not mystical. Current trends point toward an increasing appreciation of mysticism and the language of high church spiritual practices.² My

¹Perry Yoder, “The Importance of Judaism for Contemporary Anabaptist Thought,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 67.1 (April 1993), 73.

²Cf. various essays by Peter C. Erb, including “Traditional Spirituality and Mennonite Life,” in Harry Huebner, ed. *The Church as Theological Community: Essays in Honour of David Schroeder* (Winnipeg: CMBC, 1990), 275-300; “Theology and Prayer,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 11.1 (Winter 1993), 77-84; and “Contemplation and Action in the Modern World,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 9.1 (Winter 1991), 1-13.

purpose is not to argue that these trends are necessarily inappropriate so much as to offer some reflections stemming from a different tradition, Judaism. I do think that learning from Judaism may be more helpful to us in understanding and cultivating the particular strengths of our own tradition than borrowing from mainstream Christendom. This is the context for my utilizing the insights of Martin Buber, a Jewish theologian who lived from 1878 to 1965, first in Austria and Germany, and then, after 1938, in Israel. Buber's most famous book was called *I and Thou*.³

As much as any one book, I find *I and Thou* shaping my thinking and my understanding of spirituality. It is a difficult book. I am only scratching the surface of Buber's thought. What I want to offer is not so much an objective summary of Buber's thinking, but what I could call "reflections on spirituality, especially as stimulated by Martin Buber's book *I and Thou*." I will organize my reflections around five general themes: one, that the heart of spirituality is relationships; two, that God is a You and not an It; three, that all of life is spiritual; four, that reality is trustworthy; and five, that life is to be lived in the present.

The heart of reality is relationships

Buber himself can help us see some of the problems with borrowing from the mystical tradition in these comments about one of the most influential 20th-century mystics, Simone Weil, who grew up Jewish but converted to Catholicism near the end of her short life. Buber wrote:

Even if Simone Weil had known the true God of Israel, she would not have been satisfied, for he turns toward nature, which he dominates, whereas Simone Weil sought flight from nature as well as from society: reality became intolerable to her, and for her, God was the power which led her away from it. But this is definitely not the way of the God of Israel; such a way would be the very opposite of his relation toward his creation and his creatures. He has placed man in the center of reality in order that he should face up to it.

Simone Weil's idea was to serve mankind, and so she again and again took to heavy manual labor on the land, but her soul was always put to flight by reality. And she began with her own reality: she contested the "I"; it was one's duty, she thought, to slay the "I" in oneself. "We possess nothing in this world," she wrote, "other than the power to say I. This is what we should yield up to God, and that is what we should destroy." Such a basic orientation is, indeed, diametrically opposed to Judaism; for

³Martin Buber, *I and Thou* translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Scribners, 1970).

the real relationship taught by Judaism is a bridge which spans across two firm pillars, man's "I" and the "I" of man's eternal partner. It is thus the relation between man and God, thus also the relation between man and man. Judaism rejects the "I" that connotes selfishness and pride, but it welcomes and affirms the "I" of the real relationship, the "I" of the partnership between I and Thou, the "I" of love. Love does not invalidate the "I"; on the contrary, it binds the "I" more closely to the "Thou." It does not say: "Thou art loved" but "I love thee"⁴

In Buber's view, Simone Weil, as a mystic, wrongly sought to eradicate the "I." She also wrongly sought to escape from concrete reality with the flight of her soul out of this physical world. Hence, she was a failure when it came to genuine, mutual human relationships. She actually greatly disliked people—they hindered her in her quest for God.

Instead of minimizing the importance of human relationships for authentic spirituality, as he saw mysticism doing, Buber actually makes them central. He spends the first part of *I and Thou* exclusively talking about people, about inter-human relationships. I was a little surprised by this because I thought he would be talking more directly about God. But for him, what really matters is relating with other people; although as the book goes on, it becomes clear that inter-human relationships also reveal a great deal about human beings relationships with God.

There are, for Buber, basically two forms of existence, what he calls the I-You and the I-It. The I-You is when we exist in relation to others, whom we know as You. That means we know them as beings with their own value, their own existence apart from us. An I-You relationship is one of mutual regard. Certainly this is what can characterize ongoing intimate relationships between family, friends, and lovers. However, I-You relationships can also happen more spontaneously, when you meet somebody briefly but meaningfully. According to Buber, most of our involvement with other human beings is of an I-It nature. In fact, even with people we love in an I-You fashion, even our best relationships are most of the time of an I-It nature. Others are experienced as objects. We want them to do something for us, to behave well, to meet our needs, maybe just to stay out of our way. And this is okay.

For one thing, we cannot live in the I-You world for long at a time. It's too dynamic, too intense. At best, it is something we visit from time to time. As well, most of time we are needing simply to get on with things. We should always be respectful of people, but we do need to keep our

⁴Martin Buber, "The Silent Question: On Henri Bergson and Simone Weil," in Will Herberg, ed. *The Writings of Martin Buber* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1956), 312-3.

distance, to relate in a functional way and then move on. It is usually appropriate simply to say hello to the grocery store checker, buy our groceries, pay our money, and then say “You bet” and leave when the checker says, “Thanks, have a nice day.” The I-You moment always takes all of our being. The I-It never does. We must have mostly I-It types of encounters or we would be exhausted. However, the I-You times are necessary, as well, for the well-being of our soul. We need to be known as a You by others; we need to know others as Yous.

When Buber talks about relationships as the crux of spirituality he has something specific in mind. He means a relationship with another whom we know as a You. We never possess a You. A You is someone we listen to, someone we see as a person in his or her own right, not merely an object to experience. A You is not simply a projection of our own desires. When we look through a window toward someone we know as You, the glass is two-way; we’re not simply looking into a mirror. Ultimately, we need to know at least some others as You, because that is how we find our identity. Human beings are created to be in I-You relationships. The breath of life comes from encountering a You, being a You to someone else; knowing the You-world as genuine and vital.

For physical life to continue, we need the It-world. We need objectivity, we need technology, we need impersonal activity; we even need to be free to encounter other people superficially at times. However, living only in an It-world renders us less than human. Spirituality has everything to do with knowing other people as Yous. Spirituality is social, relational, connecting with people. It is a delusion to think that spirit occurs within the individual. This becomes “a human spirit bent back into itself.”⁵ Instead, genuine spirit occurs between the individual and someone other, between us and that which we are not. The individual bent back into itself renounces the centrality of relationships with others.

However, in Buber’s view, the realm of the spirit is the space *between* me and You. It is not centered in the I. “It is not like the blood that circulates in you,” writes Buber, “but like the air in which you breathe.”⁶ Our capability of living in the spirit, then, our capability of growing toward authentic spirituality, this is dependent upon our ability to relate to others, to know others as You. Only in that way may we discover the realm of spirit. Buber also emphasizes, in opposition to what he understands mysticism to seek, that to discover the realm of spirit, actually, to encounter God, we must remain ourselves. We don’t lose our self in merging with the spiritual realm. In discovering the realm of spirit,

⁵Buber, *I and Thou*, 141.

⁶Buber, *I and Thou*, 89.

we best become ourselves. That is because the highest spiritual existence is that of encountering another person (and God) as a You. And, all I-You relationships (including that with God), are based on each person remaining an “I.” It is only in finding relationships with those who are *different* from us that we find ourselves—and find God.

God is a You and not an It

In *I and Thou* Buber spends the first part of the book talking only about people. He doesn't mention God for many pages. He does this, in part at least, as a means of making his point that it is through our social relationships that we access God. We don't start with God, in isolation from human beings. For Buber's understanding of God, it is important not to be misled by the title of the English translation of his book—*I and Thou*. The German original is *Ich und Du*. The German *Du* corresponds with our informal “you,” not the formal “thou.” When Buber speaks of God, he means God as a close-at-hand You, not God as a distant Thou.

When I encounter another person as You, *that* is where God is present. When I disregard the other person, I am actually disregarding and ignoring God. Simply to use another person is to deny God. We can not live in two realms, one of *impersonality* with all other human beings and the other of closeness with God. Buber would say that the intensely pious person, with the intense devotional life, who in actuality distains actual human beings, such a person only knows God as It, an object, a projection. On the other hand, all people who address their whole being to the You of their life, in other human beings, in nature, such people are addressing Buber's God. That is true even if they understand themselves to be Godless or espouse an intellectually cock-eyed theology.

Buber writes that “whoever knows the world as something to be *utilized* knows God in the same way. [Their] prayers...fall into the ears of the void. [Those people]—and not the [so-called] ‘atheists’ who from the night and longing of [their] garret windows address the nameless—[are the actual] godless [ones].”⁷ We cannot live compartmentalized lives and hope to be spiritually alive. We cannot devote ourselves to impersonal success, manipulation, and disregard others with part of our lives and with the other part worship God. God then is an It, only a projection.

Buber also asserts that it is all parts of who we are which enter the You-world. Some approaches to spirituality seek for something “pure, essential, and enduring [in our inner soul], while stripping away everything else.” However, genuinely to participate in You-ness, he

⁷Buber, *I and Thou*, 155-6.

writes, one need “not consider our instincts as too impure, the sensuous as too peripheral, or our emotions as too fleeting—everything must be included and integrated.” The whole person participates, not only an “abstracted self.”⁸ Buber asserts that human beings have two forms of existence—the I-You and the I-It. We all reside in the It-world most of the time, which is appropriate, even necessary. But we all also have potential for being part of the You-world. And that is where we become most fully ourselves, spiritually vital and alive.

These are moments of genuine relating with others—human beings, God, (in some sense at least) nature. They are the moments which are definitive of our spirituality. We cultivate these moments not by clinging to them, not by seeking by power to create them, not by manipulating God and people to find ecstasy. Rather, we cultivate the You-moments by living with openness to other people and God, ready to know them, separate beings from us, ready to know them as You when the opportunity arises. We cultivate the You-moments by learning better to know and respect ourselves as who we are and by learning better to know and respect others as who they are. These two areas of knowledge—ourselves as “I” and others as “You” depend upon each other.

All of life is spiritual

Buber argues that the sacred, the realm of spirit, this exists everywhere. The sabbath, what might be called holy time, is everyday. It is not limited, he writes, to “a house of God, nor to a church or synagogue, or seminary, nor to one day out of seven.”⁹ For Buber, the possibility of knowing God as present, one way he talks about spirituality; the possibility of encounter—with people, creation, God—with another as You and not It; this access to the spirit is constant, at all times, at all places. Thinking in terms of “a house of God” or “one day out of seven” as special places or special times is not an aid to spirituality but indeed quite possibly a hindrance. Narrowing and restricting the Spirit in this way can keep us from experiencing each present moment as special.

“What is decisive,” Buber writes, “is whether the spirit—the You-saying, responding spirit—remains alive and active.”¹⁰ This will never happen if life is experienced as compartmentalized; partly sacred, partly secular. To have only certain slots for the life of the spirit—say, church on Sunday, our quiet devotional time, or even in more Buberian terms,

⁸Buber, *I and Thou*, 137-8.

⁹Buber, *I and Thou*, 30.

¹⁰Buber, *I and Thou*, 99.

only certain relationships and encounters—to think of these as the “spirituality” compartments and other times as “secular” or “mundane” will have the effect of relegating the “secular” compartments to nothing but the It-world, in Buber’s words, “abandoned forever to this despotism, while the spirit would [also] lose all actuality.”¹¹ When we compartmentalize our lives, living part of life closed off from the You-world, then that resistance to the You-world will spread to the rest of our lives. In trying to protect the sacred in its own little cubby, we actually are acting in such a way which will drive the sacred out altogether. It’s either *everywhere* a possibility for us, or it becomes no possibility at all.

For so many people, in Buber’s view, life has become a struggle for spiritual empowerment and vitality. This has led to what he calls a continual invention of various prescriptions, preparations, exercises, and meditations” for spiritual empowerment. But none of these “disciplines” in reality have anything “to do with the primarily simple fact of encounter.” The various spiritual disciplines and activities people struggle over, Buber believes, have their “place in the It-world and do not take us one step out of it.” Moving from the It-world to the You-world, from the world of using to the world of encounter, such a move can not be taught “in the sense of prescriptions.”¹²

Life is to be lived in the present

What we need are not more sophisticated techniques or more rigorous will-power. What we need are not more insightful gurus or some sort of tried and true spiritual retreat. What we need instead is something very simple. However, its simplicity is not to be mistaken for it being easy. What we need, Buber asserts, for spiritual vitality is simply “the total acceptance of the present.”¹³ What we need is an awareness that God as our foundational You, our fellow-human beings as Yous, are here right now. We will not find anything more profound, pure and holy, or life transforming than simply learning to say You in the present, wherever we are, whomever we are with, however we feel.

Buber also argues that “what has to be given up is not the I, as most mystics suppose. [No,] the I is indispensable for any relationship, including the highest [with God,] which always presupposes an I and [a] You. What has to be given up is not the I but that false drive for self-assertion which impels [people] to flee from the unreliable, unsold,

¹¹Buber, *I and Thou*, 100.

¹²Buber, *I and Thou*, 125-6.

¹³Buber, *I and Thou*, 126.

unlasting, unpredictable, dangerous world of relation into the world of having of things.”¹⁴ What has to be given up is fleeing from the fluid You-world into the stable It-world.

What Buber calls the “false drive for self-assertion” stems, I believe, from a fear of the present, from a fear of reality, from a fear of the “world of relation.” This world of relation is scary. Actual relationships—with people or with God—of mutual give and take, of openness, without control over are unpredictable, unstable, fluid, have their ups and downs. In our fear, we avoid that kind of uncertainty. So we do seek to flee—to solitude, to strictly It-relationships with people, to a dream of otherworldly flights of the soul. Any hope for finding the You-world by fleeing from the present will be in vain.

We know of many seemingly hopelessly inhuman environments where people have still found the world of encounter, the You-world. We learn this from the book, *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*, by Helen Prejean. She began her work when she was asked by a friend who worked with prisoners to write to a certain death row inmate who was totally closed off from the world. But because he was a Catholic, Sister Helen’s friend thought he might respond to a nun. “Sister Helen began her correspondence with Pat, the prisoner, simply to give some comfort and human contact to a prisoner whose family was too poor and debilitated to visit or write him. But she would not give Pat the impression that she condoned what he had done. Nonetheless, his letters multiplied, and his loneliness ached for them.”

She eventually visited him, and ended up helping him with an appeal, since it seemed possible that he hadn’t actually killed the person he was condemned for, though he had been an accomplice and surely was guilty of terrible crimes. She helped him to face death, even as she worked to save his life. He did end up being executed, but not before he came to express remorse for what he had done, gone to confessional, and in many other ways respond to Sister Helen as a You—after a lifetime of treating just about everyone as an It.¹⁵

Buber asserts that “I know nothing of a ‘world’ and of ‘worldly life’ that separate us from God. What is designated that way is life with an alienated It-world, the life of experience and use. Whoever goes forth in truth to the world, goes forth to God.”¹⁶ God is everywhere to be found; what Buber calls “encounter,” “association,” genuine relationship,” are everywhere to be found. There is no place called “world” where God and

¹⁴Buber, *I and Thou*, 126.

¹⁵Garry Wills, “Living Others’ Deaths,” *New York Review of Books* 40.15 (September 23, 1993), 3.

¹⁶Buber, *I and Thou*, 143.

other Yous are unavailable. Only when we flee, when we block ourselves off, when we use others, project onto others, deny the present, exist only with objects, are we separated from God. And that separation is *our* doing. God is the always present You, waiting only for our response, only for our receptivity.

“No prescription can lead us to the encounter....Only the acceptance of the presence is required to come to it.”¹⁷ There is no formula, no set of techniques. Buber’s one key to spiritual empowerment is “acceptance of the presence.” In part, what he means by that, I think, is presence in two senses. One sense is acceptance of *God’s* continual presence. God is always here, always present. The other sense is accepting our need to be present, our need to live in the here and now. *Some* dissatisfaction might be healthy, it might help us to keep moving, to seek to learn and grow and change. However, too much, without question, will keep us from knowing the You-world. Buber’s point is that the You-world is only known in the present. God is available for us only in the present. Another person as You is available for us only in the present.

Reality is trustworthy

A final theme of Buber’s is that reality is trustworthy. We can have courage to live life in the present because reality is trustworthy. We enter the You-world, which is temporary; we know others as You with all the dynamism and unpredictability of genuine I-You relationships; and then we let the You-moment pass by. We allow ourselves to do that because we know that entry to the You-world is always possible. We can trust reality always to allow access to the You-world. The You is known only in the present. We can let it go as time passes because it will be knowable again in a new present. Reality is trustworthy because the You-world is always accessible. A trust in reality, in the nature of how human life works, helps us be comfortable with a closeness/distance rhythm. The possibility of a I-You connection is always there. We don’t have to worry about being overwhelmed by the distance; the closeness *will* return.

According to Buber, the largest threat to our genuine fulfillment is a lack of trust. Instead of trust in the ongoing possibility of encounter, of entering the You-world, of genuinely connecting with God and people—this is one kind of faith. Its deadly opposite is what he calls “faith in *doom*”, faith in inevitable, overwhelming, always increasing It-ness. Buber’s contemporary, the German sociologist Max Weber, wrote in utter despair of the ever-encroaching “iron-cage” encompassing all of

¹⁷Buber, *I and Thou*, 159.

human reality, leaving us enslaved to totalitarian technology and what Weber called rationalization, the objectifying of all of life.

Buber see this “faith in doom” as more pervasive than ever before:

It is no longer the power of karma nor the power of the stars that rules [humankind’s] lot ineluctably; many *different* forces claim this dominion. [We may name several:] the “law of life”—a universal struggle in which everybody must either join the fight or renounce life;...the “psychological law” according to which innate drives constitute the entire human soul;...the “social law” of an inevitable social process that is merely accompanied by will and consciousness; [and] the “cultural law” of an unalterably uniform genesis and decline of historical forms.... The point is always that [humankind] is yoked into an inescapable process that [people] cannot resist, though [they] may be deluded enough to try.¹⁸

Buber rejects such fatalism. He calls it humankind’s “abdication in the face of the proliferating It-world.” But the It-world proliferates only as human beings are bewitched by this faith in doom. “Nothing can doom [humankind] but the belief in doom, for this prevents [what Buber calls] the movement of Return.”¹⁹ “The movement of Return” could be called “repentance”, turning back to God. But Buber is not thinking of any elaborate religious ritual or a formal conversion to a particular religion. He has in mind a simple Return to openness to the reality of the You-world; what I earlier referred to as “the total acceptance of the present.” Not acceptance of whatever is as good, but an acceptance of the present as the arena wherein life is to be lived and God is to be encountered.

“The belief in doom is a delusion from the start.” The notion of everything running down, of irresistible fate, “does not know the actuality of spirit.” When someone is overpowered by the It-world, they will accept faith in doom as a truth which, in Buber’s words, “creates a clearing in the jungle.” For those overcome by the It-world, their very chains—that is, faith in doom—are foolishly held to be profound enlightenment. “In truth,” Buber continues, “this [faith in doom] only leads [the person holding it] deeper into the slavery of the It-world.” However, Buber firmly believes that “the world of You is *not* locked up. Whoever proceeds toward [*that* world, the world where encounter, where spirit, where trust in a life-giving God of mercy; whoever proceeds toward that world], concentrating [one’s] whole being, with [one’s] power to relate resurrected, [this person will find freedom.] And to gain freedom from the belief in unfreedom,” he concludes, “*is* to gain

¹⁸Buber, *I and Thou*, 105.

¹⁹Buber, *I and Thou*, 107.

freedom.”²⁰ We might add, to gain freedom from belief in impersonality is to gain freedom. To gain freedom from the belief in the impossibility of giving and receiving love is to gain freedom. To gain freedom from the belief in overwhelming fearfulness of the present is to gain freedom.

Buber is certainly critical of many expressions of violence and oppression in the present world. However, his response is not escape from the present but an affirmation of the fundamental goodness of the present underneath all that hurts and violates. His response is belief in the world, that *this* is where God is present, *this* is where we know others as You, *this* is where we find healing. “Only [people] that believe in the world achieve contact with it;” Buber argues, “and if they commit themselves they also cannot remain godless.” Belief in the world as the creation of God, belief in the world as the arena of God’s activity—for Buber, this leads to belief in God. He affirms this with particularly moving words: “Let us love the actual world that never wishes to be annulled, but [let us] love it in all its terror, [daring] to embrace it with our spirit’s arms—and our hands encounter the hands that hold it.”²¹

It is in the present world, and only in the present world, with all its terrors, that we encounter God as You; only in the present world, with all its terrors, might we know one another as You. We can face these terrors only when we know this world—*with* the hands that hold it—as trustworthy; as a place characterized by abundance, not scarcity.

Mennonite distinctives

To some extent, I believe the belief that the heart of spirituality is relationships corresponds with Mennonite emphases on community. The priority on community places a premium on inter-human relationships. The Mennonite world certainly has its share of ideological people. Some of us tend toward a fundamentalistic placing of ultimate priority on correct doctrine. Others of us tend toward a kind of political activism which places an ultimate priority on very different correct doctrine and correct action. Nonetheless, as a whole, I believe, most Mennonites tend to be much more people-oriented than ideology oriented.

The point about life being lived in the present corresponds with Mennonite emphases on concrete, practical living. A famous story is told of the Mennonite farmer who was asked by a young evangelist if he was saved. The farmer took out a pen and a scrap of paper and began making a list of his neighbors. “What are you doing?” asked the young

²⁰Buber, *I and Thou*, 107.

²¹Buber, *I and Thou*, 142-3.

man. “You are wondering if I’m saved,” replied the farmer. “Here’s a list of people who see me live. Ask them.” Salvation has to do with life in the present; with practical, mundane, day-to-day existence. The people who know us the best, who see our present, day-to-day lives—they are the ones who can speak to the spiritual reality of these lives. Now, my point here is not to focus on denying a future, heaven-like reality. Rather, I want to emphasize the significance of a positive focus on the here-and-now. Faithful living in the present does not require a rejection of a future beyond. But it does require full commitment to living in the present.

The point about seeing reality as trustworthy corresponds with Mennonite distinctives such as believers baptism and pacifism. Believers baptism can be seen as reflecting trust in people’s ability to decide for themselves to identify with the faith community. It reflects less fear about the destiny of the child. There a sense of confidence that our children will find God accessible in life—that is essentially what I mean by affirming reality as trustworthy: God is accessible in life. That access to God is available for all of us at all time—we may trust in that. Pacifism assumes that reality is, at its deepest level, peaceable and not conflictual. It is trustworthy. Life is not, at its heart, dog-eat-dog. War is not, due to the nature of reality, inevitable. Pacifism assumes that at least we, as individuals, can live *free* from the dominance of militarism and violence.

My pacifism rests on my conviction that God is love. Saying “God is love” to me means saying “reality is trustworthy,” since God is ultimate reality. This sense of pacifism is to me probably my deepest sense of spirituality. I know that my spiritual passion is very much connected with a rejection of the ways of violence and an affirmation of the fundamental need for respect and compassion for all people at all times.

So, what, in conclusion, might I say about the significance of these ideas? For one thing, this approach to spirituality encourages us to focus more on relating openly and respectfully to other people and to the world around us than on techniques and so-called spiritual disciplines. Secondly, this perspective sees God as *immanent*, as present among us, as most knowable in the context of our interaction with other people and creation. Third, this viewpoint can help us to be hopeful about the possibilities of spiritual growth and authenticity. The You-world is always nearby. Our access to it does not depend upon confessing certain dogmas, following certain techniques, engaging in certain rituals. Our access to the You-world mostly depends upon our openness to it, our patience in waiting for it, and our responsiveness to the glimpses of love and vitality we do experience with the people we encounter in life.

14. The Christian alternative to vengeance

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The faith community is central to biblical religion. In the Bible, from the start (the calling of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12 to bring forth a community meant to bless all the families of the earth) to the end (the vision in Revelation 21–22 of the churches witness leading to the healing of the nations), this community has the vocation not simply to serve its own interests but to serve the interests of all the families of the earth.

I have written a little book reflecting on this vocation as a central theme of the Bible as a whole, suggesting what I call “God’s healing strategy” as a narrative key for interpreting the overall message of the Bible.¹ The “strategy” is simply that God has called together a faith community to know God’s healing love in its common life and to witness to that healing love in a way that serves to bless all the families of the earth, that brings healing to the nations. This motif recognizes the need the human family has for healing. We hurt each other. We violate each others’ dignity, sometimes in terribly destructive ways. A key aspect of the healing motif then may be seen as the issue of how to we respond to the inevitable harm we do to each other in ways that does not add to the harm. Based on the Bible’s core message, the community of faith is central in the effort to respond redemptively to harm. And a key part of redemptive responses, of course, is forgiveness.

Forgiveness may most usefully be understood not simply as pardon, a letting of wrongdoers off the hook, so much as a way of life, a set of practices, that brings an end to the cycle of enmity but also effects transformation in the wrongdoer, in the survivors of the wrongdoing, and in the broader community that is effected by the wrongdoing.

When we look at the dynamics loosed by the manifold violations of human dignity in our world today, we may easily recognize how crucial reflection on and, much more importantly, putting into practice

¹ Ted Grimsrud, *God’s Healing Strategy: An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Bible* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2000).

forgiveness has become. Much more common, it would seem, than seeking to break the cycle of harm triggered by violating acts, human beings tend to heighten the cycle with the “automatic” quest for vengeance. From the perspective of the Bible and its account of God’s healing strategy, we may want to claim, as Christians, that our tradition offers powerful resources for freeing human beings from the spiral of violence. As we should. But, of course, Christianity has all too often embodied vengeful and violent more than healing, forgiving dynamics.

Let’s start with the assumption that when human beings are violated in major ways, needs are created in the survivors. By “survivors” I mean people who survive violent acts themselves; we may also mean people who are the ones left with one of their loved ones’ lives is taken in violence. The basic need that is created is that of restoring survivors’ dignity, sense of identity, selfhood, and honor. There are several ways that we tend to seek to restore this sense of dignity: by taking personal *revenge*, by relying on the state’s *retribution*, and by seeking some sort of *vindication* that restores the sense of selfhood without exacting vengeance on the wrongdoer. Only this third path opens the way to forgiveness.

Revenge

We may understand “revenge” and “retribution” to point toward two different responses to violations. Revenge has to do with the responses of individuals and groups directly in response to the act of violation that seek to retaliate, to respond to the wrong-doing apart from “official” governmental channels. Retribution refers to when the state does get involved and takes the role from the victim (and victims’ associates). With state involvement, comes formal procedures to apprehend, try, offer judgment, and punish the offender when convicted.

One of the effects of the kind of violation we are considering here, is that the victim (and, often, the victim’s associates) feel humiliated as a consequence of what has happened. And, when people are humiliated, they tend to feel like they have to get even.² Humiliation may be understood as the public violation of peoples’ dignity and honor. To have dignity is to have a sense that one truly exists, that one has value, that one has an identity, and that one matters in the world. When one is violated, especially when one’s violation is known by others, one feels that one’s dignity has been destroyed. The public perception that one has been humiliated causes a powerful sense of shame and intense pain. The

² Laura Blumenfeld, *Revenge: A Story of Hope* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 18. Page references to this book will be given in parentheses in the text.

public perception that one is not valuable and lacks dignity creates a powerful sense of diminishment and often fosters a sense of the need to do something that will restore some sense of honor. In many cultures, people assume that the way to restore this lost sense of honor is to succeed at retaliating against the violator. Social pressure plays a large role in pushing people to seek vengeance, especially in cultures where a high premium is placed on reputation and honor.

According to Laura Blumenfeld, in her book *Revenge*, “shame, or the loss of honor, creates the need for revenge” (26). Shame stems from the sense that one has lost a sense of one’s value, of one’s full humanity. Psychiatrist James Gilligan argues that this sense of the loss of one’s humanity is probably the most powerful source of psychic pain that a human being can encounter.³ Shame creates an enormously volatile drive to restore the sense of one’s value and even existence. For many reasons, exacting some sort of revenge commonly provides the hope for such a restoration. Consequently, the drive for revenge links intimately with the extraordinarily powerful need to overcome shame and dishonor.

Along with shame, memory plays a central role with revenge. Memory keeps past violations alive and present (42). The memories keep the hurt alive. They foster scheming and planning on how to get even, perhaps schemes that require a long period of time to enact. Filtered through our biases, memories tend to accentuate the “evils” of the enemy and the “innocence” of one’s own people. Memory as a sustained effort to retain one’s hurt and antipathy toward the victimizer, is based on a refusal to “forgive” (since genuine forgiveness in some sense leads to a “forgetting,” at least of the grudge). Memory tends to dehumanize the perpetrator, since it is selective and focuses on the one-dimensional aspects of the remembered grievance.

We may understand “shame” in two senses. The more positive sense is to recognize that we are social creatures who are accountable in our relationships with other people. We inevitably rely upon other people’s impressions of us and their messages to us for our own sense of self. Other people, then, do play a valid role in helping us be aware when we are being disrespectful, hurtful, or in other ways violating the social dynamics necessary for our communal well-being. When we have a healthy sense of self, such signals of problems from our social world (which are noticed when we feel a sense of shame) serve the function of pushing us to correct our misbehavior and seek to act rather in ways that serve the wellbeing of others.

³ James Gilligan, *Violence: Our Deadly Epidemic and Its Causes* (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1996).

However, our vulnerability to others messages about us may be exploited and have the impact on us not of stimulating us to adapt to community expectations so much as undermining our sense of self. Shame, in the less positive sense, can have a debilitating effect. Rather than empowering us to adapt and better function in our social context, negative shame disempowers us, threatens our sense of self, and fosters desperate responses that easily lead to efforts to regain our sense of power by disempowering others.

Blumenfeld notes one particularly problematic aspect of the revenge cycle. She terms it the transition from “personal” to “collective” vengeance. Personal vengeance occurs when a person who has been hurt or is closely connected to the victim directly responds to the violation and aims to retaliate against the perpetrator. Collective vengeance has more to do with groups of people who seek to harm other groups of people primarily because of their identity as a member of the group.

Blumenfeld assumes that revenge must be directly aimed at the offender; aiming it at others reduces it to mere “terrorism.” “Collective revenge misses the whole point of revenge. At its cathartic best, revenge focuses diffuse rage on a specific, guilty party. Taking revenge on any other person turns its moral purpose upside down. Stripped down, it is a fancy word for terror. Terrorists believe that there are no innocent bystanders, that all people of a kind are guilty, even civilians. That is how they justify killing children” (181-2). Her point underscores the dynamics of revenge. As a rule, revenge stems from shame, a sense of powerlessness, rage, and displaced anger more than careful moral calculation (what we could call “retributive justice”). Hence, revenge is usually not about a tit for a tat so much as simply an expression of frustration and an attempt to save face.

Cultivating vengeful feelings and entering into the cycle of revenge makes a person vulnerable to having one’s (perhaps legitimate) desires for vindication exploited by others. These vengeful feelings may be easily manipulated by people in power for their own purposes. “Terrorism” in all its forms (and, almost all modern warfare is a form of terrorism if terrorism is defined as the attempt to terrorize “civilian” populations) exploits this desire for revenge. Blumenfeld characterizes revenge in this way. “Revenge demands division. Us versus them. It is a simple principle that avengers understand. If they humanize the enemy, blood revenge becomes killing, which is no longer an honorable response” (250). This understanding of revenge places it squarely in tension with many important Christian virtues. Can a Christian, called upon by Jesus and Paul to love *everyone*, even one’s enemies, authentically take part in revenge if it does require dehumanizing our enemy? Can we, as

Christians, legitimately suspend our empathy? Does it make a difference if we think in terms not of vengeance but a “non-vengeful” state that acts on our behalf to punish wrongdoers?

From Blumenfeld’s account, a major element of the experience of people who have been violated is the quest for what she calls “acknowledgment.” “What hurt was the lack of acknowledgment. That, for many people, is the emotional goal of revenge, more than the desire to hurt. They want the other person to acknowledge his mistake, to acknowledge the legitimacy of their pain” (292). In light of this point, we can imagine that seeking revenge by actually killing the perpetrator would deprive the victim of what may be most needed. Killing the offender would make “acknowledgment” impossible. Even punishing offenders may make acknowledgment more difficult, especially if the punishment is perceived by the offender as unjust.

Blumenfeld’s account of the dynamics of vengeance reveals that the central dynamics of revenge are personal, relational, emotional, and story-based. Revenge does seem to be a pretty basic human inclination. It is decisively shaped by how people view the world, the memories they have, the stories they tell and retell. Western, impersonal notions of retributive justice do not speak to these aspects of life. Christians could see here the importance of constructing and sustaining in their communal life a counter-narrative both to the narratives of personal revenge and retaliation and of impersonal retributive justice—neither of which seem to speak in life-affirming ways to the needs that are created when some human beings violate other human beings.

Before considering how best to think of this counter-narrative, we need to look in more detail at the impersonal retributive justice with which we in the West have sought to replace the “wild justice” of revenge—and to see how it also is not an adequate answer to the question of how to respond to wrongdoing.

Retribution

Social ethicist Judith Kay, in her book *Murdering Myths*, argues that an Enlightenment-influenced modern quest for story-free universals has powerfully shaped how our society views criminal justice.⁴ There are many reasons why such an approach would seem attractive. It provides the hope of genuine objectivity and fairness in which the treatment of

⁴ Judith W. Kay, *Murdering Myths: The Story Behind the Death Penalty* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 10. Page references to this book will be given in parentheses in the text.

offenders reflects reality and treats all people the same. This approach promises to provide a sense of stability and certainty as an alternative to the chaos of vigilante justice and the endless cycle of personal revenge. This modern approach toward justice also promises to unite diverse peoples, providing a basis for societies made up of diverse peoples to function as a unified whole. On the other hand, this view of criminal justice as separate from and transcendent over any particular stories has proved to be plagued with serious problems. It tends to shield the human wielders of power from scrutiny making more likely their abuse of the power they are given. The structures may blindly be accepted as benign regardless of the actual impact of their policies and practices.

This view of criminal justice creates a sense of inevitability about the status quo, as if “what is” is simply the only option—even when “what is” in actuality is oppressive, unjust, and serves the elite in a society. Finally, in practice our Western view of criminal justice has pushed forward a focus on retribution and scapegoating convicted criminals as opposed to a focus that genuinely works for the *healing* of victim, offending, and the broader society. That is, the illusion that the particular story of retribution is a transcendent universal simply describing reality as it is underwrites violence that is destructive to all in our society. And because this illusion is unquestioned, our society is unable to recognize just how counter-productive in relation to genuine justice our practices are.

Kay asserts that societies must value the inherent dignity of all people. When a person violates the dignity of another person, it remains essential that society underscore its commitment to human dignity by continuing to treat the offender as it wants all people to be treated. A society that mistreats anyone (no matter how “deserving”) is morally diminished. As well, when offenders are mistreated and, inevitably, damaged as a consequence, they then become even more prone to mistreating others. Punishment only perpetuates the cycle of abuse and tends to lead to more abuse and more damage to more people over time. In addition to the damage done to the mistreated offender, those responsible for the mistreatment are themselves damaged as are the institutions that empower the mistreaters. And, ultimately, the society as a whole that tolerates institutions that abuse is morally damaged.

The problem lies with assumptions about punishment. The pain and suffering effected through punishment of duly convicted offenders is understood to have great potential for making the offender a better person. It conditions a person to refrain from wrongdoing in the future in order to avoid further punishment. It helps one recognize the error of one’s ways. It balances the scales of injustice that were unbalanced by the crime. And it helps a person realize how it actually feels to be a victim.

In Kay's view, though, these arguments are not persuasive. One of the main problems with the use of punishment is that it tends to make the person punished *resent* the punishment rather than find it a stimulus for repentance. With a resentful attitude, the offender is more likely to see their wrongdoing as justified than to confess that it was inappropriate. That is, the main lesson seems to be not to get caught, rather than that the wrongdoing should not have been done. Almost all violent offenders have themselves already been victims of violence. Their acts (in their minds) generally are acts of retaliation. To be retaliated against only deepens the offenders in the cycle of pay back. Their most likely desire as a consequence of being punished will be to want to hurt someone else.

Violent punishment infects everyone involved with the pathogen of violence. The person who is hurt is damaged by the violent act—as is the person who inflicts the hurt. Beyond the individuals, the institutions responsible for doing violence to offenders are themselves damaged morally, and this damage reverberates throughout the society that has created and supports such institutions. Violence is inherently bad for *all* people. All it does is cause damage. Hurting offenders does not restore or repay many (if not most) of the debts incurred by the original violation. The damage done to the original victim is rarely healed through damaging the offender. The punishment paradigm has the opposite effect on the offender than what is needed. Rather than helping the offender grow in empathy and compassion, virtues desperately needed by people who are prone to hurt other people, punishment exacerbates anger, resentment, fear, and a sense of self-justification.

The practice of punishment often merely reinforces the volatile dynamics of shame, powerless, and victimization for the offender, the very dynamics that quite often lay behind the original act of violation. What most violent offenders need is help to overcome these dynamics that have characterized much of their lives—punishment only reinforces those dynamics. Punishment is based on the punisher having the firepower to punish, not on the inherent fairness of the process resulting in punishment that is directly related to the offense. Hence, the dynamics of punishment are easily co-opted to serve the interests of the powerful and wealthy in society. Punishment does not directly help the victims of the original crime. Perhaps in some cases that the offenders are punished helps victims feel better, but as a rule they are far removed from the process of criminal justice and their damage is not addressed by the system. Finally, punishment does not witness to the core message of Jesus that places at the center of human moral life the call to love.

Kay argues, “both revenge and retribution falsely believe the wielding of coercive power to be essential to affirming power and dignity” (87).

These dynamics enter into our lives in response to violations of human beings, people being harmed by violent acts. When people are violated, what is especially bad is the destruction of human dignity. In face of this damage to human dignity, people *need* ways to have their dignity restored. When we are damaged by violations of our personhood, we must regain a sense of this personhood. We thus face the basic question: How might our personhood be restored when it is violated?

That our criminal justice system must be based on punitive violence is an untrue story; Kay calls it “the lie.” She argues, “the internalization of the lie is a key mechanism in how the lower and middling classes end up supporting criminal justice policies and practices that are not good for them or society as a whole” (167). People tend to have the mistaken belief that when we do wrong we *deserve* to be punished, that punishment is “good” for us even when abundant evidence points toward widespread negative consequences to violent punishment. We also grant the state the right to punish, as if this right of the state overrides the rights we all have to be treated with dignity and respect. The “internalized lie” essentially rests on the core belief in the efficacy of violence—what Walter Wink calls the “myth of redemptive violence.”⁵ This (false) myth emphasizes that violence “works” better than any other alternative in dealing with problems such as the problem of crime. Tragically, it seems that no amount of evidence to the contrary can undercut belief in this myth.

In the end, Kay suggests, our criminal justice system serves to protect the interests of our ruling class while actually acting against the interests of the rest of society. Human inclinations toward revenge are manipulated by our rulers to serve their interests—even in ways that work *against* the interests of society in general. Kay does not deny that sometimes people violate others in such a way that society needs to segregate these offenders from the rest of society. However, she concludes that “the focus of activities during incarceration should be the emergence of the human from his most dangerous vices, not punishment for punishment’s sake” (176).

A society that truly seeks to foster healing rather than an enhanced spiral of violence in the face of crime would work to enhance the ability of police departments to apprehend and quickly isolate wrongdoers, with the full protection of the rights of all involved. However, beyond this effective apprehension of wrongdoers and effect of quick and fair consequences for the wrongdoing, the system would also work to find ways to help victims have the damage done to them be mitigated—

⁵ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

including the repayment of property that has been lost and making efforts to deal with the emotional costs of crime. The system would also work to bring about healing for the wrongdoers, which could include efforts at reconciliation with the victims. The system would also seek to help the wrongdoers develop the skills to be able to be reintegrated back into society in ways that overcome the problem of recidivism.

More broadly, a society that truly wanted to minimize crime would work very hard at overcoming the social inequalities that provide the most powerful impact on fostering crime.⁶ Kay ultimately advocates redefining the meaning of justice. Instead of thinking of justice in terms of paying back violence with violence, she proposes that we think of justice in terms of wholeness of each person and society as a whole. “The concept of justice changes in this new story. Ultimately, the only response that will ‘fix’ the situation is if people regain their humanity by emerging from their grief and rage, regaining their ability to connect with themselves and with others. In the long term, justice means the reclamation of human bonds” (183).

Vindication

Revenge and retribution are both responses to problems created when people are violated through acts of violence and harm. Such violations create a break, a hole, a rent in the human fabric. How is the damage caused by such violations to be dealt with? How is it repaired? How are human beings who have been violated to be helped in restoring their dignity and sense of wholeness? Howard Zehr, in his book *Transcending*, has collected several dozen stories from victims. These stories provide insights into the process of responding to violations. They ultimately show that revenge and retribution may in some cases play a role in the quest for wholeness, but they are not generally helpful. Zehr, in the end, advocates for a broader rubric, what he calls “vindication.” Vindication has to do with restoring dignity, a sense that one’s existence, called into profound doubt through the violation, is indeed vindicated. Revenge and retribution may for some people contribute to vindication, but for many, vindication comes in other ways that don’t involve hurting wrongdoers.

The storytellers whose experiences Zehr recounts name a number of “needs” that they have identified as a consequence of their trauma. In general, the needs expressed by these storytellers may be seen as related to restoring the fabric of one’s rent humanity in face of severe violations. Some of the ways these needs were met include the ability to find

⁶ Gilligan, *Violence*.

meaningful and constructive things to do with one's life in the aftermath of the trauma. In a few cases, survivors sought to continue the legacy of lost loved ones that embodied their values. In many cases, some sort of acknowledgment from offenders of the wrongness of their act provided important aid in the victims and survivors moving on. Especially when the acknowledgment was accompanied with a sense of repentance and regret did the survivors find satisfaction.

Numerous storytellers spoke of their need to find ways not to add to the spiral of violence with their own anger and vindictiveness. They sought to find ways to forgive that would free them from feeling hate and bitterness. Many spoke of the importance of supportive communities, a sense of connection with other people who could share their grief and help them restore a sense of meaning to their lives. Sadly, in these stories there were few accounts of such a sense of community being experienced. Several people spoke instead of feeling too much pressure to find "closure," to "forgive," and to "move on" from people who did not seem to understand the depth of the trauma they had experienced and the need for more time and patience with the gradual nature of the healing.

Most simply, numerous people spoke of the need to grow into a sense of acceptance of the reality of what has happened. They articulated a need to come to terms with the transformed reality they now had to live with—that things would never exactly be the same following the violation. This sense of acceptance, when achieved, seemed to then open possibilities for learning to live meaningfully amidst the sense of loss and pain. Many reflected with ambivalence on the theme of forgiveness. It appears that forgiveness is extremely important yet extraordinarily evasive. In some cases, people spoke of a clear ability to offer forgiveness, accompanied by a sense of healing and release from the weight of living with the violation. In other cases, people evinced much less clarity.

Forgiveness does seem for many to play an important role in the repair of the rent fabric. It allows survivors to move on with life and *not* let the crime define who they are. It serves as a means emotionally to move past the trauma, to provide a way to end the presence of the trauma as an on-going, devastating reality. Forgiveness, in some cases, allowed for some level of reconciliation between the victim and offender. This allows for the possibility of mutual understanding of what led to the violation, how it was experienced by the various actors, and for victims getting a sense of assurance that they indeed did not deserve what happened to them. Forgiveness also may open the possibility that offenders may be able to seek constructively to make efforts to make up for what was done. They may be more able to work at restitution for the damage they have done. They also may be more able to find healing

from their own traumas that likely led them to violate others, thereby at least on a personal level ending the cycle of violence.

There do seem to be some dangers with forgiveness. On the one hand, it may be granted too quickly, while the survivor is still traumatized. Such (possibly) premature forgiveness may well short-circuit the healing process and foster the repression and denial of hurts – with the possible long-range consequences that the trauma resurfaces at some future time. Forgiveness, if unaccompanied by genuine repentance on the part of the offender, may let the offender off the hook too easily and lessen the possibilities that the offender would find some kind of healing from their traumas—healing that likely requires the offender taking responsibility for the violation.

One of the central needs several storytellers mentioned had to do with the value of understanding the truth, as best as possible, of what happened with the violation. This would enable them to fit the events into their own story, to make better sense of their lives. Understanding what actually happened helps people better to adapt to the true situation they find themselves in, even if it is difficult. As Sandy Murphy, a woman whose face was disfigured in a brutal attack, said, “The doctors wouldn’t allow me to see my face. They would say, ‘It’s going to be fine.’ That was a lie. The truth is important to me. The truth helped me to be able to stand and say, ‘This is ugly, but you can do it.’”⁷ (156).

In response to crises created by victimization, Zehr suggests three basic human needs that need to be addressed: (1) The “need to feel that we have substantial control over our own lives, or at least important parts of our lives.” (2) “The feeling of safety that is rooted in a sense of order. We need to believe that our world is basically orderly and that events can be explained.” (3) “Healthy relationships with other people are essential for a sense of wholeness” (188). At the heart of our identity lie the stories we construct about what and what we are. When people experience traumatic violations, this constructed meaning is damaged. “An experience of violence represents an attack on those narratives, an erosion of meaning, and therein lies a primary source of trauma” (189).

A fundamental need violated people and their loved ones have is finding ways to recover such a blow to their sense of self. “Victimization is essentially an erosion of meaning and identity, so we must recover a redeeming narrative which reconstructs a sense of meaning and identity” (190). Efforts to respond helpfully to violations, then, should center on the victims and helping them to reconstruct a sense of meaning and identity.

⁷ Howard Zehr, *Transcending* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005), 156. Page references to this book will be given in parentheses in the text.

Neither revenge nor retribution serve this basic need very well. Rather than seeing vengeance as a fundamental human need in the face of violations, Zehr argues instead for what he calls “vindication” (191). The need for vindication entails a number of aspects, some of which may tend toward taking revenge, but most of which point in other directions.

For Zehr, vindication may include elements of the following:

(1) A restoration of respect. We feel vindicated when we feel respected by other people and when we gain self-respect. It is possible that this respect could be achieved through exercising power to hurt offenders. However, more likely the respect will be gained through more positive actions. Examples include finding constructive, life-enhancing tasks to do that provide a sense of honoring those who have been killed.

(2) A sense that the offender’s wrong is recognized. We feel vindicated when it is made clear that the violation that happened to us was wrong and not our own responsibility. This certainly can include the offender being convicted of their violent crime. The processes of the criminal justice system are capable of providing such an outcome. However, from the stories, survivors seemed to gain even more power when offenders acknowledged their guilt and apologized. The adversarial nature of our criminal justice system hinders such acknowledgment, partly by segregating victim from offender, partly by putting the offender on the defensive and focusing on punishment rather than acts of restitution.

(3) Empowerment. We feel vindicated when we experience a sense of having power in our lives and not simply being at the mercy of others. An important way several storytellers felt empowered was when the offender apologized, giving the survivors a sense that they had some power in relation to the offender related to how they responded to the apology.

(4) Removal of shame and humiliation.

(5) A recovery of meaning, the reconstruction of a redeeming narrative, a rekindled sense that one’s life has purpose and value.

(6) The establishment of affirming, supportive relationships.

None of these six elements of vindication require revenge or retribution. Some might include either or both, but seeking revenge or retribution might actually work against the realization of some of the elements. From Zehr’s recounting of the experience of survivors of violent crime, we see underscored the potential for Christian communities to assist in fostering healing in the light of such violence and to work to break the destructive cycle of violence, retaliation, and revenge. Zehr’s stories help us identify the actual needs of survivors.

Before we turn more directly to the resources useful for embodying forgiveness that Christian communities might provide, we need to reflect on a theological issue that has often contributed to Christian

communities being part of the problem of revenge and retribution more than the solution. This is the construction of theologies of atonement in post-biblical Christianity that had a major impact on underwriting retributive criminal justice practices in Western “Christendom” during the late Middle Ages and down to the present.

Atonement

The Christian tradition has always placed at its center the significance of forgiveness. Jesus’ own message centered on the forgiveness of sins, as did Paul’s proclamation. However, the tradition has given decidedly mixed messages concerning the social relevance of this message of forgiveness. In what sense, if any, should Jesus’ message of forgiveness shape our response to issues related to the violation of some persons’ dignity by others? According to Timothy Gorringer, in his book *God’s Just Vengeance*, the development of Christian theologies of atonement, the construal of how God is able to forgive sins, has actually contributed to harsher, more retributive responses to wrongdoing.

The standard account of atonement asks, why did Jesus have to die? God’s holiness prevents God from simply forgiving human sins. Sin requires payment in order to satisfy God’s justice. Sinful human beings are powerless to make this payment. We do not have the capability of balancing the scales of justice that we have unbalanced by our sin. We cannot pay to God what God needs in order to be able to forgive us. Only Jesus, as a perfect human being, holiness incarnated, is able to pay this price. So, Jesus’ died as a payment to satisfy God’s holiness, to satisfy God’s need for balancing the scales of justice. If there is not payback to God for the damage caused by sin, God must punish the sinner. Only a sinless being acting on our behalf can save us from God’s sure punishment. Yet, God is also gracious. Without compromising God’s holiness, God’s mercy motivates God to provide the means for adequate payment to be made through Jesus’ sacrificial death. God wants human beings to have a way of reconnecting with God and overcoming the rift caused by the human violation of God’s honor by our sin.

This view of atonement reflects a notion that the universe is governed with a scale of justice in which wrongdoing must be repaid with punishment. Violence lies at the very heart of reality. Wrongdoing requires payback. Gorringer argues that this theology has been articulated by and exploited by church leaders who identify with society’s ruling classes. That is, theology in general, and atonement theology in particular, has served the interests of those who gain the most from the status quo in human culture.

What are some ways that this theology served the interests of society's rulers? It provides a strong justification for human authority. It also provides bases for punishing what is labeled as wrongdoing as *defined* by the rulers. This makes it much easier for rulers to suppress dissent, resistance, and counter-cultural sentiments. The criminal justice system as thus construed places a high priority upon protecting the interests of the people who benefit the most from the present order of things.

The basic logic of "satisfaction" (we have to do with a holy God who becomes angry with sin and punishes those who violate God's will unless some sort of payment through a violent sacrifice is made) seems to characterize many gods in many religions. People adhering to a biblical faith must ask the question whether the Bible provides bases for challenging this general view of God. Is there something *different* in the biblical account of God and God's response to wrongdoing?

In fact, as Gorringer argues, there is. The Bible does not support a blind adherence to the logic of satisfaction. Creation itself is presented in the Bible as being good and inherently peaceable, not founded on violence like other creation stories such as Babylon's suggest. The God of the Hebrews, Yahweh, is revealed as the God of slaves and vulnerable people, not the God of kings, of the ruling class and of the social status quo. God's saving initiative in the Bible is almost always taken unilaterally on behalf of "unworthy" people. God does not have to wait for satisfaction in order to intervene to bring about salvation.

The people after the Flood of Noah remain characteristically inclined toward evil but God nonetheless acts to provide for their future and to promise never to flood the earth again. Barren Abraham and Sarah are chosen despite their frailty to parent the elect people of God intended to bless all the families of the earth. The Hebrews are liberated from their enslavement in Egypt. The book of Isaiah tells of God's mercy in forgiving the people after their destruction at the hands of Babylon. The prophet Jonah is taught of God's mercy even for Nineveh. Jesus taught of the "prodigal son" who is unconditionally welcomed back into his father's household even before he can utter words of repentance. Paul teaches of a God who loves and redeems even God's enemies.

Gorringer argues, "the New Testament, far from underscoring retributivism, actually deconstructs it."⁸ This deconstruction may be seen especially in the accounts of Jesus' life and teaching. "Jesus did *not* present himself as coming to expiate or atone for sin. There is no hint in the Gospels of the doctrine of a Fall which needs to be redeemed by a once-

⁸ Timothy Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence, and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (New York: Cambridge University, 1996), 5. Page references to this book will be given in parentheses in the text.

for-all sacrifice.” Jesus forgiving sins stood at the center of his ministry. “When people’s sins are forgiven this happens prior to the passion and is done in the name of the God who seeks life for all his creatures” (66).

A crucial point of tension between the Gospel accounts and later theology may be seen in how one understands Jesus’ crucifixion. Later theology picked up on a few isolated New Testament texts that were interpreted as underwriting deference to state power and used these to develop a view that punishment reflects the state acting on behalf of God—turning the actual meaning of Jesus’ crucifixion (which shows the state rebelling *against* God by murdering God’s own son) on its head. Gorringer writes, “A story which was a unique *protest* against judicial cruelty came to be a *validation* of it. The community which was supposed not to be conformed to the world now underwrote its repressive practice” (81).

Christian theology, in Gorringer’s account, left the basic gospel message of the centrality of God’s simple mercy behind. A key expression of just how far mainstream Christian theology moved from Jesus’ message may be seen in the atonement theology of Anselm in the Middle Ages. Whereas Jesus insisted on the *canceling* of debts (see the famous petition in the Lord’s Prayer and Jesus “Jubilee” announcement in Luke 4), Anselm makes God the one who *insists* on debt. This crucial point in Anselm’s theory—that Jesus’ sacrifice was necessary because of the unpayable debt we owe God—turns Jesus’ message on its head. A central theme in Jesus ministry was the abolition of debt reckoning.

For Anselm, the human debt must be paid by blood. The God who rejects blood sacrifice (see Hosea 6, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice,” directly quoted by Jesus) now is presented as demanding just such sacrifice. Gorringer concludes concerning Anselm’s theory, “the penal consequences of this doctrine were grim indeed. As it entered the cultural bloodstream, was imagined in crucifixions painted over church chancels, recited at each celebration of the eucharist, or hymned, so it created its own structure of affect, one in which earthly punishment was demanded because God himself had demanded the death of his Son” (103).

In Western civilization, theology underwrote punitive criminal justice practices—and in doing so, also underwrote the social status quo. Gorringer writes:

Criminal law was critically important in maintaining bonds of obedience and deference, in legitimizing the status quo, in constantly recreating the structure of authority which arose from property and in turn protected its interests. In its rituals, judgments, and channeling of emotion, criminal law echoed many of the most powerful psychic components of religion. The inverse also applies: this religion underwrites the criminal law, and its symbolic celebration of property and social class (172).

Western criminal justice practices have centered on punishment. Gorringer cites numerous theologians who have justified this theologically, including Thomas Jenkyn, a British theologian writing in 1831: “Sin is a public injury to God and the universe. It is not in the nature of mercy, nor does it become its character, to forgive such a public wrong without an expression of its abhorrence of the crime. Such a mercy would be weak indifference, a foolish and blind passion. Everyone sees that a family governed on such a principle would soon become the pest of the commonwealth. The ends of government in the punishment of offenders are, first, to show the goodness and benevolence of the law; second, to demonstrate the impartial justice of the governor; and, third, to exhibit the evil consequences of breaking the law and to impress offenders with the hopelessness of escaping the punishment due to crime” (199).

Changes in theology concerning punishment corresponded with changes in broader social thought by the beginning of the 20th century.

It was not until the end of the 19th century that theologians came out firmly in favor of rehabilitation instead of retribution. This move coincides with a critique of laissez faire economics, and the growth of a more complex understanding of the human person. The prisoner was no longer the free moral agent, to be blamed for wrong choices, and able to choose whether or not to reform, but the damaged person, who needed the services of the educationist and psychiatrist (225).

However, unfortunately retributivists remain influential, especially among Christians. Gorringer cites theologian Colin Gunton, who asserts that “forgiveness without punishment is sentimentality,” and the one of the reasons for affirming the satisfaction view of the atonement is because the alternative view “does not require death on the cross.” As well, Gunton accuses non-retributivist theologies of “trivializing evil” (235-6).

Gorringer proposes that Christians advocate for the “conflict resolution” approach to wrongdoing. “The most constructive attempts at alternatives explored over the past thirty years are in terms of conflict resolution, and have as their theoretical underpinnings the perception that all crime represents a breach of relationships” (253). Consequently, efforts are made to work in the realm of restoring and rebuilding relationships. This leads to a commitment to work within the communities where the violation happens. “The importance of mediation initiatives is that they do not operate by scapegoating, thrusting offenders *outside* the community, into jail, but recognize that offenders have to be dealt with *within* the community” (255).

Gorringer ultimately argues for an understanding of redemption that

differs a great deal with the traditional satisfaction understanding of atonement. “In reflecting on what it is God has done for us in Christ we need to shift the center of our reflection from satisfaction to the biblical roots of redemption and reconciliation. Christ ‘redeems’ us from the principalities and powers, from the social structures that warp human behavior and produce violence and crime, partly by laying bare the way in which they scapegoat and exclude, but also, correlatively, by inaugurating a continuing practice of reconciliation” (269).

Forgiveness

How might we think of forgiveness in a way that will foster healing practices in face of the kinds of violations we have been considering? I will start by listing some relevant characteristics of Christian forgiveness.

Forgiveness comes from God. It is part of the order of the universe. The purpose of forgiveness is to foster healing among human beings. It seeks to effect transformation in life. Forgiveness comes to human beings from God purely as a gift. However, it must be responded to with ethical transformation. That is, forgiveness is free, but it is also demanding.

Forgiveness has a social component. We need others’ help to find healing. It has communal relevance. The hope with forgiveness is that genuine forgiveness makes possible “moving on.” It can help end the present power that the violation has over survivors. For Christians, the possibility of forgiveness rests on an experience of God’s grace that has to do with restored relationships, healing, and a desire to be generous to others. This grace is tied with accountability to God for faithful living.

In his book, *Embodying Forgiveness*, L. Gregory Jones asserts that forgiveness is at the heart of Christianity. “It is at the heart of Jesus’ life and of the apostle Paul, it is featured in both the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed, it is central to the Church’s celebration of baptism and eucharist, and it is a unifying feature among doctrines of God, Christ, the Church, and ethics and politics.”⁹ However, in Christianity, what began as an exercise in mutual support in faith communities increasingly turned toward the private individual, with problematic consequences. According to Jones, “in Western Christianity...piety turned increasingly inward; God’s forgiveness became principally an individual transaction between God and a particular person, with virtually no consequences for either Christian community or social and political life” (38).

⁹ L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 36. Page references to this book will be given in parentheses in the text.

At the heart of Jones's presentation of forgiveness, we see the assertion that the key to embodying forgiveness is that Christians learn how to be forgiven. Jones writes, "there is a crying, urgent need for people to learn to become forgiving in their relation with one another. But for Christians this can only happen when we simultaneously learn to embody what it means to be *forgiven*—by God and by one another" (47). It is important to learn to be forgiven because it presupposes the recognition that we need to be forgiven. Without this recognition, we remain stuck in our wrongdoing and sin. Openness to learning to be forgiven provides a sense that forgiveness is a mutual, give-and-take, way of life process that is necessary for people to co-exist fruitfully in community together.

Learning to be forgiven is an aspect of respecting our place of accountability in a moral universe. It is part of our accepting responsibility for our own sins and failures. Yet, learning to forgive is very difficult. It puts us in a place of vulnerability in relation to others that having a veneer of faultlessness does not. We resist admitting that we are needy, especially in need of others forgiveness. As Jones suggests, part of the difficulty we face in Christian communities is simply that we have not been trained in being forgiven for actual, real life, failures—and, hence, we have also not developed the skills of genuinely forgiving others.

How might Christians embody Jesus' message while avoiding the Nietzschean critique that Christianity glorifies weakness and passivity? We might value anger and other emotions as our friends, and learn how to channel them in non-destructive directions and to balance honesty and truthfulness with kindness. We might become skilled in conflict resolution and learn better to value our human differences. We might better understand forgiveness as a process and part of the broader context of healing that we need after experiencing violations. We might learn better to listen to our own hearts and to be self-aware.

Jones argues:

We need an account of forgiveness that represents not a distorted and distorting weakness (as Nietzsche thought and as Christians too often actually embodied) but an alternative form of power, a forgiveness whose power is found in Christ's cross and resurrection. For it is this power that breaks apart the cycles of violence and offers a re-turning of the announcement of God's peace. This power shows that violence is neither inescapable nor unlearnable. Nor is it the master of us all. (97)

We may think of stories that show how powerful forgiveness has been in various contexts. Might it be that violence and coercive power and injustice are actually quite fragile in their dependence upon dehumanizing others? Forgiveness can be a powerful factor in re-

humanizing. In breaking the spiral of violence, Jesus did not avoid conflict or simply say that whatever people would do would be okay. Jesus did critique wrongdoing. He assigned responsibility and demanded accountability from wrongdoers. When appropriate, Jesus took sides, confronting wrongdoers on behalf of their victims. In fact, he intentionally provoked the powers and brought “judgment” onto himself. The power of Jesus’ model, his sinlessness, is how he *entered* the conflicts of the world as an advocate and prophet, yet still managed to embody nonviolence. He shows that forgiveness is not ignoring evil, but seeking healing for all involved. And Jesus’ forgiveness seeks to foster transformation, not simply pardon without expectation of a response.

Jones shares elements of Gorringer’s critique of satisfaction atonement. He writes of problems with Richard Swinburne’s account of atonement:

The most serious mistake is that Swinburne’s understanding of forgiveness and repentance collapses Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection into an account of the atonement. In so doing, he loses the integral significance of Jesus’ proclamation and enactment of the Kingdom in its invocation and embodiment of a transformed way of being community; of how and why Jesus’ nonviolent, forgiving love leads him to the cross; of the Father’s vindication of Jesus’ life and death through raising him from the dead and how that transforms our understanding of the relationships of forgiveness and repentance. (155)

Linking this critique with Gorringer’s critique of Anselm’s legacy, we can see here an argument that there are two general ways of understanding Jesus’ work—one focuses on his death as a sacrifice that enables God to offer forgiveness; the second focuses on Jesus’ entire life and its outcome as illumining God’s mercy and modeling how his followers might live as merciful people themselves. Jesus’ call to follow his way lies as the very core of his ministry. This call empowers his followers to imitate his forgiving love in life. Jesus models human life as it is meant to be, transformed from the various power struggles, fearfulnesses, and spirals of violence that characterize so much of life.

Jesus’ cross, which we as his followers are called to “take up,” resulted from his resistance to the Powers that have enslaved human beings. Trusting in Jesus leads to freedom from the Powers and the capability to live a transformed life. In the gospels, this liberation from the Powers is manifested in Jesus delivering people from demon possession, from bondage to Mammon, and from physical blindness. From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus announces the presence of God’s forgiveness, the abundance of God’s love. He assumes that these are already present; his task is to reveal that presence not to affect it.

Jones emphasizes the presence of God's mercy when he argues that forgiveness actually comes before repentance and enables us to repent. In support for this assertion, he translates Luke 7:47 as "therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven, hence she has shown great love." Thus, we may understand Jesus teaching that the woman "has not earned her forgiveness through the repentance of extravagant love; because she has been forgiven, she is able to repent by showing such love" (161). Jesus himself, thus, started with forgiveness—and the repentance of the people he ministered to followed. The famous story of the woman caught in adultery illustrates this. He first drives off her accusers, then offers the word of non-condemnation, and only at the end calls upon her to show fruits of repentance.

Jones asserts, "forgiveness is a habit that must be practiced over time within the disciplines of Christian community" (163). He cites rituals that help Christians embody forgiveness, such as baptism and communion:

Baptism signifies that, by the grace of Jesus Christ, people are set free from patterns of sin and evil, of betrayals and of being betrayed, of vicious cycles of being caught as victimizers and victims, so that they can bear to remember the past in hope for the future. They can do so because they are given a new perspective on that past, one of forgiveness (166-7).

In relation to communion, Jones asks, "how can we celebrate the eucharist as an Easter feast if we fail to live as forgiven and forgiving people? So are we enjoined to be reconciled with our brothers and sisters before we come to the eucharist (see, for example, Mt 5:23-24)" (178). We could also add the importance of preaching and teaching in the church context, where Jesus' message of forgiveness is articulated and applied. The message of forgiveness goes against the grain of our broader cultural ethos, so its explicit articulation is essential.

One may also think of more everyday dynamics in which the church serves as the context for people learning in face-to-face relationships. Simply the experience of being committed to sustaining relationships in community, to face openly and honestly the inevitable conflicts that arise, of having practical models of people who forgive and find ways to practice reconciliation even in the face of violations, all provide essential guidance and reinforcement for the politics of forgiveness.

The church has the task to train people to be "prepared" ahead of time to respond redemptively to violations that tend to lead to hatred. "We must seek to contextualize hateful feelings by seeking to develop habits of understanding and embodying God's forgiving and reconciling love prior to such situation (if possible) so that one can interpret the situation or experience or life in that context" (261). Such preparation

includes developing habits of openness and honesty about one's feelings, being free to express them to others in ways that help one to avoid the long-term problems of repression, denial, and pent-up rage that tends to find expression at some point in hatred and hostility and retaliation.

The church also is a place where *showing* the fruits of forgiveness carries more weight than commands to forgive. Jones writes, "rather than *telling* victims and those who are suffering that they ought to forgive, or that they ought to believe in a good and gracious God, the first task of the Church—as people who struggle to embody God's forgiveness in the pursuit of holiness—is to show solidarity with and compassion toward those who find themselves *in extremis*" (295).

15. A theological critique of corporal punishment

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What difference does it make to assert that nothing is as important for our theology as pacifism (i.e., the cluster of values which include love, peace, shalom, wholeness, kindness, mercy, restorative justice, nonviolence, and compassion)? I propose that one difference pacifism makes (or should make) is to cause pacifists to look critically at all justifications for violence—and to question all theological underpinnings for such justifications. In this essay, I will focus critically on one case, theological underpinnings that help justify acting violently toward children (what is commonly called corporal punishment).

I want to discuss six points concerning the theological problem of the justification of violence against children.

(1) Human beings tend to be reluctant to act violently toward others. We usually require a rationale to justify such violence. We must believe some value is more important than nonviolence. For Christians, this value or conviction is usually expressed in terms of "God's will."

(2) A theological framework I call "the logic of retribution" underlies the rationale for violence against children. In "the logic of retribution," God is understood most fundamentally in terms of impersonal, inflexible holiness. God's law is seen to be the unchanging standard by which sin is measured. God's response to sin is punitive. Jesus' death on the cross is necessary as a sacrifice to provide the only basis for sinful human beings escaping their deserved punishment.

(3) Pacifists will raise theological concerns here. When God is seen, as with the logic of retribution, primarily in terms of impersonal holiness, legal requirements, and strict, vengeful justice, the biblical picture of God as relational, compassionate, and responsive is distorted.

(4) Not only is it justified according to problematic theological assumptions, corporal punishment also has problematic practical consequences. It may intensify the dynamic of responding to violence

with violence, actually encourage young people to use violence. It may also contribute to a stunted experience of life for its recipients.

(5) Given that all theology is humanly constructed, we may (and must) reconstruct our understanding of God in order to foster consistently pacifist theology and practice.

(6) Foundational for such a theological reconstruction, the Bible may be read as providing bases for a “logic of *restoration*.” According to the logic of restoration, God’s holiness is personal, flexible, dynamic, and relational. God’s justice is concerned with restoring relationships and community wholeness, not with punishment, vengeance, and balancing the impersonal scales of an eye for an eye. God’s mercy is unconditional, not dependent upon human beings in any sense earning it.

We are naturally reluctant to use violence

Human beings tend to be reluctant to act violently toward other human beings. We usually require a rationale to justify such violence. We must believe some value is more important than nonviolence. For Christians this value is commonly expressed in terms of “God’s will.” I make an assumption here that does not meet with uniform agreement. However, commonsense, I believe, tells us that human beings as a species do not kill other human beings without a rationale.¹ We agree that many acts of violence, at least, do have a clear, expressly stated rationale. Wars are justified for many of these reasons: Justice must be served. We must defend our culture’s deepest values. We must stop the immoral aggressor. We must seek to change the behavior of those who misbehave.

Criminal justice and child discipline give parallel rationales for violence as needed to punish misbehavior: Justice must be served. We must defend our culture’s deepest values. We must stop the immoral aggressor. We must seek to change the behavior of those who misbehave. Underlying such rationales we may find the ultimate justification: *It is God’s will*. God wants our nation, or our criminal justice systems, or those responsible for the raising of children, to act as God’s agent of justice, of discipline, using the “sword” to further God’s will for human existence.

Violence is a *theological* issue. We overcome our reluctance to use it because we believe our most profound source of values and moral

¹Psychiatrist James Gilligan, former director of mental health for the Massachusetts state prison system, makes a case that all acts of even extreme violence are “logical” in the sense that they have a clear rationale for their perpetrators, usually to be understood as acts intended to establish self-respect. Gilligan denies that violent acts are random or gratuitous. James Gilligan, *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

directives—*God*—desires for us to do so. We may think of illustrations. Certainly many rationales given for warfare claim warrant from *God*.² So, too, do many rationales for violence toward those convicted of crimes.³ In this essay, I will focus on a third area where this dynamic might be seen, rationales given for use of violence against children.

It's important to define several central terms. *Violence* is “physical or emotional force used so as to injure another person.” *Punishment* is “the causing of pain (or injury) for a wrongdoing.” *Corporal punishment* is “punishment inflicted directly on the body.” *Violence toward children*, I suggest, is “adult use of physical force on children so as to cause pain (or injury).” Finally, *abuse* may be defined as “extreme hurting by treating badly, causing physical or emotional damage due to the intensity and extent of the injuring.” Using these definitions, I suggest that corporal punishment, precisely understood, is a form of violence against children. If violence is understood as “physical force used so as to injure”, and if corporal punishment is understood as “pain or injury inflicted directly on the body,” corporal punishment is by definition a form of violence.

I am not interested here in condemning corporal punishment per se but focus on describing and assessing the *rationale* for such punishment and its theological implications, though I will also reflect on some practical consequences. I do not mean to try to establish a new moral rule that parents must follow. And I recognize that many cases of corporal punishment do occur in loving families, and that children in loving families are much better off than children who are not in loving families, even if some of the former are occasionally spanked.

I focus on corporal punishment rather than more extreme forms of child abuse for the purpose of theological analysis. Let us think analogously with just war reasoning here and use parallel criteria. We may distinguish between “abuse” on the one hand (violence that is too extreme to be justifiable or violence toward children where the punishment does not correspond to the wrongdoing and is inappropriate violence), and “discipline” on the other hand (what we might call justifiable violence against children—where certain criteria are met).

These justifiable-violence criteria include: (1) *just cause* [there is actual wrongdoing by the child], (2) *for the sake of peace* [discipline which will keep the child in line and help the child behave appropriately in the future],

²For a clear, detailed account of one set of examples, U.S. Christian leaders during World War I, see Ray Abrams, *Preachers Present Arms* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969).

³See Ted Grimsrud and Howard Zehr, “Rethinking God, Justice, and Treatment of Offenders,” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 35.3/4 (Fall 2002), 259-285.

(3) *limited* [the punishment corresponds to the wrongdoing, the child experiences pain but the it is limited in duration], (4) *proper authority* [the discipline comes from the child's parent or an authorized substitute], (5) *clear beginning and end* [the child is aware why the punishment is being offered and knows that it will be brief and that when it is over, the relationship with the parent can continue on peaceful grounds]). To continue this just-war analogy, some may say that appropriate violence toward children requires clear justification. This justification, as with the just war theory, often rests on certain assumptions concerning the character and will of God. These assumptions especially relate to views of God's holiness and justice. We will look more closely at them below.

I am a committed pacifist when it comes to corporal punishment just as I am when it comes to warfare. I reject justifiable-violence reasoning in both cases. I want to think through theologically how we might construct an understanding of God and God's will for human beings that does not lend itself to justifications of *any* form of violence. As well, that I am a parent, and, of course, was a child myself. Part of my thinking about corporal punishment surely stems from my own experience of not being spanked as a child and of not spanking my child. So, what I propose follows not only from theory, but also from personal experience.

I am concerned with the theological logic that (I propose) lays behind much violence toward children. I believe that even in the worst cases of abuse some sort of this logic operates on some level. However, here I focus on what I am calling "corporal punishment" as distinct from what I am calling "abuse"—which is not to say that I do not recognize that abuse is much worse. However, my argument most directly addresses what I called above "discipline", or what people might call "*justifiable* violence against children" because I want to focus on overt justifications for the use of corporal punishment.

The role of the "logic of retribution"

"The logic of retribution" underlies the rationale to use violence against children. In "the logic of retribution," when all is said and done, God is understood most fundamentally in terms of impersonal, inflexible holiness. God's law is seen to be the unchanging standard by which sin is measured. Human beings are inherently sinful. God's response to sin is punitive. Jesus' death on the cross is necessary as a sacrifice to provide the only basis for sinful human beings escaping deserved punishment.

Certainly not all parents who use corporal punishment think self-consciously in the theological framework I am outlining here. Some may even reject this theology. However, I suggest that even in such cases, on

some level, punitive practices rest on this general logic. One question that may arise for pacifists is if we are willing to consider whether we at times may accept non-pacifist assumptions with regard to our actions. The theological rationale for corporal punishment rests on the view that appropriate punishment (causing pain due to wrongdoing) is God's will or reflects God's character. The first, and most basic, attribute of God is holiness, the belief that God simply cannot countenance any kind of sin. If God has direct contact with sin, God must destroy it immediately.

Theologian Millard Erickson explicitly advocates this position:

The nature of God is perfect and complete holiness. This is...the way God is by nature. He has always been absolutely holy....Being contrary to God's nature, sin is repulsive to him. He is allergic to sin, so to speak. He cannot look upon it."⁴

So, everything about God that is relevant to God's ongoing relationship with human beings ultimately follows from God's holiness. Humans have been told what we must avoid doing in order to avoid violating God's holiness. When humans sin, it is by diverging from God's laws. Since the laws come from God, sin is against *God* himself.

The law is something of a transcript of the nature of God. When we relate to it, whether positively or negatively,...it is God himself whom we are obeying or disobeying. Disobeying the law is serious...because disobeying it is actually an attack upon the very nature of God himself.⁵

In violating God's holiness, such sin makes God angry. God must (due to God's holiness) punish sin. Violated holiness must be satisfied. According to the logic of retribution, then, God (in effect) is governed by inflexible holiness and human beings invariably violate that holiness. Because of the fundamental nature of this holiness, God is not free to act with unconditional mercy and compassion toward rebellious human beings. Simply to forgive would violate God's holiness. Compassion without satisfaction is not possible for God.

For God to remove or ignore the guilt of sin without requiring a payment would in effect destroy the very moral fiber of the universe, the distinction between right and wrong.⁶

⁴Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 802.

⁵Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 803.

⁶Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 816.

Justice, in this framework, works to sustain the balance of the universe. If the balance is upset, justice requires recompense to restore the balance, payment to satisfy the requirements of the balance. This payment is made through punishment, pain for pain. In Christian theology, the doctrine of the atonement enters here. Due to the extremity of the offenses of human beings versus God's law, the only way God can relate to human beings is if there is death from the human side to restore the balance. The only way this can happen is through the enormity of the death of God's own Son, Jesus, whose own holiness is so powerful that it can balance out the unholiness of all of humanity. Human beings, when they confess their own helpless sinfulness, may claim Jesus as their savior from God's righteous anger. Jesus satisfies God's retributive justice (pain for pain) on our behalf.⁷

Within the logic of retribution, salvation (defined as the restoration of harmony with God) is consistent with the basic nature of the universe as founded on impersonal holiness. Salvation happens only because God's holiness is satisfied through the ultimate act of *violence* - the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. In this view, God is no pacifist. In fact, it is part of God's plan that God's own son be violently put to death. In light of this understanding of the nature of God and of the fundamental nature of the universe, the logic of retribution indeed leads to acceptance of "justifiable violence" against children (i.e., corporal punishment).

This view says that children need to be taught and reminded that the holiness of God is the fundamental characteristic of the universe. Since God cannot countenance rebellion against God's laws, parents must take with utmost seriousness their responsibility to warn their children of the consequences of violating God's law. Physical punishment can give this reminder. Child psychologist James Dobson, an advocate of corporal punishment, writes that God is utterly inflexible in the face of sin:

If we choose to defy [God's] moral laws we will suffer consequences. God's spiritual imperatives are as inflexible as His physical laws. Those who defy those physical laws will not long survive. The willful violation of God's commandments is equally disastrous; "the wages of sin is death."⁸

Of course, children invariably do violate God's rules. So, corporal punishment also reinforces their awareness of their unworthiness before God and their need for Christ as their substitute. As well, corporal punishment also provides a means of curbing the expression of willfulness

⁷Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 804.

⁸James Dobson, *The New Dare to Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 228.

(that is, the inherent selfishness and rebelliousness in human beings). Dobson (and other advocates of corporal punishment, including many influential Christian leaders from past generations such as Augustine, Martin Luther, and Menno Simons) emphasizes the need to shape the wills of children, using justifiable violence against the child as necessary.

We have a God-given responsibility as parents to shape the will....When a youngster [acts out with] stiff-necked rebellion, you had better take it out of him, and pain is a marvelous purifier.⁹

Christian parents face the challenge of acting early on with their children to help the children internalize the logic of retribution.

Little children are exceedingly vulnerable to the teaching (good or bad) of their guardians, and mistakes made in the early years prove costly, indeed. There is a critical period during the first four or five years of a child's life when he can be taught proper attitudes. These early concepts become rather permanent. When the opportunity of those years is missed, however, the prime receptivity vanishes, never to return.¹⁰

One of the main goals of corporal punishment is to teach children of God's holiness, human unworthiness, the role of retribution, the need to follow God's law, and the untrustworthiness of their own emotions.

A distortion of the biblical picture of God

Pacifists may raise theological concerns. When God is understood, as within the logic of retribution, primarily in terms of impersonal holiness, legal requirements, and strict, vengeful justice, the *biblical* picture of God as relational, compassionate, and responsive is distorted. The problem lies with the view of God within the logic of retribution. The logic of retribution seems to minimize biblical themes of interdependence and mutuality. A sense of relief over escaping punishment replaces a healthy sense of self-worth and sharing in God's unconditional love.

Theologian Rita Nakashima Brock points out that this logic fosters the tendency to split off parts of ourselves that we see as impure and to project them onto others. As a result, people we see as different and undesirable are labeled "unclean" and either ostracized or persecuted.¹¹

⁹James Dobson, *Dare to Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1970), 27.

¹⁰Dobson, *Dare*, 20.

¹¹Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys By Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 56-57.

Theologian Timothy Gorringer critiques the logic of retribution as it came to be expressed in the theology of Anselm during the Middle Ages. Anselm's theology of atonement, according to Gorringer, is ahistorical. For Anselm, God does not act out of a commitment to human history, but becomes human out of a metaphysical necessity. Jesus' life is reduced to payment to God of the debt humans owe God due to sin.¹² *However*, Jesus lived *in* history, and in his actual life he insisted that *canceling* debts is a fundamental Christian practice. By portraying God as rigidly *insisting* on debt, Anselm turned Jesus' teaching on its head.¹³

Jesus' God liberates from legalism. Jesus asserted, "the Sabbath is for humans, not humans for the Sabbath." Anselm's God, on the other hand, is "understood as...personified law. Rather than *transcending* law God is infinite law, law in himself."¹⁴ The consequences of such legalism have been grim in the Western world—uncounted acts of violence toward wrongdoers in the name of God's rigid, unforgiving holiness.

The roots of the transformation from Jesus' merciful God to the logic of retribution go back much further than Anselm. However it happened, the portrayal of God as merciful was dwarfed by God as "holy." Walter Wink, in reflecting on this transformation, asks, "What is wrong with this God, that the legal ledgers can be balanced only by means of the death of an innocent victim?" He notes the contrast between Jesus' teaching and the God of the logic of retribution. Jesus simply declared people forgiven, with no hint of any need for a sacrificial victim as a prerequisite.

The nonviolent God of Jesus came to be depicted as a God of unequalled violence, since God not only allegedly demands the blood of the victim who is closest and most precious to him, but also holds the whole of humanity accountable for a death that God both anticipated and required.¹⁵

Practical problems with corporal punishment

Not only is it justified by problematic theological assumptions, corporal punishment also has problematic practical consequences. It may well intensify the dynamic of responding to violence with violence, actually educating young people into the practice of using violence. It

¹²Timothy Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 82

¹³Gorringer, *God's*, 102.

¹⁴Gorringer, *God's*, 102.

¹⁵Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 148-49.

may also contribute to a stunted experience of life for its recipients.

Social scientist Murray Straus, in his quantitative study of corporal punishment, concludes, “Corporal punishment predisposes a society to use aggressive and punitive methods for dealing with social problems.” He admits that it is not solely responsible for punitive public policies. However, harsh prison sentences and dehumanizing prison conditions, minimizing public assistance for families in need, cutbacks in aid for mental illness, and the harsh violence of military intervention against poor, so-called “outlaw” nations and “terrorist havens are unthinkable without the groundwork of widespread corporal punishment as part of the “complex system of...causes of a society’s punitive attitude.”¹⁶

Anthropologist Ashley Montagu argues that violence is learned behavior. With tragic irony, corporal punishment (meant to curb chaos stemming from the presumed inborn tendency toward violence) may actually teach children a “skill” they would not otherwise learn—the skill of being violent. Human aggressiveness seems to be a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. If we assume that we are violent, we will shape our practices to conform with that assumption.¹⁷ If we believe otherwise, and numerous cultures past and present have, we tend to grow up and live our lives without acting violently. Montagu sees human behavior as almost totally learned, not instinctive. That is, for example, we are not hard-wired to be invariably aggressive and violent. We are not born aggressive; that is something we must learn.¹⁸ He uses the concept of natural selection to support this point. In our long evolutionary history, human beings have had to be *responders*, not *reactors*, in order to adapt.

Instincts...would be adaptively useless to a creature that responds to the challenges of the environment by the use of intelligence and learning....Instincts would simply have got in the way of the *responses* that were called for—not reactions but *responses*.¹⁹

Another piece of evidence Montagu cites to support the “learning” over “instinctual” explanations is simply the fact of how much even the physical brain itself of human beings grows and develops after we are born.²⁰ Children are born with strong desires to give and receive

¹⁶Murray A. Straus, *Beating the Devil Out of Them: Corporal Punishment in American Families* (New York: Lexington Books, 1994), xii.

¹⁷Ashley Montagu, *The Nature of Human Aggression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 293.

¹⁸Montagu, *Nature*, 4.

¹⁹Montagu, *Nature*, 77-78 (italics Montagu’s).

²⁰Montagu, *Nature*, 206.

affection. In a loving and nurturing environment, these desires are by and large met, and the child flourishes and relates to others with care and respect. Children only become selfish, withdrawn, or hostile when their affectional desires are frustrated.²¹ Children do not react “spontaneously” or “instinctively” with aggression toward others, Montagu insists. They do have the genetic potential to act with aggression, but they must be taught how to do this. “Aggressive behavior has to be provoked,” he writes. “Its development into full-scale aggression will depend on the subsequent training children receive in the expression of aggression.”²²

James Gilligan, in an analysis that complements Montagu’s, makes the connection between violence as a learned behavior and corporal punishment explicit. According to Gilligan, “violence to the body causes the death of the self because it is so inescapably humiliating.” When parents physically hurt their children, they communicate (no matter their intentions) a withholding of love. Such physical pain, and, even more, emotional pain, damages children’s souls.²³ The heavier the punishment, the stronger the impact. Violence leads to further violence. “The more harshly we punish children, the more violent they become. Punishment does not prevent or inhibit further violence, it only stimulates it.”²⁴

Therapist Alice Miller has raised perhaps the strongest, most passionate voice in recent years protesting the harmful consequences of corporal punishment. She has relentlessly insisted that violence against children has profound long-term, harmful consequences. Miller details numerous consequences from the use of corporal punishment.

(1) Like Montagu, she believes violence is learned behavior. Children learn violence from the way they are treated. From the very beginning of its life, a child rapidly learns “the nature of good and evil—learning faster, and more effectively, than it ever will again.”²⁵ When they are manipulated, controlled, even hurt physically, children learn about pain, about coercion, about how the strong exploit the weak. In time, they put these lessons into practice when they too gain power over others.

(2) When we experience punishment as young people, Miller argues, we learn to keep our distance from our own suffering and the suffering of

²¹Montagu, *Nature*, 99.

²²Montagu, *Nature*, 100.

²³Gilligan, *Violence*, 48-49.

²⁴Gilligan, *Violence*, 113, 150. Further support for Gilligan’s analysis comes from Richard Rhodes, *Why They Kill* (New York: Knopf, 1999), a report on the research and analysis of criminologist Lonnie Athens.

²⁵Alice Miller, *Breaking Down the Walls of Silence: The Liberating Experience of Facing Painful Truth* (New York: Meridian, 1993), 151.

others. We do not develop empathy.²⁶ We must develop protection from our suffering and avoid empathy for ourselves. Inevitably, such lack of empathy leads to lack of empathy towards others. “When what was done to me was done for my own good, then I am expected to accept this treatment as an essential part of life and not question it.”²⁷

(3) The recipients of such violence learn to repress their anger and hatred that naturally well up in response to the pain they are experiencing—but which they are strictly forbidden to express. As a consequence, this hidden anger and hatred waits to find expression later in life, directed at “acceptable” recipients such as the enemies of one’s nations, social deviants, or, perhaps most tragically, one’s own children. When they are hurt, children naturally feel anger, even hatred. However, part of the punishment usually includes the strict forbidding of any expression of such anger. However, Miller argues, the anger does *not* dissipate, as would be likely should the child be allowed to experience and express it. The anger is repressed. Over time it is “deflected onto other people and onto [oneself], but not done away with.”²⁸

(4) When young children are punished for alleged disrespect for the authority of their parents, they are essentially forced to render their parents blind obedience. This lesson then comes to be applied to other forms of authority. The 20th century has witnessed all too many cases of people blindly following orders that come from governmental authority that result in mass death. When children are forced to obey their parents without question, chances are that when they become adults they will likely continue unquestionably to obey authority.

²⁶An issue that deserves careful research is the impact of widespread corporal punishment among Mennonites. My impression, based on various conversations with Mennonite friends and some occasional reading of fiction and non-fiction concerning Mennonite family life, is that Mennonites traditionally have relied heavily on corporal punishment. If true, this would seem to put into question my assumptions in this paper about the impact of corporal punishment on fostering other forms of violence—given the longstanding pacifism of Mennonites. However, I suspect that careful consideration would show that the contradiction is more apparent than real. For example, Mennonites are notorious for the frequency and intensity of their intra-church conflicts. Personally, I have seen plenty of evidence during my 20+ years in Mennonite churches of a surprising and deeply troubling lack of empathy toward people who are different or people who violate community norms. I have a tentative thesis that we would probably find a correlation between the practice of corporal punishment and the difficulty in expressing empathy I have perceived.

²⁷Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984), 115.

²⁸Miller, *For Your Own Good*, 248.

Can one, today, still dispute the fact that there would never have been a Hitler, or Hitler supporters, if there had been no child abuse, if children had not been brought up, with the help of violence, to blindly obey?²⁹

Children are taught, under the threat of punishment, that their parents represent God—and that, like God, parents have the right to hurt those who disobey. Quite often another key link in this chain is the state—that also represents God. “The political leader has only to harvest what has been sown.”³⁰

(5) Finally, Miller argues that violence against children stifles the natural love for life with which people are born. Children are born with a natural curiosity, a desire to learn, to explore, to experience. Parents often feel threatened by a child’s spontaneity and lack of inhibition—since the parents themselves as children were punished and made to feel guilty about their natural impulses and reactions (often in the name of God’s will). So the vicious cycle continues. Such stifling of the love of life cannot help but reap a bitter fruit—the fruit of wanton *disregard* for life.

Wars continue to be accepted; there are many who have learned only to destroy life and be destroyed by others, people who were never able to develop their love of life because they were never given the chance.³¹

In the face of these critiques of the logic and practice of retribution, pacifist theologians face a major challenge to articulate alternatives. In the remainder of this essay, I will address only the theological aspect of this challenge.³²

A call to *reconstruct* our view of God

Given that all theology is humanly constructed, we may (and must) reconstruct our understanding of God in order to foster consistently pacifist theology and practice. The first step for a pacifist response to violence against children is to recognize that, as Gordon Kaufman states, *all theology is human work*.³³ The logic of retribution, no matter how deeply

²⁹Miller, *Breaking*, 81.

³⁰Miller, *For Your Own Good*, 44.

³¹Miller, *Breaking*, 167.

³² Miller’s writings, I believe, contain a great deal of helpful implicit guidance for the practice of nonviolent parenting.

³³Gordon D. Kaufman, *God—Mystery—Diversity: Christian Theology in a Pluralistic World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 42.

embedded in Christian theology, is something *human beings* formulated. No theology comes directly from God. Therefore, it is fully appropriate to evaluate any theological construction, both in terms of how it coheres with our vision for life in the present and with our understanding of our faith's founding document, the Bible. In recognizing the human origin of all concepts of God, Kaufman challenges us to evaluate these concepts continually. In particular, we are responsible continually to seek to discern what the effects of our God-concepts are on human life and the world.³⁴ What are the criteria for such evaluation?

Kaufman argues that the fundamental criterion is to what extent these God-concepts enhance what he calls "humanization"—human health and well-being, harmony with God and creation, inter-human mutual respect and compassion.³⁵ Recognizing humanization as theology's fundamental evaluative criterion leads to the Christian confession of Jesus as our clearest manifestation of God. Kaufman cites Colossians 1:15: Christ "can be characterized as 'the image of the invisible God'. It is here that Christian faith finds its model or paradigm for understanding God: the ultimate mystery, as it bears on us humans, is to be construed in terms of what here becomes visible."³⁶ God-as-revealed-in-Christ gives us a vision of life understood at its very core as personal, loving, compassionate, relational, peaceable—in other words, diametrically counter to the vision of life at its core assumed by the logic of retribution.

If Jesus ultimately, for Christians at least, serves as our paradigmatic basis for understanding humanization and for developing the best and most appropriate concepts of God, we need to look to the Bible as a central source for our theological construction. Timothy Gorringer, in commenting on the place of biblical reflection in trying to rethink the logic of retribution with regard to criminal justice recognizes that, while many theologians in the past 2,000 years have read the Bible as justifying the logic of retribution, "the founding texts point in another direction."³⁷

The Bible's "logic of restoration"

Foundational for pacifist theological reconstruction, the Bible may be read as providing the bases for a "logic of *restoration*." According to the

³⁴Gordon D. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), xii.

³⁵Kaufman, *Face*, 407-11.

³⁶Kaufman, *Face*, 388.

³⁷Gorringer, *God's*, 17. Gorringer's chapter nine, "The gospel and retribution" (223-47), makes an excellent concise case for his assertion that Christianity's "founding texts" may be read as supporting a logic of *restoration*.

“logic of restoration,” God’s holiness is personal, flexible, dynamic, and relational. God’s justice is concerned with restoring relationships and community wholeness, not with punishment, vengeance, and balancing the impersonal scales of an eye for an eye. God’s mercy is unconditional, not dependent upon human beings in any sense earning it. To read the Bible through restorative rather retributive lenses reveals a remarkably different portrayal of God and justice. From start to finish, we find in the Bible a “logic of restoration” fundamentally counter to salvation based on satisfying an impersonal principle of retributive justice.

The Bible’s “logic of restoration” reveals a God with unconditional mercy, whose compassion takes precedence over wrath. The act of creation can be understood thus. God brings peace out of chaos. The story of Noah and the Flood concludes with God simply deciding to act henceforth with mercy and not destruction (Gen 9:8-17). Abraham and Sarah are called to form a people meant to bless all the families of the earth (Gen 12:1-3) based totally on God’s unconditional gift to them of an unexpected child. Abraham and Sarah’s descendents are rescued from slavery in Egypt as a gift from God. Much later, God spoke similarly through Hosea in promising to continue to love the rebellious children of Israel (“I am God and not mortal, the Holy One in your midst and I will not come in wrath,” Hos 11:9; here God’s holiness explicitly leads to God *not* being wrathful). After Israel’s fall and while in exile, more such words spoke of God’s persevering love and unconditional mercy (Isa 40–55).

The story of Jesus continues this account of God’s dynamic, responsive, unconditional saving mercy. Jesus taught a gospel of mercy as seen in his extraordinary parable of the “prodigal son” (Luke 15:11-32). According to the Apostle Paul, the work of God to save even God’s enemies (Romans five) is an expression of God’s *justice* (Rom 3:21). That is, God’s justice equals unconditional, life-giving mercy—mercy that heals, which restores broken relationships, which has absolutely nothing to do with punishment or retribution.

I propose, the logic of restoration much more centrally characterizes the core message of the Bible than does the logic of retribution. *Biblically*, God’s holiness and God’s justice both find their paradigmatic expression in God’s responsive love, God’s unconditional mercy. One way clearly to capture the radical difference between the logic of retribution and the logic of restoration is to look at how the latter understands the Bible’s view of justice. “Justice” (Hebrew: *mishpat* and *sedeqah*; Greek: *dikaionune*) is a common term in the Bible. A careful examination of its usage reveals an understanding quite different from impersonal, retributive, “English-

speaking” justice.³⁸ Old Testament prophets (e.g., Amos, Micah, Isaiah) present justice as tied up inextricably with *life* (cf. Amos 5:21-24: “Let justice roll down like [life-giving] water, like an ever-flowing stream”). Do justice and live; do injustice and die. Justice is not an abstract principle but rather a life-force. Justice establishes relationships; it meets needs; it corrects wrongs. Justice is concrete, practical, and historical.

The ultimate goal of God’s justice is redemption (cf. the visions concluding the books of Amos and Micah). Even the judgment God brings on Israel is for that end: it is intended to correct Israel’s self-destructive injustice. The threats, warnings, and judgment of God are not for the sake of punishment as an end in itself. They are not a matter of retribution, of repaying rebellious Israel an “eye for an eye.” Rather, the threats and warnings offer hope of salvation, of transformation. Biblical justice is not primarily a legal concept; rather it tends to merge with concepts such as “steadfast love,” “compassion,” “kindness” and “salvation.” Justice has ultimately to do with enhancing life. By enhancing life, we imitate our life-enhancing, loving Creator.

God’s love for enemies means that God hates that which sin and evil do to human beings, and God works to heal its effects. That is, God seeks to *heal*, not to punish. God is *holy* in the sense that God makes whole. God binds wounds. God transforms brokenness. Evil only ends when the cycle of evil fighting evil with violence and retribution is broken. God destroys evil, ultimately, not through coercive force but through suffering love. This biblical theme symbolically comes to its completion in the book of Revelation, where the Lamb, Jesus Christ, wins the final battle with the powers of evil through his cross and resurrection—the basis for being praised for his *just* deeds (Rev 19:11-21).³⁹

To conclude: Violence toward children is not necessary. *Violence toward children is not God’s will.* We may make this assertion based on analyses such as Ashley Montagu’s and Alice Miller’s. We may also make this assertion based on a biblically based reconstruction of our concept of God. We worship *the God of Jesus*—a God of peace. Perhaps, as

³⁸See Ted Grimsrud, “Healing Justice: The Prophet Amos and a ‘New’ Theology of Justice,” in Ted Grimsrud and Loren Johns, eds., *Peace and Justice Shall Embrace: Power and Theopolitics on the Bible* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press US, 1999), 64-85. On the contrast between biblical justice and modern, Western concepts, see Albrecht Dihle, *Greek and Christian Concepts of Justice* (Berkeley, CA: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1974) and George P. Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Sackville, New Brunswick: Mt. Allison University Press, 1974).

³⁹See Ted Grimsrud, “Peace Theology and the Justice of God in the Book of Revelation,” in Willard M. Swartley, ed., *Essays on Peace Theology and Witness* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1988), 135-53.

Christians, we face no greater challenge in our retribution-drenched culture than to insist that our God is a God of restoration, *not* a God of retribution. For a pacifist, I want to suggest, *any* rationale for violence—including any rationale for violence against children—that claims to be God’s will is, simply put, blasphemous.

16. Rethinking God, justice, and the treatment of offenders

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“The whole trouble,” Leo Tolstoy wrote about criminal justice, “is that people think there are circumstances when one may deal with human beings without love, but no such circumstances ever exist. Human beings cannot be handled without love. It cannot be otherwise, because mutual love is the fundamental law of human life.”¹ Our criminal justice system certainly is troubled by tendencies to treat some people (offenders and victims) without love; the consequences are costly. From a Christian perspective, and simply for the sake of social wellbeing in our society, we need to challenge those tendencies.

This essay will address three issues: (1) On what bases do people think they can deal with offenders without love? That is, what views of God, ultimate reality, and justice justify unloving (retributive) approaches to criminal justice? (2) Is it possible to construct an understanding of God, ultimate reality, and justice, based on the founding texts of the Christian tradition (i.e., the Bible), that supports Tolstoy’s assertion about the fundamental law of life being love? (3) Is it possible in “real life” to approach criminal justice issues from the point of view of Tolstoy’s assertion that love is foundational?

Concepts of God and retributive justice

Despite the widespread occurrence of inter-human violence throughout most of recorded history, few people would deny that most human beings have an inclination to avoid violence toward other human beings. In human experience we usually need some overriding reason to

¹ Quoted in Timothy Gorringer, *God’s Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence, and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 266.

go against this inclination. That is, to act violently toward, especially to kill, other human beings, is serious business, undertaken because some other value, commitment or instinct overrides the inclination not to be violent. Punishment involves, by definition, the intentional infliction of pain and the use of coercion and thus must be seen as a form of violence. Punishment by the state, then, is morally problematic as it involves the state doing things that are normally considered morally and socially unacceptable. The problematic nature of punishment has given rise to a huge variety of justifications for delivering such pain.

In the criminal justice tradition of the Western world, the overriding justifications given for violently punishing offenders, even to the point of death, have and continue to be tied to a certain understanding of ultimate reality. In this view, ultimate reality requires retributive justice when fundamental natural or divine laws are violated. Such “retributive justice” is seen to restore the moral balance. Given the religious roots of Western culture, this understanding is to a large extent rooted in a particular view of God as ultimate reality: retribution is needed to “satisfy” the need God has that violations be paid for with pain. When someone commits a wrong, it is assumed, the central question of justice is “What does s/he deserve?” and the normative answer is pain.

So in the area of criminal justice, the issue of punishment, i.e. of authorized human beings inflicting pain (including death-dealing pain), on other human beings is a theological as well as a philosophical and practical issue. In saying that violence is a theological issue, we are using “theology” in a broad sense to refer to beliefs about ultimate reality, foundational beliefs about the nature of the universe. We are using “God” as the common human symbol for ultimate reality, whether this understanding of ultimate reality posits a personal deity or not.² Punishment is an issue having to do with how human beings understand the world we live in, the values by which we shape our lives. The concept of retribution or punishment as justice is an issue shaped decisively by beliefs about God and God's character (or, in non-religious language, beliefs about ultimate reality and the character of ultimate reality).

Western culture has explicitly theological roots dating back to the “Christianizing” of the Roman Empire which began in the fourth century with the first “Christian” emperor, Constantine, and given powerful theological grounding in the work of Augustine a century later. This process continued as western concepts of justice were decisively shaped during the Middle Ages through an interaction between Christian

² On the symbol “God”, see Gordon Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

theology and newly-emerging concepts of law. This interaction deeply influenced western culture as a whole and helped to reinforce a retributive view of justice. Part of the theology underlying retributive justice, that we will summarize in very broad strokes, speaks to how God was (and is) understood. There are some key aspects of the view of God generally characteristic of medieval Europe that shaped (and were also shaped by) the emerging punitive practices of criminal justice and which continue to be foundational in present-day practices of retributive justice.

A crucial consequence of this view of God is how it provides the basis for understanding God to desire violent punishment. God's wish for violent punishment provides a crucial impetus for the overriding of our instinct not to kill or in other ways act violently toward other human beings. Retributive theology sees the first, and most basic, attribute of God as holiness, or, we could say, purity, or perfect righteousness. God's holiness is such that God simply cannot countenance any kind of sin. Sin is unholiness, impurity, unrighteousness. God can have nothing to do with such blemishes. In fact, if God has direct contact with sin, God must destroy it immediately. Everything about God and God's actions must be understood as ultimately deriving from this holiness.

From this perspective, we know what sin is because God provides laws to follow. These laws have been revealed in part through the revelation from God given in the Bible but also through the natural awareness people have in their own hearts of right and wrong. Human societies construct legal structures that, depending on the particular society, reflect God's laws. When human beings sin, it is because we diverge from God's laws. Since the laws come from God, the sins are ultimately against God; they directly violate God's holiness. This makes God angry and punitive. The only way holiness can be satisfied is through just punishment.

God's nature, then, is essentially inflexible. God cannot simply choose to forgive violations of his law. God can not respond to each case in a unique way given the unique circumstances of each sin. God is unable to act with unilateral mercy and compassion. God, rather, is constrained by holiness, the most foundational characteristic of God. Simply to forgive would violate that holiness and leave it unsatisfied. Compassion without satisfaction is simply not possible for God. Since God's justice is based the principle of holiness, it allows nothing but punishment (i.e. the giving of pain for the sake of giving pain) as recompense for sin. Otherwise, the imbalance of a universe where God's rules have been violated can never be rectified. People must get what they deserve.

Ultimate reality, then, is based on an inflexible principle of holiness. God may be understood as, in essence, a personified unchanging law of holiness. Deep down, reality is impersonal and unmerciful and the

universe is seen in this view as an impersonal balance. “Justice” is most fundamentally concerned with maintaining this balance. If the balance is upset, justice requires recompense to restore the balance—payment to satisfy the requirements of the balance. This payment is made through punishment, pain for pain. When the offense is serious enough, the only payment acceptable to justice is death—hence the moral validity of capital punishment. The human instinct not to kill is overridden by the requirements of justice. God wills that humans kill other humans under these circumstances because the most important value is God’s justice.

In this theological framework, the doctrine of the atonement enters the picture here. Due to the extremity of the offenses of human beings against God’s law, the only way God can relate to human beings is if there is death from the human side to restore the balance. God cannot relate to human beings simply based on love and compassion; God’s justice, i.e. holiness, trumps God’s love. God can relate only if God’s holiness is satisfied. As it turns out, this must happen through the enormity of the death of God’s own Son, Jesus, whose righteousness is so powerful that it can balance out the unrighteousness of all of humanity. Jesus’ atoning death provides a way for God to relate to repentant human beings. Human beings, when they confess their own hopeless sinfulness, may claim Jesus as their savior from the righteous anger of God, anger based on human violation of God’s laws. As a consequence, salvation itself does not go counter to the basic nature of the universe as founded on impersonal holiness. Salvation happens only because that holiness is satisfied through the ultimate act of human violence, the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. The basic nature of the universe does not change, and hence the pattern of restoring the balance by punishment when violations of God’s law occur remains intact.

This theology has infused the social, political and cultural life of the West in fundamental ways going back not just to the medieval period but into antiquity. Timothy Gorrige makes a strong case for the atonement theology of Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109) providing a crucial link in applying this view of God and ultimate reality to the practice of punitive criminal justice.³ However, surely the roots of such an application of these theological themes go much further back, to the infusion of Greek philosophy into Christian thought and the extraordinarily influential writings of Augustine of Hippo.⁴

³ Gorrige, *God’s Just Vengeance*, 85-125; cf. also Anselm, “Why Did God Become Human?” in Brian Evans and G. R. Evens, eds. *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 260-356.

⁴ See Henry Paolucci, ed., *The Political Writings of St. Augustine* (Chicago: Henry Regnary, 1962, especially sections I and IV.

While recognizing these ancient antecedents, we will focus on the Middle Ages in sketching the impact of retributive theology on criminal justice practices.⁵ In the early Middle Ages, the church, as it struggled with the state for dominance of European society, found it helpful to utilize the law of the later Roman empire as its instrument for solidifying its authority. It merged its theology with the newly-rediscovered legal system to create canon law. Secular authorities, in their turn, followed suit. The theology provided a notion of God's impersonal holiness and retributive response to violations of that holiness. The Roman legal philosophy was also centered on impersonal principles. Instead of being based on custom and history, law in this perspective stood alone.

Roman law assumed a central authority, providing a basis for "legitimate" initiation of action by a "neutral" centralized dispenser of justice. In the medieval world, this centralized authority (church or state) was God's direct agent. Roman law was written law, based on principles that were independent of specific customs ("transcendent," to use theological language). As embraced by the medieval church in canon law, it had an accompanying method for testing and developing law (i.e., scholasticism). Roman law thus could not only be systematized and expanded but also studied and taught transnationally by professionals. This universal character helps explain its appeal and almost immediate spread to universities throughout most of Western Europe.

From the base of Roman law, the church built the structure of canon law. This revolutionary development gave the papacy a key weapon in its struggle for supremacy within the church and in its relationship to secular political authorities. By providing for prosecution by a central authority, it established a basis to attack both heresy and clerical abuse within the church. The most extreme expression of this new approach was the Inquisition in which agents of the pope found heretics and tortured them.⁶ No longer was the individual the primary victim. In the Inquisition, it was a whole moral order that was the victim, and the central authority was its guardian. Wrongs were no longer simple harms requiring redress. They were sins requiring retribution. *God's* holiness understood in terms of retributive theology, necessitates *punishment*, carried out by the human agents of God's will.

⁵ See Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Herman Bianchi, *Justice as Sanctuary: Toward a New System of Crime Control* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994); and Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990).

⁶ Bianchi, *Justice as Sanctuary*, 16-17; cf. also Bernard Hamilton, *The Medieval Inquisition* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1981).

These retributive practices actually diverged from the approach of the first Christians. In the early church wrongs were seen as against people. In Matthew 18, wrongdoers are to make it right to the victim, then the obligation is loosened in heaven. But in the new medieval understanding, wrongs came to be seen as against God, against moral order. The wrong was seen to be against the sovereign, the overall authority, and that figure was a legalistic, punishing figure. God took the place of the victim, and salvation became appeasing an angry God.⁷ God's punishment was portrayed as so awful that our all attention is on saving the sinner from punishment, ignoring the obligation to the victim. In this theology, as in the emerging legal system, the focus is on dealing with the offender.

Justice became a matter of applying rules, establishing guilt, and fixing penalties—without reference to needs of the victim. Canon law and its parallel theology began to identify crime as a collective wrong against a moral or metaphysical order. Crime was a sin, not just against a person but against God, against God's laws, and it was the church's business to purge the world of this transgression. From this it was a short step to the assumption that the social order is willed by God, that crime is also a sin against this social order. The church (and later the state) must therefore enforce that order. Increasingly, focus centered on punishment by established authorities as a way of doing justice. By the end of the 16th century, the cornerstones of state justice were in place, and they drew deeply from the underpinnings of retributive theology. New legal codes in France, Germany, and England enlarged the public dimensions of certain offenses and gave to the state a larger role. Criminal codes began to specify wrongs and to emphasize punishment. Some of these punishments were overwhelmingly severe, including torture and death.

Enlightenment thought and post-Enlightenment practice increased the tendency to define offenses in terms of lawbreaking rather than harm. To the extent that harms were important, emphasis was increasingly on public rather than private dimensions. If the state represented the interests of the public, it was easier to justify defining the state as a victim and giving up to the state a monopoly on intervention. Most importantly, the Enlightenment provided new objectivity in the practice of punishment. Enlightenment and French Revolutionary thinkers did not question the idea that when wrongs occur, pain should be administered by the state. Instead, they offered new justifications for state-initiated punishment. They instituted more rational guidelines for administering pain. And they introduced new mechanisms for applying punishment.

⁷ Julian Pleasants, "Religion That Restores Victims," *New Theology Review* 9.3 (1996), 41-63.

The primary instrument for applying pain came to be the prison. The reasons for the introduction of imprisonment as a criminal sanction during this era are many. However, part of the attraction of prison was that one could grade terms according to the offense. Prisons made it possible to calibrate punishments in units of time, providing an appearance of rationality and even science in the application of pain.

In short, our current “retributive” model of justice gained ascendancy through this legal revolution starting around the 11th century, but was not fully victorious in many places until at least the 19th century. Through this process, crime came to be defined as against the state, justice became a monopoly of the state, punishment became normative and victims were pushed out. The influence went both ways, with law and theology shaping each other.⁸ Developing penal theory, based partly on Roman law, helped reinforce the punitive theme in theology—e.g., a satisfaction theory of atonement that reinforced the idea of payment or suffering to make satisfaction for sins. Biblical interpretation was biased as the Latin translation of the New Testament caused it to be read through the lens of Latin law. Christ’s death was intended to end retribution but this reinterpretation, including “satisfaction theology,” worked toward the opposite—desensitizing us to, even justifying, judicial violence.

Retributive theology, emphasizing legalism and punishment, deeply influenced western culture through rituals, hymns, symbols. An image “of judicial murder, the cross, bestrode Western culture from the eleventh to the eighteenth century,” with huge impact on the western psyche. It entered the “structures of affect” of western Europe and “in doing so, ...pumped retributivism into the legal bloodstream, reinforcing the retributive tendencies of the law.”⁹ The result, at minimum, was an obsession with retributive themes in the Bible. A kind of historical short-circuit occurred in which certain concepts were taken from their biblical context, interpreted through the lens of Roman law, then used to interpret the biblical text. The result was obsession with the retributive themes of the Bible and neglect of the restorative ones—a basic theology of a retributive God who desires violence.

This view is embedded in Western criminal justice system through our modern “retributive justice,” that might be characterized like this:

- (1) Crime is understood primarily as a violation of the law (unchanging, impersonal), and the state is the victim.
- (2) Offenders must get what they deserve: justice aims to establish blame and administer pain to satisfy the demands of the moral balance in which the violation is countered by the

⁸ Gorringe, *God’s Just Vengeance*, 22.

⁹ Gorringe, *God’s Just Vengeance*, 224.

punishment. (3) The process of justice finds expression as a conflict between adversaries in which the offender is pitted against state rules and intentions outweigh outcomes and one side wins while the other side loses.

This paradigm that dominates Western criminal justice is a recipe for alienation. By making the “satisfaction” of impersonal justice (“God’s holiness”) the focus of our response to criminal activity, the personal human beings involved—victims, offenders, community members—rarely find wholeness. Moreover, the larger community’s suffering often only increases. Instead of the healing of the brokenness caused by the offense, we usually find ourselves with an increasing spiral of brokenness. Many victims speak of being victimized again by the impersonal criminal justice system. Offenders, often alienated people already, become more deeply alienated by the punitive practices and person-destroying experiences of prisons—which are most certainly not systems built upon anything resembling Tolstoy’s law of love.

A crucial step in breaking free from the destructive dynamics of violence responding to violence is to recognize that the notion of ultimate reality (based on beliefs about God) that underlies the retributive justice paradigm is a human construct. Gorringer’s “archaeology” of the impact of Anselm’s theology provides powerful evidence for such a recognition.¹⁰ As Gordon Kaufman writes, all theology, in the broad sense of our views of ultimate reality, is a human construct:

All understandings of the world and of human existence are human imaginative constructions, grown up in a particular historical stream to provide orientation in life for those living in that history. But at any given time it is always an open question whether the conceptions and values and perspectives inherited from the past remain suitable for orienting human existence in the new present: this is a question to be investigated, never a position which can simply be taken for granted.¹¹

The notions of God and ultimate reality that underlie the retributive paradigm outlined above are not set in concrete. They are the result of human reflection and human application. If these constructs contribute to brokenness instead of healing, furthering the spiral of violence instead of fostering genuine peace, they need to be deconstructed and replaced.

Ironically, given the roots of our predicament in Christian theology, if we would return to Christianity’s founding documents, the writings in the Bible, we might well discover the bases for a very different understanding

¹⁰ Gorringer, *God’s Just Vengeance*.

¹¹ Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 43.

of justice, ultimate reality, and God. This alternative reading of the Bible provides the basis for constructing a new understanding of justice, one which is increasingly coming to be called “restorative” justice, in contrast to “retributive” justice. To put it another way, the source of our problem might actually provide a way to overcome the problem. Dutch law professor Herman Bianchi argues that we should apply “homeopathic theory” to our situation. It will take a dose of what made us sick to cure us. Since an interpretation of theology got us into this “illness” in the West, he argues that it will take a dose of theology to make us free of it.¹²

In what follows, we will summarize some of the biblical themes that undergird a non-retributive theology. Then we will briefly discuss present-day attempts to express this alternative theology in the realm of criminal justice practice.

The law of love and restorative justice in the Bible

To read the Bible with a sensitivity to restorative justice rather than through the lens of retributivist theology reveals a remarkably different portrayal of God and justice. From start to finish, we find in the Bible a “logic of salvation” fundamentally counter to salvation based on satisfying an impersonal principle of retributive justice.¹³ The Bible’s “logic of salvation” time after time reveals a God whose mercy is unilateral, whose compassion takes precedence over wrath (Hos 11:9). The act of creation itself can be understood thus - God bringing peace out of chaos. The story of Noah and the Flood concludes with God simply *deciding* to act henceforth with mercy and not destruction (Gen 9:8-17). Abraham and Sarah are called to form a people meant to bless all the families of the earth (Gen 12:1-3) based totally on God’s unilateral gift to them of an unexpected child (“Sarah was barren,” Gen 11:30). Abraham and Sarah’s descendents are given new, miraculous life—liberation from slavery in Egypt—as a gift from God. The law of Moses came in the same way, as a gift from God. Later, God spoke similarly through Hosea in promising to continue to love the rebellious children of Israel (“I am God and not mortal, the Holy One in your midst and I will not come in wrath,” Hos 11:9). After Israel’s fall and while in exile, more such words spoke of God’s persevering love and mercy (Isa 40–55).

The story of Jesus continues this account of God’s dynamic, responsive, unilateral saving mercy. According to the Apostle Paul, the

¹² Bianchi, *Justice as Sanctuary*, 2.

¹³ For a more detailed presentation of these ideas, see Ted Grimsrud, *God’s Healing Strategy: In Introduction to the Main Themes of the Bible* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press US, 2000).

work of God to save even God's enemies (Romans 5) is an expression of God's *justice* (Rom 3:21). God's justice finds expression in unilateral, life-giving mercy—mercy that heals, that restores broken relationships, that has nothing to do with punishment or salvation. Paul's understanding of God's justice as personal and restorative (not impersonal and retributive as articulated by later Christian theology) coheres with earlier portrayals of God's justice in the Hebrew Bible.

"Justice" (Hebrew: *mishpat* and *sedeqah*; Greek: *dikaisune*) is a common term in the Bible. A careful examination of its usage reveals an understanding quite different from impersonal, retributive, "English-speaking" justice.¹⁴ The book of Amos contains perhaps the most concentrated treatment of the theme of justice in the Bible.¹⁵ The prophet Amos confronts the people of Israel for their treatment of weak and marginalized people in their midst: "You...who oppress the poor, who crush the needy" (4:1). The Israelites "trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way" (2:6). They have corrupted the local legal system which, instead of protecting weak people, actually makes their plight worse. Israel is in jeopardy here due to its practices of oppression and exploitation and due to its active religiosity that only makes God more unhappy with the people. "Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light" (5:18).

Israel's only hope is to reverse the directions of its social practices. "I hate, I despise your festivals... Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (5:21, 23-24). The salvation for Israel is *justice*. But it is not justice as an abstract principle, as an impersonal balancing of the universe's scales. It is God's justice—the farthest thing from punishment. Amos does speak of impending judgment should Israel not turn to the ways of justice. However, the judgment is not called "justice". "Justice" has to do with restoration of wholeness, not with retribution. Amos presents justice as tied up inextricably with *life*. Do justice and live, Amos asserts; do injustice and die. Justice is not an abstract principle but rather a life-force. An unjust society will die; it cannot help but collapse of its own weight.

¹⁴ Cf. Albrecht Dihle, *Greek and Christian Concepts of Justice* (Berkeley, CA: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1974) and George Parkin Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Sackville, New Brunswick: Mt. Allison University Press, 1974).

¹⁵ The next several paragraphs summarize Ted Grimsrud, "Healing Justice: The Prophet Amos and a 'New' Theology of Justice," in Ted Grimsrud and Loren Johns, eds., *Peace and Justice Shall Embrace: Power and Theopolitics in the Bible* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press US, 1999), 64-85.

The goal justice seeks is life for everyone in the community. Because life is for everyone, justice pays particular attention to the people who are being denied life. Justice provides for access by all to the communal "good life." None can justly prosper at the expense of others, or even in the light of the poverty and need of others. Justice, for Amos, establishes relationships, it meets needs, it corrects wrongs. Justice is concrete, practical, and historical. It is tied to specific acts and people.

In Amos, as elsewhere in the Bible, the ultimate goal of God's justice is redemption (cf. the vision of the healing of Israel which concludes the book of Amos [9:11-15]). Even the judgment God brings on Israel is for that end: to correct Israel's self-destructive injustice. The threats, warnings, and judgment of God are not about punishment as an end in itself. They are not a matter of retribution, of repaying rebellious Israel an "eye for an eye". Rather, the threats offer hope of salvation, of transformation. But if Israel does not respond, God's respect for Israel's free-will will result in God allowing its collapse as a nation-state. As we well know, this is precisely what happened: Israel played power-politics to the end and succumbed to the superior power of Assyria.

The overall biblical teaching on justice parallels Amos. We may summarize the biblical perspective with the following four points:

(1) *Justice is for the sake of life.* God's justice in the Old Testament is not primarily retribution but salvation, not primarily punitive but corrective. The justice of God is saving power, God's fidelity to the role as the Lord of the covenant. Hosea 2:19 makes this point clearly: "I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy." Other representative texts include: Ez 34:16; Ps 25:9; Isa 1:27; and Jer 9:24. The biblical God created the earth and its inhabitants for harmonious relationships and continually acts, even in the midst of human rebellion, to effect those relationships. "The Jewish and early Christian understanding of God's justice put the primary emphasis on the divine initiative, on God's readiness to do for his human creatures what they could not do for themselves, on God's readiness to 'go the second mile' and more."¹⁶

In the Old Testament justice is not primarily a legal concept; rather tends to merge with concepts such as "steadfast love," "compassion," "kindness," and "salvation." Justice has ultimately to do with enhancing *life*. In that way we imitate our life-enhancing, loving Creator. In the New Testament, the writings of the Apostle Paul, particularly the Letter to the Romans, make similar points. In Romans, Paul states that the *justice* of

¹⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *The Justice of God: A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 35.

God has been revealed (apart from the law) in the saving work of Jesus Christ (Rom 3). That is, God's justice is God's compassionate love which effects salvation.

(2) *Justice is part of the created order.* The Old Testament connects justice and life as part of its creation theology. Old Testament theology confessed "creation" to be an act of the covenant-making God of Israel.¹⁷ Therefore, the basic character of creation harmonizes with the values of the covenant love, justice, peace, compassion—that which sustains and nourishes life. The Old Testament allows for no disjunction between the creator God and the covenant-making God. In fact creation was God's first covenant-making act. Thus covenant values are part of the very fabric of creation. This means that human life has meaning, purpose, and destiny. Human life originated as an expression of God's covenant-love. So all human action that is in harmony with that love has meaning and is part of the basic meaning of creation—and is thereby "just".

The creation of humankind in the image of this God means that all people need relationships, with each other and with God. The purpose of human activity is to facilitate these relationships. Since all people, simply by virtue of being people, image God and thus have dignity and value, discrimination and disregard of any human life can never be justified. Injustice severs relationships. Justice seeks to establish and/or restore relationships. God's will has to do with all parts of creation. Nothing is autonomous from that will. The Old Testament challenges people of faith to carry out the creator's will in all spheres of human existence. Ultimately, the Old Testament makes no distinction between the order of creation and the order of redemption. The creator-God and the redeemer-God are one and the same. Faithfulness to the "creation mandate" equals living lives of love. The heart of God's character is steadfast love, which for God means desiring the good of all people. This includes God's enemies and especially social outcasts. God's love provides the model for God's followers.

(3) *Justice is not soft on evil but rather seeks to destroy evil.* However, this justice is rooted in God's love for all humans. God's love for enemies means that God hates that which evil does to humankind and works to heal its effects. Evil ends when the cycle of evil fighting evil is broken. The Old Testament model for this is Isaiah's suffering servant—for Christians the precursor to Jesus—who did not retaliate but accepted all that the powers of evil could do and conquered them. This is the ultimate model for biblical justice.¹⁸ God destroys evil, ultimately not through

¹⁷ Millard C. Lind, *Monotheism, Power, Justice: Collected Old Testament Essays* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1990), 95.

¹⁸ Lind, *Monotheism*, 89-90.

coercive force but through suffering love. This biblical theme symbolically comes to its completion in the book of Revelation, where the Lamb, Jesus Christ, wins the final battle with the powers of evil through his cross and resurrection (cf, Rev.19:11-21).¹⁹

God's love works to set right that which has been corrupted. This is justice. One way to characterize justice is to say that justice is how love is expressed in the face of evil. Love expressed in the face of evil acts to stop the evil and to heal its effects. It is redemptive, salvific. God's justice creates life and acts to sustain and restore life. Human justice, in the Old Testament sense, would seem truly to be justice only when it also acts to sustain and restore life. Since biblical justice seeks to make things better, justice is not designed to maintain the status quo. Indeed, its intent is to shake up the status quo, to improve, to move toward shalom.

(4) *God's justice is especially concerned with the most vulnerable members of society.*²⁰ The biblical teaching ends up emphasizing the poor and needy because in their oppression they were being excluded from community life and from the shalom God wills for everyone. This destroys community and ends up lessening the well-being of each person in the community. Jeremiah identifies doing justice to the poor and needy with "knowing" God (22:13-16). He represents God as stating that those who "understand and know me" are those who recognize that "I am Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight" (Jer. 9:24). This is true for God; it is likewise God's expectation for people.

Expressing love toward one's fellow human is the inescapable condition of having communion with God. "Sow for yourselves justice, reap steadfast love,...for it is time to seek the Lord" (Hos 10:12). This becomes the call to conversion: "Return to your God, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God" (Hos 12:6). This communal justice was not to be for the Israelites' own sake alone. The purpose for justice within Israel was ultimately worldwide justice. Even in the story of Israel's initial election in Genesis 18, a major reason given for it is to bring about "justice and right" for all humankind.

Biblical teaching redefines justice in ways that help us do justice in a largely unjust world. As Millard Lind writes, "biblical justice speaks to the world's problems of justice, and it speaks so radically (to the 'root' of the

¹⁹ See Ted Grimsrud, "Peace Theology and the Justice of God in the Book of Revelation," in Willard M. Swartley, ed., *Essays on Peace Theology and Witness* (Elkhart, IN: The Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1988), 135-153.

²⁰ See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 69-72 and Perry Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1987), 27-37.

matter) that it changes the definition of justice.”²¹ In changing the definition of justice, the biblical perspective changes the definition of the ultimate character of God. The Bible emphatically links God’s love with God’s justice. This inextricable connection guards against rationalizing the treatment of some people as objects instead of as human beings, all in the name of “justice”. Such “justice” becomes a dehumanizing power-struggle with winners and losers. And because losers are so seldom content with being losers, the battle never ends.

Holding love and justice together also guards against thinking of justice as an abstraction, separate from its function as a relationship-building, life-sustaining force. The concern for justice is people, much more than “fairness,” “liberty,” or “entitlements.” Biblical justice focuses on right relationships, not right rules. This, justice is primarily corrective or restorative. Justice seeks reconciliation and reparation. Injustice must be opposed and resisted, but only in ways that hold open the possibility of reconciliation. What happens to the offenders matters, too, if justice is the goal. Corrective justice rules out death-dealing acts, such as capital punishment, as tools of justice. This understanding of biblical justice (and the biblical God) places a high priority on restoring relationships and social wholeness in the face of brokenness and alienation (e.g., crime).

We may illustrate the contrast between biblical, restorative justice and retributive justice as follows:

<u>Retributive Justice</u>	<u>Restorative, Biblical Justice</u>
(1) Rule-focused (break law)	People-focused (cause harm)
(2) Focus on infliction of pain	Focus on making right
(3) Rewards based on just deserts	Rewards based on need
(4) Separate from mercy	Based on mercy and love
(5) Seek to maintain status quo	Transforms status quo
(6) Central actors: state vs. individual	Central actors: community
(7) State (or God) as victim	People (shalom) as victims
(8) Goal is offender paying debt to society (God); victim is ignored	Goal is to restore relationships, healing for all parties

Restorative justice is personal, relational, social, and dynamic. It stands in stark contrast with the Western retributive justice that characterizes our criminal justice practices. The contrast may be said, by some, to be so great that restorative justice is essentially irrelevant to the

²¹ Lind, *Monotheism*, 95.

“real world” we now live in. We propose, to the contrary, that restorative justice offers tremendous possibilities for “healing” even in the brokenness and alienation of today’s criminal justice world. Hundreds of programs in many parts of the world demonstrate that restorative justice is not only relevant but essential. Without doubt, healing is needed.

Putting restorative justice into practice

“Human beings cannot be handled without love,” Tolstoy wrote, and yet our practice of criminal justice has been built on the opposite. We have argued above that Christian scripture supports Tolstoy’s assumption that relationships are fundamental. However, a misconstruction of God’s nature, formed in part through an unfortunate symbiotic interaction between law and theology during a formative period of western culture, has caused our culture not only to ignore but also to pervert this understanding into a retributive concept of justice. It is this retributive understanding that underpins the unprecedented rate of punishment in today’s world, providing conceptual justification for the “corrections-industrial complex” or industry that is part of its driving force.²²

This concept of justice is not only morally questionable—it is counterproductive as well. James Gilligan, former head psychiatrist for the Massachusetts Department of Corrections, notes that many offenses emerge out injustice and victimization that offenders themselves have experienced or perceive themselves to have experienced. “The attempt to achieve justice and maintain justice, or to undo or prevent injustice, is the only and only universal cause of violence.”²³

What is conventionally called “crime” is the kind of violence that the legal system calls illegal, and “punishment” is the kind that it calls legal. But the motives and the goals that underlie both are identical - they both aim to attain justice or revenge for past injuries and injustices. Crime and punishment are conventionally spoken of as if they were opposites, yet both are committed in the name of morality and justice, and both use violence as the means by which to attain those ends. So not only are their ends identical, so are their means.²⁴

²² See Nils Christie, *Crime Control as Industry: Toward Gulags, Western Style* (New York: Routledge, 1994) and Eric Schlosser, “The Prison-Industrial Complex” *Atlantic Monthly* 282.6(June, 1998), 51-77.

²³ James Gilligan, *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic* (New York: Vintage, 1997), 12.

²⁴ Gilligan, *Violence*, 18-19.

What would a concept of justice look like if it were based on love—that is, on respect and concern for the people involved, on a commitment to respond constructively?²⁵ Could such a relational or restorative approach to justice not only be articulated but actually implemented?²⁶

During the past 25 years, a growing movement has sought to do just this. Eduardo Barajas, Jr., a program specialist for the National Institute of Corrections, has characterized it like this: “A revolution is occurring in criminal justice. A quiet, grassroots, seemingly unobtrusive, but truly revolutionary movement is changing the nature, the very fabric of our work.” He argues that it extends beyond most reforms in the history of criminal justice: “What is occurring now is more than innovative, it is truly inventive, ... a ‘paradigm shift’.”²⁷

The immediate source of this “restorative justice” movement may be traced back to two Mennonite practitioners in Ontario, Canada. Frustrated with existent criminal justice practices, trying to put into practice, their religious beliefs, seeking to be practical about peacemaking, they conducted a series of “victim-offender reconciliation” encounters between two juvenile offenders and the numerous people these young men had victimized in a drunken spree. This led to the implementation of various forms of victim-offender mediation or reconciliation throughout North America, Europe and elsewhere and to the development of restorative justice theory.

From of that tiny source was born a stream that is now international in scope. Nothing comes from nowhere, though, and of course this restorative justice stream has many much deeper sources; indeed, its exact origin is obscure. It can be traced to a variety of religious traditions. During the past several decades it has been fed by the conflict resolution movement as well as the movements for victim rights and alternatives to prison. Feminist theory has provided an important awareness of how the patriarchal nature of our structures, including the justice system, but has also enriched the stream with its emphasis on an ethic of relationship.

The stream is fed in important ways from a variety of traditional values, practices, and customs. Indeed, two of the most promising forms

²⁵ Ron Claassen, “Prerequisites for Reconciliation” in *VORP Volunteer Handbook* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1990), 10-11.

²⁶ What follows draws upon the following writings by Howard Zehr: *Changing Lenses*; “Restorative Justice: The Concept” *Corrections Today* (December 1997), 68-70; and “Justice as Restoration, Justice as Respect,” *The Justice Professional* 11 (1998), 71-87.

²⁷ Eduardo Barajas, “Moving Toward Community Justice,” in *Community Justice: Striving for Safe, Secure, and Just Communities*,” (Washington, DC: National Institute of Corrections, 1996), 1-7.

of restorative justice today—Family Group Conferences and Circle Sentencing, come directly from aboriginal or indigenous values adapted to the realities of modern legal systems. In contrast to the “retributive” paradigm of justice, the concept of restorative justice underlying these approaches might be summarized like this:

- (1) Crime is primarily a violation of, or harm to, people and relationships.
- (2) Violations create obligations. The aim of justice is to identify needs and obligations so that things can be “made right” to the extent possible.
- (3) The process of justice should, to the extent possible, involve victims, offenders and community members in an effort to mutually identify needs, obligations and solutions.

The restorative justice concept can be framed in a variety of ways, but two ideas are fundamental: restorative justice is *harm-focused* and it promotes the *engagement* of an enlarged set of stakeholders. Most restorative justice can be seen as following from these two concepts.

Restorative justice views crime first of all as harm done to people and communities. Our legal system, with its focus on laws, often loses sight of this reality, that crime is essentially causing harm; consequently, it makes victims at best a secondary concern of justice. A harm focus, however, implies a central concern for victims’ needs and roles. Restorative justice, then, begins with a concern for victims and how to meet their needs, for repairing the harm as much as possible. A focus on harm also implies an emphasis on offender accountability and responsibility—in concrete, not abstract, terms. Too often we have thought of accountability as punishment, that is, pain administered to offenders for they pain have caused. In reality, this has very little to do with actual accountability.

Little in the justice process encourages offenders to understand the consequences of their actions or to empathize with victims. On the contrary, the adversarial game requires offenders to look out for themselves. Offenders are discouraged from acknowledging their responsibility and are given little opportunity to act on this responsibility in concrete ways. The “neutralizing strategies”—the stereotypes and rationalizations that offenders use to distance themselves from the people they hurt—are never challenged.

However, if crime is essentially about harm, accountability means being encouraged to understand that harm, to begin to comprehend the consequences of one’s behavior. Moreover, it means taking responsibility to make things right in so far as possible, both concretely and symbolically. The principle of engagement suggests that the primary parties affected by crime—victims, offenders, members of the community—are given significant roles in the justice process. They need to be given

information about each other and to be involved in deciding what justice in this case requires. This may mean actual dialogue between these parties, or it may involve indirect exchange or the use of surrogates. In any case, engagement implies involvement of an enlarged circle of stakeholders as compared to the traditional justice process.

In highly simplistic form, the three central questions of the retributive justice paradigm might be characterized like this: “What laws have been broken? Who ‘done’ it? What do they deserve? The comparable questions for a restorative approach then might be these: “Who has been hurt? What are their needs? Whose obligations are they?”

“What does the Lord require?” asks the prophet Micah, and begins the answer: “To do justice....” But what does justice require? The latter question is central to restorative justice. What does justice require for victims? For offenders? For communities?

Out of the traumas of victims’ experiences come many needs. Some of these have to be met by victims themselves and their intimates. But some of their needs are best addressed by the larger society, especially the justice process. Victims badly need what might be called somewhat ambiguously “an experience of justice.” This has many dimensions. Often it is assumed that vengeance is part of this need but various studies suggest that this is not necessarily so. The need for vengeance often may mostly be simply the result of justice denied. The experience of justice includes public assurance that what happened to the victim was wrong, unfair, and undeserved. Victims need to know that something is being done to make sure that the offense does not happen again. Often they feel the need for some repayment of losses, in part because of the statement of responsibility that is implied. So *restitution* and apologies from an offender can play an important role in the experience of justice.

Victims also need *answers*; in fact, crime victims often rate the need for answers above needs for compensation. Why me? What could I have done differently? What kind of person did this and why? These are just a few of the questions that haunt victims. Without answers, it can be difficult to restore a sense of order and to heal. Another area is sometimes termed “*truth-telling*”—opportunities to tell their stories and to vent their feelings, often repeatedly, to people that matter: friends, law enforcement people, perhaps even to those who caused this pain. Only by expressing their anger and by repeatedly telling their stories can many victims integrate this terrible experience into their own stories and identities. Also important is the need for *empowerment*. In the crime, an offender has taken power over victims’ lives, not only of their body and or property during the incident itself, but over their subsequent emotions, dreams and reality. Many victims find that, at least for awhile, the offense and

the offender are in control of their psyche. That is profoundly unnerving. Without an experience of justice and healing, this too can last a lifetime.

Offenders need to be held accountable, but in ways that encourage empathy and responsibility. However, they certainly have other needs as well. Instead of isolation, offenders need encouragement to be reintegrated, or integrated, into the community. They also need chances for personal transformation. This implies help to develop competencies (instead of the usual focus on deficiencies). It requires that they have an opportunity to have their own needs—including the harms and sense of victimization that may have led to their actions—addressed.

Although retributive justice is done in the name of the “community” (that actually means the state), in actuality the actual human community of those affected by the crime is left out of this process and its needs addressed only abstractly, if at all. Fears and stereotypes are heightened rather than addressed. People are encouraged to view things in simple dichotomies—them and us, guilty or innocent—rather than appreciate the rich nuances of real-life people and situations. Worst of all, perhaps, when the community is left out of the justice process, important opportunities for growth and community building are missed. Judge Barry Stuart, an early developer of Sentencing Circles, notes that when processed right, conflicts provide means to build relationships between people and within communities; take this away, and you take away a fundamental building block of community and of crime prevention. Communities have needs well as responsibilities that must be addressed.²⁸

To address these needs, a diverse set of practices has emerged in various communities. Most work in a cooperative relationship with the existing justice system, receiving referrals from it. Many are designed to provide alternative sentencing options or alternatives to arrest or prosecution. Others, such as those that work with severe violence, may be primarily designed to assist the healing of victims and offenders, with minimal impact on legal outcomes. Most, however, involve some form of victim-offender conferencing. That is, they involve an opportunity is provided for a facilitated dialogue between victim and offender, often with a written restitution agreement as part of the outcome. Three examples of restorative-oriented alternatives that have emerged include the following: (1) the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP); (2) Family Group Conferences (FGC); and (3) Sentencing Circles (SC).

(1) *Victim Offender Reconciliation Program*. In North America, the leading form of victim-offender conferencing, at least until recently, has been

²⁸ Barry Stuart, “Alternative Dispute Resolution in Action in Canada: Community Justice Circles,” unpublished paper (Whitehorse, Yukon: Yukon Territorial Court, n.d.).

called the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program. In its “classic” form, it is operated in cooperation with the courts but often housed in separate non-profit organizations. Upon referral of a case by the court or probation service, trained volunteers separately contact victim and offender to explore what happened and determine their willingness to proceed. If they agree, victim and offender are brought together in a meeting facilitated by the volunteer mediator who serves as a neutral third-party. In this meeting, the facts of the offense are fully explored, feelings are expressed, and a written restitution contract worked out. This contract and a brief report then go back to the court or referring agency. If it is to become part of a sentence, it must receive final approval of the court, then becomes a condition of probation.

In its original form, VORP predominately handled property offenses such as burglary. Increasingly, however, programs are being designed to handle cases of violence, including offenses such as rape and homicide. Offenses like this, of course, require special precautions and procedures and so VORP is today taking many forms.²⁹

(2) *Family Group Conferences*. Recently, new forms of conferencing are emerging, new applications are being tried, and new lessons are being learned as a result of two approaches originally rooted in indigenous traditions. Family Group Conferences (FGC) emerged in New Zealand (and soon in Australia) in the late 1980s as a response, in part, to the concerns and traditions of the indigenous Maori population. The western-style juvenile justice system was widely recognized to be working poorly and many Maori argued that it was antithetical to their traditions; it was oriented toward punishment rather than solutions, was imposed rather than negotiated, and left family and community out of the process.

In the new juvenile system adopted in 1989, all juvenile cases with the exception of a few very violent crimes are diverted from police or court into FGCs. New Zealand Judge Fred McElrea has called it the first truly restorative approach to be institutionalized within a western legal framework.³⁰ Instead of court hearings, youth justice coordinators facilitate conferences including victims and offenders, though families of the offender are also an essential ingredient. Not only do families help to provide accountability and support but advocates argue that it empowers the family as well. Caregivers involved with the family may be invited and a youth advocate—a special attorney—is included to look out for the

²⁹ See Harry Mica, “Victim Offender Mediation: International Perspectives on Theory, Research, and Practice,” *Mediation Quarterly* 12 (1995).

³⁰ F.W.M. McElrea, “Restorative Justice in Practice,” in Jonathan Burnside and Nicola Baker, eds., *Relational Justice: Repairing the Breach* (Winchester, U.K.: Waterside Press, 1994).

legal concerns of the offender. Victims too bring family or supporters. Moreover, the police take part in the meeting.

The meetings are not only large but include parties with divergent interests and perspectives. This group is expected to come up with a recommendation for the entire outcome of the case, not just restitution, and they must do this by a consensus of the group! Even more startling, they actually manage to do so in most cases. Family Group Conferences are working well enough that many judges and other practitioners have called for their adaptation to the adult system in New Zealand and pilot projects are under way there.

(3) *Sentencing Circles*. Sentencing Circles (SC) have developed as an effort to take seriously the traditions and concerns of indigenous peoples.³¹ Until recently they have operated primarily in Native Canadian communities, but in Minnesota and elsewhere they are applied to a variety of settings, including inner-city neighborhoods and the workplace. SCs take a variety of forms. Usually, though, they work in conjunction with the formal legal process to provide forums for developing sentencing plans while at the same time addressing community-wide concerns. SCs bring together offenders, victims (or their representatives), support groups and interested community people to discuss what happened, why it happened, and what should be done about it. Discussions are apparently wide-ranging and aim toward a full airing of facts and feelings and consensus about solutions.

While the “punishment” of the offender is worked out here, primary emphasis is on healing victim, offender, and community. The principal value of the approach is the impact on communities: “In reinforcing and building a sense of community, SCs improve the capacity of communities to heal individuals and families and ultimately to prevent crime.”³² These practices imply a radically different approach to justice for offenders, one that emphasizes an accountability that criminologist John Braithwaite calls active rather than passive responsibility.³³

Critics point out that if restorative justice is to be taken seriously, it will need to expand its analysis of offender needs to encompass an

³¹ Rupert Ross, *Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1996).

³² Stuart, “Alternative Dispute Resolution.”

³³ John Braithwaite, “Principles of Restorative Justice,” plenary presentation at the International Conference on Restorative Justice for Juveniles (Ft. Lauderdale, FL, November, 1998). See also John Braithwaite and Philip Petit, *Not Just Deserts: A Republican Theory of Criminal Justice* (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1990) and John Braithwaite, *Crime, Shame, and Reintegration* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

understanding of rehabilitation. We suggest the following as essential building blocks of restorative or relational rehabilitation:

1. Restorative rehabilitation is victim-focused. Treatments and therapies are not conducted in isolation from understanding of impacts on, responsibilities to, and concern for, victims.

2. Treatment is not viewed as an entitlement—as may happen in the current model—but rather as part of accountability to victims and the community and a form of social exchange.

3. Treatment is contextualized, focusing upon integration and the creation or strengthening of social bonds rather than isolation.

4. Interventions are tailored to the personal characteristics of offenders. Levels of service are matched to the level of risk; intensive services to low-risk offenders are often not only ineffective but often backfire. High anxiety offenders do not respond well to confrontation, and offenders with below-average intellectual abilities do not respond well to cognitive skills programs.

5. Interventions are designed to identify and change the criminogenic needs of offenders and, except for individuals not suited to it, are rooted in behavioral or cognitive-behavioral treatment models.

Tolstoy's assertion suggests that justice needs to be redefined in new terms. Criminologists Richard Quinney and John Wildeman, agree:

From its earliest beginnings...the primary focus of criminology has been on retribution, punishment, and vengeance in the cause of an existing social order...rather than a criminology of peace, justice and liberation....If crime is violent and wreaks violence on our fellows and our social relations, then the effort to understand and control crime must be violent and repressive.³⁴

However, such an approach only intensifies the spiral of violence leading to greater violence. What is needed is something that *breaks* the cycle of violence. Quinney and Wildeman suggest that finally peacemaking school of criminology is beginning to emerge.

We have argued that such a peacemaking approach to criminal justice is indeed needed. This peacemaking approach must take seriously (and vigorously critique) the philosophical and theological roots to retributive criminology. However, we are suggesting that the *deepest* roots of Western theology, found in the Bible, are indeed fully compatible with new, peacemaking approaches to criminal justice. Tolstoy would be pleased.

³⁴ Richard Quinney and John Wildeman, *The Problem of Crime: A Peace and Social Justice Perspective* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1991), 40-41.

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