The Gift of Difference

RADICAL ORTHODOXY, RADICAL REFORMATION

Chris K. Huebner & Tripp York, Editors

Foreword by John Milbank

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This book is the product of a friendship, and so we dedicate it to those who were the occasion for our coming to know one another: Stanley Hauerwas and Propagandhi.

CONTENTS

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John Milbank

FOREWORD

In her great travelogue about the former Yugoslavia, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon,* as well as in her novel, *The Birds Fall Down,* the British writer Rebecca West grappled with the issue of whether one should preserve ideological purity at all costs, or whether one should compromise with the expediencies of power. Significantly, in both books, she associates the cause of non-compromise both with Eastern Orthodoxy and with modern political left-wing idealism. With the latter she saw herself as being aligned, and for the former she evinced a great attraction combined with some depth of understanding. Yet in the end she aligns herself more with the tradition of Latin Christianity and with the spirit of Augustine, which she associates with principled compromise.

This, for West, is the middle path between an impossible purism on the one hand and a nakedly nihilistic cult of power on the other which, in the 1940s, she understandably associated with the Germanic world, but also considered, in all rigour, to have been growing in ascendancy ever since the nineteenth century cult of Wagner. Within this world she identifies a perverse cult of cultural and racial purity which (perhaps in a Lutheran trajectory, as suggested by Michael Haneke's film, *The White Ribbon*) exonerates itself from all culpability and shifts every blame upon the cultural or racial "other," including the Slavic legacy which she celebrates and defends. It was the despised Balkan peoples, West reminds us, who at various times held at bay from Europe the Muslim Turk.

And yet, as she also describes, this resistance was often both fatalistic and reluctant, an urge to the defence of the earthly kingdom being in tension with a quietist willingness to insist that only the gaining of the heavenly kingdom through purity of conduct was of any importance. Here she sees a parallel between the ancient threat of the Caliph and the current threat of Hitler: in either case, resistance needs to be realistic and to involve a reasonable expectation of victory, except where one faces possible political extinction. From this perspective the failure to go to the aid of Czechoslovakia was defensible; the decision to go to the aid of Poland inevitable. In either case, for West, the issue is whether a tradition that includes a significant refusal of "cruelty" can itself reluctantly embrace violence upon occasion. Her answer is that it must, on the grounds that the other option is too individualistic: one may save one's own soul but one risks losing the entire cultural sphere within which the pursuit of salvation is possible, if one takes it to be the case that renunciation of cruelty is a crucial aspect of this pursuit.

It is tempting to read West's writings as a Latin riposte to Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor.* Yes, compromise with power risks recruiting an apparent pursuit of salvation to mere worldly pragmatism. On the other hand, the embrace of charity without power risks handing over power to a *complete* lack of charity and justice. This dangerous dialectic of purism was perhaps the central theme of the late Gillian Rose and it has impacted upon Radical Orthodoxy in terms of our critical examination of the Franciscan trajectory: here the proclamation of love as beyond knowledge has tended to instrumentalize knowledge, while the proclamation of poverty as refusing all possession has tended to degrade possession into mere domination. But there is a deeper danger still: charity without power, an ineffective charity, is not really charity at all but rather an impossible aspiration, because it is ironically *doing* nothing. Thus when Blaise Pascal called for justice to be combined with power he was not only calling for the redemption of power, but also for there to be justice quite simply. And it is valid in Augustinian terms to conclude the same thing about the third term of his "three orders:" charity. Unless we combine charity with practical knowledge

(the pursuit of justice) and power, not only does power remain without warrant and knowledge a dangerous scheming, also charity cannot really emerge from mere formless and incapacitated aspiration. For although, one might say, the descent into the Platonic cave is dangerous, without this descent there effectively is *no* participation in the Forms and therefore no finite knowledge of the Forms whatsoever. So in response to Dostoyevsky's correct warning concerning the politicization of charity, West with equal percipience points out that there is no apolitical charity.

So the dilemma would seem to be this: Christianity announces and shapes a new realm of non-violence which proclaims the power of weakness, a power operating through collaboration and reconciliation. But this power is still power; indeed it is the only entirely powerful power, because any exercise of violence always leaves one vulnerable: a house divided against itself cannot stand. Hence, the practice of peace is not a matter of isolated individual motivation; it is rather a matter of a shared habit and an achieved practice. It is exactly because they know this so well that Mennonites have tended to embrace enthusiastically an "ethics of virtue" in recent years. However, this means that the realm of total mutual exposure, the realm of weakness within which "all defences are down," might ironically be seen as requiring defence against an exterior which refuses this exposedness. At the very least, one might say, the New Testament makes it quite clear that Christians are involved in paradoxical warfare: a power-struggle in which one seeks to extend the powerful reach of the very sphere of "powerlessness" (which is yet that of genuine power) itself. But does this mean some adoption of the coercive and utilitarian instruments of worldly power on the part of *ecclesia*? Dostoyevsky tends to indicate no; West, as a good Augustinian, in the end says yes: we have to make a good use towards the true ends of peace of the compromised ends of the earthly city.

Now, at this point, what I gather from the excellent essays in the current volume is that modern Mennonites would tend to say that they offer, *not* the path of misguided purism, not the illusion of "beautiful souls," but rather their own middle way between apoliticism and political compromise. This is because, as they

rightly say, they see the church itself as the true polity and (unlike most of the magisterial Reformation) they see the possibility of "living beyond the law" in terms of a new sort of social and political practice. With all this I thoroughly agree, and am entirely at one with Stanley Hauerwas in recognising the specifically *Catholic* witness of the churches of the Radical Reformation and their later descendants, including the Quakers. For beyond the false dichotomies of faith and works, individual and association, they have understood how to be saved *is* to belong to the church in the sense of belonging to a mystical space within the world—a space that can sometimes be literally geographical, as in the invocation of a visionary Quaker Northumbria by the Quaker-raised Basil Bunting in his long poem *Briggflats* (considered by many to be the most important long poem in English in the twentieth century after T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*).

There is nothing quietist either about this entire diverse legacy, which has not only created exemplary utopian communities but also founded many ethical businesses whose good influence endures to this day. One can also say that the relative "worldliness" of the spiritual enclaves in this tradition, as compared with medieval religious communities, points to a new (and entirely Catholic) way of communally combining *ascesis* with festivity and the quest for salvation with the quest for sexual fulfilment. And I say this bearing in mind the significance of Ivan Illich and Charles Taylor's suggestion that a neglect of the festive and convivial dimension of religion in the Latin West was in a large measure responsible for eventual secularisation. Clearly however, the more puritanical aspects of the Radical Reformation legacy failed fully to understand this implication of their own endeavours.

As a matter of fact this Mennonite "third way" remains in essential agreement with both Augustine and Dostoyevsky. For the former, true human association lay within the church; while the latter desired to "monasticize" the entire social realm. Yet even if one agrees with the Mennonite tradition that the church itself is the place where charity is combined with power of a new and more genuinely powerful kind, there remains the question of the relationship of this power to contaminated, compromised coercive power.

Is it here really necessary to declare the Constantinian moment either "bad" or "good?" Was it not rather inevitable and indeed positively anticipated by St. Paul himself in his epistles which (as the truly rigorous exegetes have shown) seem already to assume a certain inner subversion and yet preservation of empire by *ecclesia*? And does not sheer anti-Constantinianism actually risk Marcionism? For we ignore at our peril the fact that (as is clear in Augustine's *Civitas Dei* Book V) an affirmation of the validity of the Jewish political history runs parallel to a qualified affirmation of the providential character of Roman political history. The merging with the latter after Constantine can therefore be read as a more emphatic recognition that the gospel transcends and fulfils, yet does not abolish, the literal and political level of the Old Testament, just as charity fulfils and surpasses yet does not abolish the need to pass laws and administer justice. Of course there is ambiguity here: the danger that *ecclesia* will be submerged in *regnum*. Yet *regnum* also gets qualified as *ecclesia:* the Justinian code really did make laws more humane; codes of warfare really did become more constrained; state and social welfare really did expand within Byzantium later in the West.

And without this addition of power to charity would the ecclesial sphere have been effectively sustained at all? To refuse this addition is in a way to refuse the resurrection and the fact that in the end it is Christ's integral kingly function which is eternal and not his mediating priestly function. Perhaps we need to balance Aquinas' sense that all secular power must be subject to the spiritual plenitude of power held by the Pope with Dante Alighieri's "west Byzantine" sense (best expressed in the *Paradiso,* rather than in the overly secularising *Monarchia*) that the prime site of natural-supernatural integration here on earth remains that of political justice. We are always poised between this primacy of realisation and the equal primacy of supernatural aspiration. And the final paradox is that *for now* the latter must be primary, but *in the end,* when Christ alone reigns, the former is primary. Failure to see this is why people are shocked by the sudden "Jewish" reversal of the last book of the Bible. And perhaps this insight is also the key to a balance between the Catholic and Orthodox/Anglican perspectives—for there is a sense in which one can both

reverse and spatially complexify the psychogeographical terms of Rebecca West's terms of contrast between "purity" and "compromise."

Here one can note that perhaps the most uncomfortable historical fact for contemporary Christians is the debt that they owe to kings. Should Charles Martel in the face of the Muslims or Alfred of Wessex in the face of the pagans simply have laid down their swords? If one feels that that would have ensured their salvation, then one has to add that it would also apparently have rendered impossible our own within the course of historical time. For the survival of Christianity was enabled by acts of military defiance and its survival otherwise would have been either marginal or non-existent—the religious pluralism of the American polity being nowhere yet in sight. To suggest that absolute purity is what matters here and otherwise a leaving of the fate of future generation to providence would somehow seem to "iconoclastically" devalue the mediations of the spirit effected by the body and temporality. Shocking as it may seem, because God creates us as hybrid material-spiritual creatures, *ecclesia* includes certain physical spaces which it is arguable that, *in extremis,* one may have physically to defend. Certainly in the name of secular justice rather than "defence of the holy," yet without the space of justice the offer of the sacred cannot really be made.

In this respect it is hard to agree with John Howard Yoder's view that coercive resistance to evil does more damage than original evil itself. This can indeed in many instances be the case, but there are surely too many counter-examples for this to hold as a general rule. King Alfred was able to defeat the pagan Danes precisely because he was fighting wars for the sake of peace, whereas they were fighting a war because that was what male heroes did. Thus he called their bluff by offering a peace treaty which awarded them minor kingships on condition of conversion. It is therefore clear that Alfred won his military victory in highly Augustinian terms and that an unqualified coercion grounded on an ontology of violence was defeated by a qualified, teleological use of coercion grounded upon an ontology and eschatology of peace.

To say this is not at all to deny the Mennonite witness to the aspiration to the supernatural and the attempt to incarnate a peace-seeking

process that passes through non-resistance, suffering, and forgiveness. J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* expresses with genius just how the Christian strategy is double and paradoxical: Gandalf coordinates a military campaign while Frodo self-sacrificially seeks to destroy forever the idol of absolute power. Both tactics are cooperatively necessary and yet Frodo's tactic is more than a tactic: it is rather at one with the ultimate goal itself which is of peace and the renunciation of power for its own sake and even the ultimacy of "magical power" which is allegorically for Tolkien the realm of art, taken apart from the offering of work of art in ethical gift-exchange. (This is the import both of the decline of the elves in *The Lord of the Rings* and of the eschatological plot in his short story *Leaf by Niggle*.)

The same combination of tactic and goal can be seen in the practice of political non-resistance by Martin Luther King, Jr. I agree with the essayists in this volume that to say, with Hans Urs von Balthasar, that this "intrumentalizes" the sacred, is to miss the point that the church is also a supra-political practice which is not resigned to police and legal coercion as the only mode of keeping habitual order. Such a practice, like practices of penance and reconciliation within the church, are at once ways to the end and already the end itself. It is in this respect that they surpass the merely secular political turning of the ends of this world towards the ends of peace.

The positions which I have articulated above are in tension with some of those developed in the current volume. I hope, however, that they take seriously Mennonite concerns. Without any question, the essayists below have done Radical Orthodoxy and me the immense service of taking seriously our concerns. All the readings of Radical Orthodoxy writings are careful and never caricatured. This is rare, and rare also is the preparedness to search for the deep issues and to realise, for example, that when I am talking about peace I am also talking about the nature of signification and the metaphysics of participation. When a Mennonite refusal of all military action and legal force is asserted against me it is done with great nuance and subtlety and often with a certain desire to reach a higher synthesis through an *Aufhebung* of both theological pacifism and the theology of justified coercion.

I in particular and Radical Orthodoxy in general are immensely indebted to the composers and editors of this really fine collection. It will take the debate in political and cultural theology much further forward.

INTRODUCTION

John Milbank opens his book, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, with an unexpected comment: "Once there was no secular."[1] Of course, part of the reason such a claim may come as a surprise is due to how we have been schooled into thinking we implicitly know what constitutes the secular. In claiming that the secular did not always exist, Milbank is suggesting that a space had to be carved out for its invention. The secular has not always been a domain, an entity, or a thing. To grant the secular a space is to suggest that there is an arena free from God. For Christians, this borders on the nihilistic as such a realm cannot exist. Such a place is nothingness. The secular, at least within Christianity, exists as a time between times. It is that moment, or series of moments, between the fall and the eschaton where creation awaits, and participates in, its anticipated redemption. There is no space or domain that is the secular; there is only the time between the fall and the restoration of creation.

Unfortunately, however, our politics, ethics, and aesthetics, that is, our varied forms of life, are greatly determined by this recently invented space. Much of what constitutes the Radical Orthodoxy movement, of which Milbank's work is a principal catalyst, is the ability to properly name the creation of the secular as a domain that seeks to be free from the "prejudices" of religious determination.

[1] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 9.

The Enlightenment sought to free (or create) the individual from the constraints of church, mosque, and temple, in order to liberate (or, again, create) the autonomous self who is only answerable to the self. The individual's self-rule, however, would be short-lived as the very political body that created the individual self, and legitimates its rule, demands total allegiance. Due to the advent of the nation-state, a transference of allegiance from religion to the nation-state occurred. In order to legitimize this transference, religion had to be privatized, relativized, and de-politicized in order for the nation-state to claim ownership of the recently liberated individual.

There have been a number of reactions to the recent privatization and relativization of Christianity. Many Christians refuse to separate their religious convictions from the political arena—or, for that matter, any other arena. They reject the notion that religion should be sequestered to the private realm. A person's religious beliefs and practices should be the principal narrator of all activities. This extends, for example, to politics, music, art, and friendship. The Christian's understanding of God, and all that flows from this understanding, becomes the principal narrative that attempts to navigate her in all aspects of life. Though we are comprised of various communities that shape and form our identity, Christianity, under this rubric, is the grand narrative.

Many Radical Reformers, however, are hesitant about this response due to the concerted effort of some Christians to not only make their religious commitments public, but to utilize their religious convictions in order to rule non-Christian body-politics. This kind of Christianity often assumes that it is up to us to ensure that history comes out "right." This is the eschatological heresy often referred to as Constantinianism. Constantinianism is problematic not because it refuses to privatize Christianity, but because it confuses the politics of the church with the politics of the world. The drive within Constantinianism is to make the world Christian by harnessing some manner of control and power so that the world cannot be anything other than the kingdom of God. Yet, the god that ends up being revealed through this strategy must, of necessity, become a tribal god. Constantinians wed their faith commitments

with their commitments to the state, and, in doing so, practice a religion of the empire that establishes a god of a different kind of nation than the timeless and nomadic nation that is the church.

The flip side of the Constantinian response is simply the more "liberal" response that urges the complete separation of religion from publicly embodied life. Religion has its place, but not in the public realm. Those Christians who find themselves in positions of power must rule, during their work hours, without any bias stemming from their religious beliefs. From John F. Kennedy to John Kerry, their convictions about the Son of God (especially as understood within a Catholic context) have no bearing, we are told, on the decisions they will make for the good of the commonwealth.[2] Jesus very well may have been raised from the dead, but such a conviction has no place in the public realm where decisions must be made for those who both believe and reject such a claim. Religion must, for the sake of the common good, be kept private. One may believe that God exists and that this God will judge the living and the dead, but such convictions must not influence public policy.

For the descendants of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist tradition, both approaches are problematic. It was the Radical Reformers who severely criticized the fusion of church and state, and demanded a separation of the two. This separation, however, was not intended to be at the expense of depoliticizing Christianity. Their intention was not to privatize their convictions; rather, it was to make them visible. This kind of Christianity, ultimately, rejects both of the so-called liberal and conservative approaches to Christian witness in a post-Christian order. Neither posture is helpful, for both make certain assumptions indebted to a particular epoch, modernity, that has reshaped our imaginations as to what we think constitutes the secular. It is on this point, among many others, that we may find important friends within the Radical Orthodoxy movement.

Of course, the Radical Orthodoxy movement refers to much

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[2] Of course, this was, for Constantinian Christians, a strike against these politicians. Perhaps, however, what was really driving these politician's comments was not derivative of them being liberal, as much as they we were concerned about losing the Protestant vote.

more than these specific political concerns. The term "radical orthodoxy" refers to a number of things including a return to creedal Christianity. For many Anabaptists (and much of mainstream liberal Protestantism), there is no greater anathema than the thought of returning to the creeds. Such a notion reeks of a return to Constantinianism and is, therefore, met with reluctance. Yet, the reasons for this return on the part of Radical Orthodoxy adherents, as well their attempted recovery of patristic and medieval theology, is their contention that we have lost valuable resources for how to think and live well during this time between times. A significant part of what we have inculcated since the advent of modernity betrays a theology that remains indebted to the kind of ideologies that render it difficult to speak and think in any terms outside of this secularizing and totalizing framework. For instance, following Augustine's account of knowledge as divine illumination, the Radical Orthodox theologians attempt to transcend "the modern bastard dualisms of faith and reason, grace and nature" that so heavily dictate much of our recent theological conversations.[3] Much of what we assume to be natural distinctions are really creations of a theology perverted by modern thought. By naming these dualisms as fictitious, practitioners of Radical Orthodoxy hope to better "criticize modern society, culture, politics, art, science, and philosophy with an unprecedented boldness."[4] Such critique is not an end in itself, but seeks to reveal how modernity destroys the very things it claims to celebrate: self-expression, sexuality, politics, and aesthetics. It is destructive of these various elements of the embodied life as secularity refuses the transcendence necessary to interrupt and suspend their relative worth over and against the void.[5]

If there is anything that we have in common with those within the Radical Orthodoxy movement, it is the attempt to live as faithfully as possible during this in-between time. We must raise questions that explore the meaning of how Christians are to be differently

[3] "Introduction," in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 3.

ethical and differently political. What does such difference look like in terms of our publicly-embodied lives? What does self-expression, aesthetics, art, music, and our desires look like when we reject the modern bifurcations of nature and grace as well as, in particular, the sacred and the profane? This reader functions as an attempt to address these questions.

Though there are many important differences between these two movements, some of which will be highlighted in this book, the one important commonality between the two revolves around how Christians are to seek to live in the here and the now in light of both our past and our future. Though the answer that some of the adherents of Radical Orthodoxy give may not always coincide with the Radical Reformers, the fact that they are raising these questions is a resource we would do well not to ignore.

Tripp York
Chris K. Huebner
Feast of St. Augusta
Anno Domini 2010

ONE

Peter C. Blum

TWO CHEERS FOR AN ONTOLOGY OF VIOLENCE: REFLECTIONS ON IM/POSSIBILITY

> *The Niebuhrian or the Sartrian has no corner on dirty hands. The question is not whether one can have clean hands but which kind of complicity in which kind of inevitable evil is preferable.*
>
> JOHN HOWARD YODER[1]

> *It is indeed probable that more harm and misery have been caused by men determined to use coercion to stamp out a moral evil than by men intent on doing evil.*
>
> F. A. HAYEK[2]

It may still be too early to judge the enduring significance of the movement known as Radical Orthodoxy.[3] There is little doubt, however, that the writers associated with Radical Orthodoxy have been at the centre of an emerging tendency among Christian thinkers to move beyond either uninformed dismissals or uncritical

[1] John Howard Yoder, "'Patience' as Method in Moral Reasoning: Is an Ethic of Discipleship 'Absolute'?", 24-42 in *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas, Chris K. Huebner, Harry J. Huebner, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 40.

[2] Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 146.

[3] This paper draws partly from material originally presented as "On the Impossibility of Peace: Nonviolence and 'Deconstructionist' Social Theory," at the conference, "Teaching Peace: Nonviolence and the Liberal Arts Curriculum," at Bluffton College, May 2004. Warm thanks are due to J. Richard Burkholder and Scott Holland for comments on that original presentation.

canonizations of "deconstructionist"[4] thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida. The Radical Orthodox reading of deconstruction—especially as found in the writings of John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock—still leads ultimately to the oft-repeated condemnation of its supposed nihilism. But no one can deny that the judgement in this case emerges from serious and hermeneutically charitable engagement with texts, rather than second-hand caricatures and arbitrary imposition of narrow discursive norms.

It is equally apparent that Radical Orthodoxy focuses on themes which are of crucial interest to Christians who self-identify as Anabaptist-Mennonite. Chris Huebner especially has drawn our attention to this by highlighting the richness implied by the shared adjective in "radical orthodoxy" and "radical reformation," and tracing the possibilities for mutual critique residing within the shared emphasis on peace. In particular, he discusses John Milbank's distinction between a Christian emphasis on the ontological priority of peace and a postmodern "ontology of violence," which is associated with deconstructionist thought. As Huebner rightly points out, Mennonite discourse regarding peace can often imply "that peace is reified and treated statically, as a kind of possession that we Mennonites somehow have privileged access to, such that we are charged with the task of distributing it effectively to others."[5] Milbank's insistence on peace as a *counter-ontology*, Huebner writes, situates it "as an excessive and freely given charitable donation." This may provide a much-needed corrective to Mennonite tendencies toward an artificial separation of ethics from theology and (I would add) discipleship from grace.

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[4] I use the term "deconstructionist" for convenience, and with a great deal of hesitation. I especially hesitate to encourage the impression that deconstruction is an "-ism," that it is something about which someone might be an "-ist." The reader should be aware that I am using it here, somewhat carelessly, to encompass a trajectory of thought which has taken shape especially around the "canonical" texts of Jacques Derrida and (secondarily) Michel Foucault, which has various other defenders (notably including John D. Caputo in the United States), and which is commonly treated as a "school of thought." It is often treated so, in particular, in the literature associated with Radical Orthodoxy.

[5] Chris K. Huebner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Waterloo, ON; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 41.

Indeed, it is tempting to see the opposition of a Christian ontology of peace to a deconstructionist ontology of violence as one of the most influential tropes to emerge from Milbank's brilliant reflections. It appears with increasing frequency in the writing of theologians not directly associated with Radical Orthodoxy, perhaps most prominently including Stanley Hauerwas.[6] I do not wish simply to deny the potential power of this distinction, either in general or in relation to Anabaptist-Mennonite theology in particular. I wonder, however, if the use of the phrase "ontology of violence," to cast negative light on deconstructionist thought, perhaps still implies a too-hasty condemnation of the latter as ultimately nihilistic, and thus fundamentally anti-Christian. It is on this question that I intend to focus in this paper.

Consider Milbank's own introductory summary of the point in question, from his magisterial book, *Theology and Social Theory*:

> Christianity . . . recognizes no original violence. It construes the infinite not as chaos, but as a harmonic peace which is yet beyond the circumscribing power of any totalizing reason. Peace no longer depends upon the reduction to the self-identical, but is the sociality of harmonious difference. Violence, by contrast, is always a secondary willed intrusion upon this possible infinite order (which is actual for God). Such a Christian logic is *not* deconstructible by modern secular reason; rather, it is Christianity which exposes the non-necessity of supposing, like the Nietzscheans, that difference, non-totalization and indeterminacy of meaning necessarily imply arbitrariness and violence. To suppose that they do is merely to subscribe to a particular encoding of reality. Christianity, by contrast, is the coding of transcendental difference as peace.[7]

It is one of the primary burdens of Milbank's substantial treatise to expand upon and provide warrant for this claim, but my interest here is not in how well he succeeds in this. There are already numerous discussions of Milbank's book by writers much more qualified than

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[6] See, for example, Stanley Hauerwas, "Creation, Contingency, and Truthful Nonviolence: A Milbankian Reflection," 188-198, in *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth Century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

[7] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 5-6.

I am to address this. I readily concede that, if one is willing to accept the way in which Milbank develops the ontological violence/peace distinction, then his insistence on the priority of peace is compelling.

Yet I remain suspicious of the idea of establishing a clear line of demarcation, beyond which we must refuse to go with "the Nietzscheans," lest they pull us with them into the nihilist abyss. I am not yet fully convinced that the deconstructionist suggestion that violence (like the stack of turtles under the proverbial elephant) "goes all the way down" must be rejected by a Christian in general, or by a Mennonite in particular. A failure to make a distinction may be dangerous, of course, but it emphatically does not follow that the making of the distinction is automatically less dangerous.[8] Before excommunicating (to say nothing of shunning) deconstructionist thought, I want to experiment a bit further with "a particular coding of reality" (another way to say "ontology," as Milbank understands it) that does not guarantee peace as either its metaphysical bedrock or its happy ending. There are clearly risks, as is always the case with experiments. But let us try it.[9]

I

I will phrase my questions in a way that can make a Mennonite tremble, i.e., the way that they tend to arise for me: What if nonviolence really is *impossible*? What if violence is not only *practically* unavoidable, as many people assume, but somehow radically *inescapable?* What if there is no place where we can make our bed, but violence is there? What if we really cannot *do* other than violence? Deconstructionist thinkers do in

[8] Here I have in mind Michel Foucault's maxim that "everything is dangerous." See my discussion of this in Peter C. Blum, "Foucault, Genealogy, Anabaptism," in *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*, eds. Susan Biesecker-Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press; Telford, PA: Pandora Press U.S., 2000), 60-74.

[9] "I favor any skepsis to which I may reply: 'Let us try it!' ["*Versuchen wir's*!"]," Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 115 (insertion from German original mine). On the Nietzschean sense of "experiment," see Peter C. Blum, "Totality, Alterity and Hospitality: On the Openness of Anabaptist Community," *Brethren Life and Thought*, 48, nos. 3, 4 (Summer, Fall, 2003): 159-175.

fact want us to take seriously the idea that this may be so. Recall Michel Foucault's notorious sociopolitical pessimism, for example:

> Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination. The nature of these rules allows violence to be inflicted on violence and the resurgence of new forces that are sufficiently strong to dominate those in power. Rules are empty in themselves, violent and unfinalized; they are impersonal and can be bent to any purpose. The successes of history belong to those who are capable of . . . controlling this complex mechanism, . . . [making] it function so as to overcome the rulers through their own rules.[10]

Or consider Jacques Derrida, whose point of departure is Emmanuel Levinas' phenomenology of the Other. For Levinas, the experience of the Other is most fundamentally the experience of the ethical, of a command. The face of the Other enters my world not as another thing in the world, but as Other than my world, as the possibility of a wholly Other world. I am responsible for the Other prior to any cognition of the Other. The violence lies in the fact that my standard *modus operandi* is to reduce the Other to the same, to force my experience of the Other into my world, to thingify the Other. In a lengthy essay on Levinas entitled "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida sifts through the implications of Levinas' thought (a thought, he famously writes, which "can make us tremble") and his conclusions are striking.

> . . . [E]very reduction of the other to a *real* moment in *my* life, its reduction to the state of empirical alter-ego, is an empirical possibility, or rather eventuality, which is called violence. . . .[11]

> War, therefore, is congenital to phenomenality, is the very emergence of speech and of appearing. . . . [12]

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[10] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 85-86.

[11] Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 128. Emphases are in the original unless otherwise noted.

[12] Ibid., 129.

> If the living present, the absolute form of the opening of time to the other in itself, is the absolute form of egological life, and if egoity is the absolute form of experience, then the present, the presence of the present, and the present of experience, are all originally and forever violent. . . .[13]

> A Being without violence would be a Being which would occur outside the existent: nothing; nonhistory; nonoccurrence; nonphenomenality. A speech produced without the least violence would determine nothing, would say nothing, would offer nothing to the other; it would not be *history*, and it would *show* nothing. . . [N]onviolent language would be a language which would do without the verb *to be*, that is, without predication. Predication is the first violence.[14]

According to this line of thought, it seems that any approach that I make to another is violent. *Discourse* is violent. S*aying anything at all* (anything that involves predication, at any rate) is violent!

If violence is so completely ubiquitous, if I could not even *speak* without it, then how could I maintain that nonviolence is essential to discipleship? Surely the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, regardless of admitted variations in interpretation, has been relatively unified in its strong rejection of the claim that Jesus' teachings present some sort of impossible ideal. Shouldn't we refuse to follow this line of thinking? Not so fast. Recall that it is not only deconstructionists who raise questions regarding violence at the level of discourse. Such questions also figure prominently in recent discussions of John Howard Yoder's work. Again, Chris Huebner provides an especially clear example.[15] Huebner rightly stresses how Yoder's writings both advocate and embody a sort of "pacifist epistemology" that has not often been emphasized until recently, even among Yoder's defenders. Such an epistemology, as Huebner develops it, cannot be understood as able ever to finalize distinctions between discursive gestures which are violent and those which are not. It implies a constant suspicion and vigilance regarding the violence in both saying and doing.[16]

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[13] Ibid., 133.

[14] Ibid., 147.

[15] Huebner, *A Precarious Peace*, 97-115.

[16] I have argued in a similar way elsewhere that Yoder's commitment to patience is not as distant from a putatively "Nietzschean" perspective as we might think. See Peter C. Blum, "Yoder's Patience and/with Derrida's *Differance*," in *A Mind Patient*

Suppose for a moment that Derrida is right, and suppose we conclude that nonviolence is impossible. If we are to understand this sort of assertion in its appropriate context, we must recall the central significance which "the impossible" has in Derrida's later writings. John D. Caputo has clarified its significance in such insightful books as *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*[17] and *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*.[18] Caputo emphasizes that deconstruction is itself impossible, and that it is primarily concerned with or driven by the impossible. He presents both Levinas and Derrida as "dreamers of the impossible," as ethically committed to the welcoming of the Other even though such a welcoming is shot through with impossibilities. That my experience of an Other is in some sense a "transgression," a scandal from the point of view of "objective thought," an overcoming of an impossibility "as if by magic," was already highlighted by Maurice Merleau-Ponty,[19] whose phenomenology of embodied life is largely taken for granted by Levinas and Derrida. Like perception itself, my experience of the Other belies the supposed monadic isolation of subjectivities, *presenting* me with what cannot possibly be made *present*. For Levinas, the experience of the Other is indeed the experience by me of what, by definition, *cannot be a phenomenon* for me. The experience is of the *trace* of the Other, which turns out to be more a sort of *meaningful absence* than a presence, but Levinas nonetheless insists that it is an experience *of the Other*. He also insists that it is not some sort of subjective projection, that it is not only intersubjective, but also in some sense *transcultural*.[20]

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and Untamed: Assessing John Howard Yoder's Contribution to Theology, Ethics, and Peacemaking, eds. Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004), 75-88.

[17] John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997).

[18] John D. Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997).

[19] See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (trans. revised by F. Williams and D. Guerrière) (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), and "On the Phenomenology of Language," in *Signs*, trans. R. C. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 84-97.

[20] Cf. my detailed discussion of this in Peter C. Blum, "Overcoming Relativism? Levinas' Retrieval of Platonism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 28, no. 1

In the early essay, "Violence and Metaphysics," from which I have already quoted, it is clear that Derrida wishes to underscore the *impossibility* of Levinas' view. A line from that essay, commonly quoted out of context, states: ". . . Levinas is resigned to betraying his own intentions in his philosophical discourse."[21] Stated tersely, Levinas wishes to remain committed to the universalizing, totalizing discourse of philosophy, for which an Other that is wholly Other can never be an experience, because it can never be discursively thematized. But if he remains so committed, then saying precisely what he wishes to say about the coming of the Other is clearly impossible. Either the saying somehow brings the other into the same, and it is thus not wholly Other, or the "saying" of Levinas is an attempt at a "nonviolent saying" which is doomed to failure, for it could not really be a saying at all. Either way, philosophy "wins." Derrida borrows a Greek maxim to express the point: "If one has to philosophize, one has to philosophize; if one does not have to philosophize, one still has to philosophize (to say it and think it). One always has to philosophize."[22] Derrida further points out that Levinas is a "Greek" in precisely this sense, that given his own statements regarding the criteria of intelligibility, he is explicitly committed to what the maxim affirms.

"Violence and Metaphysics" has been understood by many readers, regardless of their level of sympathy with the views expressed, as an attack on Levinas by Derrida. Later writings in which Derrida seems much more clearly to endorse Levinas' views are thus taken to represent a shift or a "turn." As a number of recent commentators have argued, however, "Violence and Metaphysics" must not be read simply as a *rejection* of Levinas' approach.[23] Instead, it should be understood as a call to Levinas to be more forthright, perhaps more "honest," regarding the relation that his thought entails between "the Jew" (the unsayable advent of the Other—called 'Judaism' by

(Spring 2000): 91-117.

[21] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 151.

[22] Ibid., 152.

[23] See Robert Bernasconi, "The Trace of Levinas in Derrida," in *Derrida and Difference*, eds. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988),13-29, as well as the works of Caputo cited above.

"hypothesis," as Derrida puts it) and "the Greek" (the saying, the thematizing that is philosophy). That we somehow "live in the difference between the Jew and the Greek," for Derrida, amounts to living in "hypocrisy." But the hypocrisy in question, the betrayal of intentions to which Derrida calls our attention, is not simply a logical error on Levinas' part. When Derrida raises the question of the legitimacy and meaning of "is" in James Joyce's "Jewgreek is Greekjew,"[24] the question is not so much directed at Levinas, but stated on his behalf, perhaps more starkly and more honestly than Levinas states it himself.

The upshot seems to be that any meeting of the extremes, Jew and Greek, is impossible, and that Levinas knows this—knows it, in fact, "better than others."[25] But for Derrida, as we have noted, it is precisely when something is impossible that things get interesting. Probably the most famous example from Derrida's later writings is the impossibility of justice. Law is possible and practical, and I can know when I am right in relation to it. Justice, on the other hand, is impossible except as a justice "to come." Yet justice, Derrida claims, *cannot be deconstructed*. He indicates that deconstruction is done in the name of justice, even that deconstruction *is* justice. I can *know* that I am *right* (legally), but I cannot *know* that I am *just*, since justice is anterior to law.[26] Similarly, the impossibility of bridging the gulf between Greek and Jew is precisely what makes it possible to live in the difference between the two. Caputo has developed this point of Derrida's most effectively, clarifying that the coming of the wholly other (*tout autre*) could only be the radically unsettling sort of "experience" that Levinas envisions if it is impossible.

> The *alter ego* comes [on Derrida's account] with a certain optimal alterity, neither too great (positively infinite) nor too small (more of the same); the *tout autre* is *tout autre* only up to a point; there are limits! The coming of the other occurs within a field of perception which it resists, which resistance, forcing as it does a merely approximating

[24] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 153.

[25] Ibid., 152.

[26] See Jacques Derrida, "The Force of Law: 'The Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" 228-298 in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (London; New York: Routledge, 2001); also Caputo's discussion of "the messianic" in *Prayers and Tears*, 117-159.

> ap-perception, constitutes its transcendence. Its transcendence is the transcendence of the other person, different from me, let us say, but not different *than* me, a field of novelty and surprise within a pregiven horizon of perception. That would constitute what might be called, given certain constraints, an absolute surprise, so long as that means an absolute surprise *relative to* what we were expecting. In order to be overtaken by something we were not ready for, Elijah, for example, we have to be ready.[27]

Caputo argues that it is precisely the notion inscribed here which Derrida later names "the impossible." If there is an error on Levinas' part, it is perhaps that he sometimes lacks the courage of his convictions regarding the impossible, that he sometimes writes as if his move is ultimately a "translation" of Hebrew into Greek (as Caputo puts it), that he sometimes dreams of a resolution that would be something like a pure unmediated *given*, untouched by discursive violence, a dream which Derrida labels "empiricism." "[Derrida] has found it necessary to deny the dream of pure nonviolence, which is an impossible dream, in order to make room for the dream of the *tout autre*, which is the dream of *the* impossible. . . ."[28] It turns out that the so-called "betrayal of intentions" is not an error:

> [Levinas] is not resigned to a notion of the other which does not protect its alterity, which exposes the other to being taken and treated as a thing or an animal or an Unsinn. But he is resigned to a higher-order "betrayal," a certain hyper-betrayal, to saying something that comes unstuck as soon as it is said, because of the objectification and thematization to which it is subjected by—that old nemesis—"philosophy." . . .[29]

But the whole point of the "betrayal" is that when the saying "comes unstuck," it is not simply a pure negation or abject failure. Like the language of negative theology, which fails yet does not simply fail to speak of God, Levinas' saying regarding the wholly Other fails yet does not simply fail in its "reference" to the wholly Other. The "absolute surprise," the transgression of the same by the trace, is not the

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[27] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 22.

[28] Ibid., 23.

[29] Ibid.

abstract consideration of what remains an external "thing-in-itself." It is a genuine shock which the system is set up to "expect," in a sense, by the very finalizing narrowness of its expectations. The *tout autre* arrives precisely as a *solicitation* of *logos* (philosophy). Caputo writes:

> Now that arrival, that incoming invention is an arrival of which we may dream, and that dream does not vanish at daybreak when language awakens, because it is a dream within language, a dream which language itself dreams, a dream dreamed by the trace. . . The trace makes this taking-place im/possible, prepares the way for the impossible. The passion for the impossible takes place within the trace.[30]

II

Having significantly diminished the distance between early and later Derrida, we may now turn to the later, more clearly "Levinasian" work, for further light on the im/possibility of nonviolence. Here I will focus on Derrida's remarkable essay, "On Forgiveness."[31] Derrida makes the same explicit point there with regard to forgiveness that I want to make here with regard to nonviolence: that it is impossible, but that its impossibility is precisely what makes it possible. The crux of his argument is that forgiveness only makes sense if it is forgiveness of the unforgivable. "If one is only prepared to forgive what appears forgivable, what the church calls 'venial sin,' then the very idea of forgiveness would disappear."[32] Further, if forgiveness is conditional upon a consciousness of guilt, a repentance, and a transformation of the guilty into something else, into one who is no-longer-guilty "through and through," the idea collapses here as well. It becomes an economic transaction. Forgiveness is what it is, says Derrida, insofar as it is "*unconditional*, gracious, infinite, aneconomic forgiveness granted to the *guilty as guilty*."[33] It is distinct from amnesty, reparation, legal acquittal, or indeed from any sort of legal judgment. It cannot be

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[30] Ibid., 24.

[31] Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London; New York: Routledge, 2001).

[32] Ibid., 32.

[33] Ibid., 34.

finalized, as one can finalize a legal matter. Derrida in fact characterizes it as a kind of madness: ". . . [P]ure and unconditional forgiveness, in order to have its own meaning, must have no 'meaning,' no finality, even no intelligibility. It is a madness of the impossible."

It is worth noting, for my purposes here, that Derrida also explicitly identifies what is "outside the law" as "violent by that very fact;"[34] violent, that is, from the point of view of the system of law that institutes intelligibility. The sovereignty of the state is always founded upon a violence, Derrida reminds us, which the state's institution is geared toward forgetting. He even suggests that, prior to modern forms of colonialism, such instituting violence always manifests "an aggression of the *colonial* type." The implication is that the impossibility of forgiveness is, from a political point of view, of a piece with the impossibility of stepping back into the space prior to that institution. But it is at this point that we may begin to follow the movement that Derrida is pointing toward. Here is his conclusion, risking a rather violent simplifying paraphrase: An impossibility relative to the system, when such an impossibility is a matter of this sort of "stepping back before" the system, is precisely the sort of impossibility which makes it possible. Forgiveness remains a possible transgression because it makes its own sort of radically "external" sense, even though it does not make sense in the usual way, by fitting into the system. The *singularity* of the Other—its ability to "make sense" without being intelligible within a system—lies behind this "externality," in a way parallel to the "externality" encountered above in the context of "Violence and Metaphysics." Sociopolitically speaking, it is helpful here to compare the way in which radical criticism of sovereignty will be unintelligible strictly from the point of view of that sovereignty, yet such criticism remains possible in the name of justice. It is "im/possible," as Caputo phrases it. Here is Derrida's conclusion regarding forgiveness:

> What I dream of, what I try to think as the 'purity' of a forgiveness worthy of its name, would be a forgiveness without power: unconditional but without sovereignty. The most difficult task, at once necessary and apparently impossible, would be to dissociate unconditionality and sovereignty. Will that be done one day? It is not around the

[34] Ibid., 57.

> corner, as is said. But since the hypothesis of this unpresentable task announces itself, be it as a dream for thought, this madness is perhaps not so mad. . . .[35]

Now the parallel in the case of violence will also be clear. If violence is ubiquitous, if intelligibility itself is in some sense violent, then nonviolence is impossible. It is, as Mennonites are so often told (with renewed indignation recently in the United States under the shadow of terrorism), *madness*. But following Derrida's lead, we may now catch of glimpse of how this madness is perhaps not so mad.

The negation involved in "nonviolence" may be a bit different from what we often assume. It may not be a matter of looking for any sort of absence or cessation of violence *per se*, or of looking for a place to stand that is outside or beyond violence (i.e., perhaps there is no *hors-violence*). It may be a matter of negating the necessary, of saying "*no*" to violence, even though this saying does not itself *escape* violence. It may be that there is one thing to which we must do violence, and that is violence itself. Not so much a "nonviolence," as a "no *to* violence." Actually, in keeping with a "deconstructionist" mood, it works a bit better to say it in French: Not "*nonviolence*," but rather "*non à la violence*!" Insofar as this negation makes sense, it is (as in the case of forgiveness) a radically "external" sort of sense, a sense that leans upon the command "you shall not kill," which is given to us (according to Levinas) in the face of the Other. At the level of discourse, I believe that this connects directly to the sort of "pacifist epistemology" that Huebner discusses, precisely the sort of "patient conversation" that Yoder was working toward.

But what about *action*, as opposed to discourse? Some will surely worry that my wordplay here is disconnected from action, and perhaps that it could suggest "quietism," one of the most dreaded recent bogies of the Historic Peace Church intelligentsia. But there is no bifurcation here of action from discourse, or vice versa. The point *is* action, of course. Saying "no" is understood here as *enacting* negation, as *doing* "no," so to speak. Admittedly, my reflections here so far do nothing toward addressing the question of exactly what the enactment

[35] Ibid., 60 (ellipsis his).

of negation might (or should) look like. Am I going to draw some specific ethical conclusions now?

Suspicions regarding "quietist" tendencies will increase, I am sure, as I turn toward the Old Order Amish for potential hints regarding the possibility of the impossible. The Amish drawing of boundaries in relation to modernizing trends appears notoriously arbitrary, and I believe that we should consider carefully the idea that it *cannot be other than arbitrary*. One way of reading Donald Kraybill's authoritative book, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*,[36] would see it as an argument against this conclusion, an argument that assumes, once we understand the logic of Amish culture, that their drawing of boundaries will make complete sense, that the arbitrariness is thoroughly dissipated. I find another reading more compelling, however. On this reading, Kraybill's book shows that the impossibility of non-arbitrary boundaries is precisely what makes the drawing of boundaries possible. It is impossible to draw boundaries that are univocal and finalized, but why should this prevent the drawing of boundaries? Inability to find a *perfect* place to draw a line need not prevent one from drawing it, in full awareness that it may need to be revisited at some later point. Kraybill's account suggests that the Amish are not simply crippled by some extremely difficult possibility, by a demand to do something that is not impossible in principle, but that is easy to get wrong. They are enabled in drawing boundaries by the very arbitrariness of those boundaries.

This point gains particular force in light of public attention recently drawn to the impossibility of the Amish way, in explicit relation to both violence and forgiveness. On October 2, 2006, Charles Roberts took hostages at an Amish school at Nickle Mines in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, ultimately killing several girls (ages 7 to 13) and then himself. The event and its aftermath were immediately, widely, and extensively covered by the media, and there was a pervasive sense that the horror was deepened by the fact that the victims were from a group known for its refusal ever to kill others, even in self-defense. Most significant, however, was the gesture made

[36] Donald B. Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, rev. ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

by the Amish of assuring the perpetrator's family of their forgiveness. Donald Kraybill writes of how it was this gesture, made when "blood was hardly dry" [37] on the floor of the school, which brought the most questions to him from reporters who queried him about the incident. How could forgiveness be extended so quickly, and with so many unanswered questions regarding the circumstances, the shooter's motives or exact intentions? "Was it a genuine gesture," one reporter asked, "or just an Amish gimmick?"[38]

On the one hand, the gesture vividly illustrates Derrida's point regarding the im/possibility of forgiveness. It does this in a way that is deeply moving to countless observers. Somehow, its rightness resonates and slices, at least momentarily, through our cynical awareness of its impossibility. It seems to instantiate the very "forgiveness without power" to which Derrida alludes. As Kraybill notes, "[T]he Amish do not ask if forgiveness works; they simply seek to practice it as the Jesus way of responding to adversaries, even enemies."[39] In the terms under consideration here, the Amish do not ask if forgiveness is possible. Nor would they simply assume that its being commanded entails its (human) possibility, since with God all things are possible. The way that I think this might be transposed into the key of my concerns here is like this: To admit that violence may be ubiquitous and unavoidable, that there is no *hors-violence*, is not to say simplistically that everything is violence, such that nothing can be done. To return to Derrida's pronouncement encountered near the outset, *pure violence* is just as much "a contradictory concept" as pure nonviolence. There is no vicious *reductio ad absurdum* lurking, ready to spring on us and render us unable to make any distinctions. There is no nihilistic

[37] Donald B. Kraybill, "Why the Amish Forgive: Tales of Redemption at Nickel Mines," an article which first appeared on Oct. 8, 2006 in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Harrisburg Patriot-News*, and has been reproduced in various places under varying titles, both in print and online. For a full account of and extensive reflection on the incident by Kraybill and others, see Donald B. Kraybill, Steven M. Nolt, and David L. Weaver-Zercher, *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007); and John L. Ruth, *Forgiveness: A Legacy of the West Nickle Mines Amish School* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007).

[38] Kraybill, "Why the Amish Forgive."

[39] Ibid.

paralysis, rendering us unable to make any real decisions. My actions will look arbitrary to *someone*, whether I do or do not vote; whether I do or do not stand and pledge allegiance to the American flag, whether I do or do not pay all of my taxes willingly, whether I do or do not accept some killing as justified. But it is also true that my actions will always be intentional (in the rich sense developed by phenomenologists). As Merleau-Ponty put it, we are "condemned to meaning," yet we are enabled rather than stymied by this finitude.

On the other hand, however, the Nickle Mines incident also sheds further light on the warrant for my *Wortspiel* (wordplay). To say that the impossibility of forgiveness makes it possible, as I have been doing here, is emphatically not to say that the impossible becomes the possible. The reporter asks if extending forgiveness is "an Amish gimmick." Perhaps it is something they are culturally obligated to *say*, but how can it be something that they "really mean," something that they genuinely *feel*? Are they merely going through the motions while hiding the hate that we suspect might really be in their hearts?[40] Perhaps the violent response is not negated, but hidden by a gesture which we will always suspect might be a lie. But even worse: Suppose that the Amish are completely sincere. Even then, the rejection of violent response will never be able to prevent itself from being read as, or even from actually *being*, another form of violence. Would the Amish have us forgive all murderers? How could this be other than an acceptance of murder, even a form of murder? The "nonviolence" does not escape violence. Nonviolence thus is still impossible, even though a "no" to violence is not.

III

So how fares the experiment? What have I established here? Following the thought that violence is ubiquitous, so that nonviolence is

[40] Besides any other issues that we encounter in this vicinity, it is important to note that a thoroughly Cartesian disjunction between "inner" and "outer" is presupposed by the hypothetical questioner. For a beginning toward fleshing out (pun intended) some of the rationale for rejecting this presupposition, see Peter C. Blum, "Heidegger's Shoes and Beautiful Feet: Ritual Meaning and Cultural Portability," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 79 (January 2005): 89-107.

impossible, I have tried to outline a way of seeing this impossibility in a positive light, with Levinas, Derrida, and Caputo as guides. I have tried to suggest a way of envisioning disciples of Jesus responding to violence with a "*no*," a no that is possible precisely because it is impossible. So what? Perhaps nothing of the sort is needed. Perhaps Milbank's insight is correct, and Christianity must counter the ontology of violence with an ontology of peace.

Before I "stand aside," as the Quakers say, I would like to conclude by shifting attention, more deliberately than before, from the term "nonviolence" to the term "pacifism." The latter term has connotations for Milbank that have already stimulated much discussion among his Anabaptist-Mennonite readers. As Huebner has pointed out, it was already clear in *Theology and Social Theory* that an ontology of peace does not, for Milbank, entail pacifism.[41] This is made even more explicit in a chapter on violence in his book, *Being Reconciled*,[42] where he declares that Christians "should not and even cannot be pacifists."[43] Here, as before, I would emphasize that Milbank's discussion is brilliant and subtle, and that my treatment of it will fall far short of doing it justice. Especially worthy of consideration, beyond the limits of my present constraints, is his intriguing contention that many of us in the modern West have become much more "*onlookers* of violence, rather than (at least for now) participants in enactments of violence," and that this "occulted" violence is not less violent, but is rather the *most* violent.[44] But what is of most immediate interest in this context is the possibility that it is precisely Milbank's insistence on the ontological primacy of peace which disallows pacifism. For an Anabaptist-Mennonite consideration of Milbank's point of view, I believe that this is where my hesitation—my sense of danger as opposed to error—will be most palpable, if there is anything to it at all.

One of the first things that a pacifist critic will notice is that Milbank apparently assumes pacifism to be simply a *refraining*

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[41] Huebner, *A Precarious Peace*, 46.

[42] John Milbank, "Violence: Double Passivity," in *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 26-43.

[43] Ibid., 43.

[44] Ibid., 28.

from engaging in an action, an assumption which many thoughtful defenders of pacifism would strongly resist. But I would contend that the real problem is more fundamental than this. Of central import in Milbank's argument is the claim, admittedly compelling, that "violence is never simply *evident*, because we have to *judge* whether a substantive good has been impaired." The first level at which pacifism is ruled out is, in his terms, "phenomenological;" it will not do to reject all apparent violence. "Instead, violence has always to be diagnosed, and in a double fashion. Much apparent violence may be exonerated, while much occulted violence must be disinterred."[45] At the level of action, then, Milbank envisions pacifism as a sort of refusal or even willful ignorance of the fact that such judgement/diagnosis is inevitable. It is "averting one's gaze," which is itself violent rather than an avoidance of violence.

Consider the specific terms in which Milbank formulates this point:

> [I]f the pacifist is confronted with an act of violence against the innocent which he is not going to meet with counter-violence—shall we say, a posse of marauding Apaches about to assault pioneering women and children, or else a bunch of gung-ho American pilots about to bomb into submission "subversives" in the Third World—then does he stay and watch, or does he shrink quietly away to his prayers? If he does the latter, if he averts his gaze, then how will not the innocent, catching this act out of the corner of their terrified eyes, not perceive here the signifiers of indifference or embarrassment? On the other hand, if he stays to watch, how will they not discern in his gaze of pious sorrow a trace of the non-intervening *voyeur*? Pacifism, then, is counter-intuitive down two possible forks; it is aporetic, and therefore impossible for humanity as ordinarily understood.[46]

Notice that Milbank and I seem ultimately to agree both that violence is in some deep sense unavoidable, and that pacifism is impossible. So where is our difference? I think that we begin to glimpse its true shape in the rhetorical texture of the above passage. Most obvious is the fact that impossibility here for Milbank is finalizing; it

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 29.

is a refutation. The impossibility of pacifism is the end of the matter. But there is more to notice here. A reader of John Howard Yoder (and of such students of Yoder as Huebner) will note that the passage clearly speaks from a site of epistemic privilege, of "methodologism" and theoretical closure.[47] The reliable identification of "the innocent" and of their (guilty) attackers is taken for granted. Milbank would obviously not claim that such identification is unproblematic in every way, that our practice of it could be other than fallible. But what if the very identification of "the innocent" as distinct from the guilty is also *impossible*?[48] My sense is that affirming this would amount to nihilism for Milbank, and thus is part of what is supposedly guarded against by the primacy of peace. Yet if my prior reflections are not wide of the mark, then from the perspective of deconstructive thought, it could be something quite other than nihilism.

Just as significant, I would suggest, is the sense that the above passage speaks unself-consciously in a voice of controlling power, in a voice that students of Yoder will likely call "Constantinian." Not only is it the voice of one who is able to judge/diagnose; it is also the voice of one who has some clear (albeit partial, perhaps) purchase on the reins of history, one who is in a position not only theoretically to justify but also effectively to implement the needed "counter-violence." The formulation is compelling partly because it rightly identifies the same ineradicable risk that was emphasized above: A "no" to violence cannot prevent itself from being taken *as* violence, even from *being* violence. But the binary choice of looking or turning away seems to be presented implicitly to an actor who is primarily responsible for realizing (or at least attempting to realize) a specific *instrumental* goal.[49] If we will not act violently, the only other option is a "gaze of pious sorrow." Yoder might ask: Why should we assume that the only alternative to counter-violence is an abdication of responsibility?

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[47] Cf. Huebner, *A Precarious Peace*, 83-95.

[48] Derrida's reflections on the distinction between friend and enemy are relevant here. See Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997).

[49] Cf. Huebner, *A Precarious Peace*, 46. As Huebner notes, the emphasis on the instrumental here is seemingly in conflict with Milbank's rejection of the instrumental rationality of "secular reason."

Are there possibilities for fulfilling the responsibility *to be faithful* which are not reducible to a simplistic choice between violent resistance and (equally or even more violent, for Milbank) voyeuristic detachment?[50]

Anabaptist-Mennonite thinkers understandably will be drawn to a theological outlook which makes peace fundamental. Radical Orthodoxy may provide a fruitful example of how such an outlook could be formulated. But it is well worth considering that an ontology of peace, as opposed to an ontology of violence, does not necessarily make the rejection of violence less impossible. I have suggested further that the deconstructionist insistence on the ubiquity of violence might actually imply that nonviolence is made possible by its very impossibility. Let us be clear, though: The point of my "two cheers" for an ontology of violence is not to finalize the choice of one ontology, so much as to warn against finalizing the choice of another.

[50] These questions are developed at length and in various ways throughout John Howard Yoder's writings.

TWO

Kevin Derksen

MILBANK AND VIOLENCE: AGAINST A DERRIDEAN PACIFISM

Good readings of a text often turn on the correct identification of its primary targets and conversation partners. Mistaking the context of the conversation can quickly distort what is at stake in a piece of work. Such a distortion, I think, is easily read into John Milbank's reflections on Christian involvement in violence, especially as described in his essay "Violence: Double Passivity."[1] In this particular piece, the context seems abundantly clear. The essay was first presented at a conference as part of a direct exchange with Stanley Hauerwas.[2] Yet to read it first as a critique of Hauerwas-style Christian pacifism would be a mistake. In a sense, Milbank shows very little interest in engaging the Christian peace position itself. What he is interested in, I would suggest, is engaging the range of positions and tendencies that he likes to name under the placeholder "Derrida."[3] His critique of Hauerwas, or Christian pacifism more

[1] John Milbank, "Violence: Double Passivity," in *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 26-43.

[2] See chap. 11-13 of *Must Christianity Be Violent? Reflections on History, Practice and Theology*, eds. Kenneth R. Chase and Alan Jacobs (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2003).

[3] Clearly there are others implicated here (elsewhere Milbank names Levinas, Patočka, sometimes Marion), and one may certainly want to take issue with his reading of Derrida, but often the name stands in as a generalized foil to represent tendencies that Milbank sees all too abundantly, both in the academic world and otherwise.

generally, comes only secondarily and only to the extent that these positions take on a certain Derridean hue. What is at stake, in other words, is not pacifism but a logic of private possession, autonomy, and stability.

In this paper I will attempt to carry out a reading of "Violence: Double Passivity" that so locates the conversation and identifies the stakes. I will argue that the essay's account of violence as spectatorship is finally an account of violence as self-possession, and that Milbank's concern with pacifism is at the point at which the pacifist attempts to bypass violence through an intensification of self-possession which ends up participating in the very essence of violence itself. Finally, I will suggest that this reading of Milbank allows those of us who are committed to something that we might call a Christian peace position to take his work seriously as a helpful corrective to what can (too easily) become an obvious and simplistic contrast between violence and peace.

I

Before all of that, however, it may be helpful to review briefly what exactly is entailed by the placeholder "Derrida," and the grounds on which Milbank objects to it. Milbank's concern is with any account of violence and peace that turns on some conception of 'the ethics of self-sacrifice' as defended paradigmatically in Derrida's work. There are a number of relevant texts here,[4] but Milbank's description and critique generally runs as follows. Derrida, he suggests, is typically representative of both an academic and a cultural trend which reads the giving up of one's life for another as the highest ethical good. This is exemplified most concretely by Derrida in his later book *The Gift of Death*.[5] Here, in classic fashion, Derrida stages a deconstruction of

[4] See for instance John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* 11, no. 1 (1995): 119-161; "The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice," *First Things* 91 (March 1999): 33-38; "Grace: A Midwinter Sacrifice," in *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 138-161.

[5] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

responsibility, the ethical, and gift; showing in each their internally aporetic structures of (im)possibility. Responsibility, he argues, is not simply a matter of conceding to procedures of public accountability. Drawing on the Genesis story of the sacrifice of Isaac, he claims that responsibility more truly involves a singular, private, and secret attention to the demands of some one other which can never be publicly justified;[6] likewise the ethical, which always inevitably involves the betrayal of all other others in fidelity to the one.[7] A gift, then, is exactly that which breaks with structures of public accountability and ethical duty to address the truly ethical space of absolute singularity. Like responsibility and ethics, however, a gift can never fully escape these structures. Giving a gift inevitably instigates a cycle of obligation that returns one to the realm of public accountability. A true gift must be given anonymously, but Derrida recognizes that even then the giver receives something back in the knowledge and satisfaction of having done a good deed. Every gift opens up a debt that demands to be filled, one which compromises the very logic of the gift itself.

It is at this point that Derrida becomes interested in the giving of death. Might it be, he suggests, that the giving of one's life comes closest to finally breaking from any cycle of obligation and return? In death I give what is most finally my own, and what cannot in any way be given back to me. Only death allows that the gift is finally without self-interest, as there remains no self after death whose interest might be involved. Thus the paradigmatic ethical act, on Derrida's reading, must be the self-sacrificial giving up of oneself for another.

Milbank takes this account of ethics as self-sacrifice and suggests that we consider the sorts of underlying assumptions that are guiding it. He notes four that we ought to be particularly attentive to.[8] The first concerns the nature of the gift itself. Derrida assumes that a true gift must be purely unilateral or sacrificial; a giving up that expects nothing in return. The second is that death is not complicit with evil, but is the condition of possibility for the good. It is only death that

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[6] See for example ibid., 70-72.

[7] See for example ibid., 84.

[8] Milbank, "The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice," 33-34. See also his "Grace: A Midwinter Sacrifice," 154-155.

affords both the vulnerability and disinterest that a true gift requires. Thirdly, in this reading God is reduced to a "shadowy hypostasized Other," whose claims on the self melt into those of the human other, so as not to disrupt the pure realm of the ethical. Finally, and in consequence, the ontological world in which such self-sacrifice can be centrally meaningful is of necessity secular—one in which death *is* truly an ultimate horizon and our own lives take on an ultimate value.

By contrast, Milbank wants to give expression to a vision in which Christian resurrection has meaning such that death is not an ultimate horizon. For Milbank, in other words, death in no way marks the limit of exchange; God blesses the crucified Jesus with the gift of resurrection! Derrida claims that the "pure gift" is impossible, that it is always and inevitably caught up by a "hint of calculation." Milbank agrees, and his ontology of resurrection only confirms this impossibility. His key move, however, is to suggest that "pure gift" was never really at stake. Rather, he suggests that gift is always fundamentally exchangist in nature. What we should be after is not a "pure gift," but purified gift exchange.[9]

The crucial contrast to draw, for our purposes, concerns the place of possession in these two modes of reading gift. Here Milbank's account of moral luck is instructive.[10] As Milbank notes, moral luck, or the assumption that in some sense we need good fortune in order to be good, had an ambiguous role within ancient Greek ethical thought. The ethical *telos* of *eudaimonia* (happiness) was conceived possessively in terms of a personal security that could not be assailed. However, it was also recognized that fortune sometimes plays an important role. One cannot be "happy" (and therefore ethical or virtuous) when fortune conspires to force a decision between the frying pan and the fire.[11] It is often assumed that Christianity names a radical suppression of such moral luck by imagining alternative forms of virtue universally available in all situations. Milbank thinks that Derrida's reading of Christianity in *The Gift of Death* is one such account. Milbank describes how on this reading Christian

[9] Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given?", 131.

[10] See Milbank, "Grace: A Midwinter Sacrifice."

[11] Ibid., 140.

ethics retains and maximizes the antique requirement of unassailable security, but replaces the pursuit of happiness with an ultimate regard for the "other." This orientation, however, takes place exactly in the realm of personal ownership, such that even the Derridean gesture of pure self-sacrifice unto death is a coding for that which one can ultimately never be deprived of. For Derrida, we will recall, death is interesting because it is singularly mine to give. Thus even the ultimate gesture of dispossession paradoxically reinscribes itself as the moment of purest ownership, and any account of moral luck is dissolved.[12]

In contrast to all of this, however, Milbank wants to argue that Christianity actually takes this notion of moral luck to an extreme that transforms all ethical discourse.[13] He suggests in opposition to the Derridean account that Christianity actually *retains* the ancient pursuit of happiness (*beatitudo*), but through a novel abandonment of self-possession and security.[14] "Suppose it is the case that to be ethical is not to possess something, not even to possess one's own deed. Suppose it is, from the outset, to receive the gift of the other as something that diverts one's life, and to offer one's life in such a way that you do not know in advance what it is that you will give, but must reclaim it retrospectively. A total exposure to fortune, or rather to grace."[15] Here it is the resurrection that changes everything. It is only belief and participation in the resurrection that allows for the ethical at all. Death is no longer the ultimate horizon, but now names a giving that is also a receiving in divine grace. The ethics of possession is interrupted by an (asymmetrical) reciprocity of gift exchange reflected in the mutuality of trinitarian life and joyfully celebrated in the eucharistic feast.

At this point we can see the connections between this more recent engagement with Derrida on gift, and Milbank's earlier work in *Theology and Social Theory*.[16] The burden of the latter text was

[12] Ibid., 141.

[13] Ibid., 139-140.

[14] Ibid., 142.

[15] Ibid., 147.

[16] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006).

to repudiate the "false humility" of too much theology which has allowed the theological agenda to be set by variants of a secular reason. The problem with this state of affairs, Milbank claims, is that secular reason is antithetical to theology. Most crucially, secular reason in all its guises (both modern and postmodern) presumes an ontology of originary conflict and violence at odds with the Christian confession that in the beginning is the peaceful and harmonious differentiation of God as three persons, whose contingent creative action codes difference in terms of peaceable mutuality. Milbank's more recent interest in the gift is simply another (perhaps more nuanced) way of talking about the Christian ontology of peace he developed in *Theology and Social Theory*. The concern in both cases is to establish the priority of relationality for Christian theology. Derrida is problematic for Milbank insofar as he claims that human interaction is fundamentally conflictual, and promotes a corresponding account of gift predicated on a logic of private possession and autonomy that tries to purify from all structures of relationality and exchange. On Milbank's reading of Christian theology, however, there can be no gift without these prior structures in place.

II

There is clearly more to be said here by way of groundwork than space permits. The basic outline of a conversation has been marked, however, concerning especially (for the purposes of this paper) the themes of possession, security, and stability. Moreover, the following pages will constitute the fleshing-out of this conversation, on one particular front. So, we turn now to the question of violence, and especially to Milbank's essay, "Violence: Double Passivity."

Milbank positions his reflections on violence in the context of the traditional Christian account of evil as privation. He begins by attempting to read evil and violence as largely synonymous, as "convertible but not identical: exactly like a couple of malign transcendentals."[17] This is a crucial opening move for Milbank, because in a sense the essay then becomes a reading of violence under

[17] Milbank, "Violence," 28.

the logic of privation theory. What is the significance of this location within such an account of evil? To begin with, it positions a Christian reading of violence directly at odds with the "Derridean" placeholder we have been exploring. Milbank makes this clear at the beginning in an easily overlooked passage that I want to suggest functions as a statement of intent and target for the comments that follow. Given its significance I quote it at some length.

> Hence the positive assertion of private autonomy is judged to be *just as* evil as its evidently evil and perverse enjoyment of heteronomous interferences. . . . Such autonomy is exposed by privation theory as deprivation of our participation in being as gift: in this way privation theory attacks as evil not just exterior and visible destruction, but also interior and invisible self-assertion. The latter is here diagnosed *as also* evil; but this means as also secretly violent: a violence against Being, an attempted and illusory violence against God.[18]

Autonomy and self-assertion are evil. Evil is violence, so autonomy and self-assertion are also violent. Derrida is caught in the crosshairs. Milbank is opposing himself to any attempt to provide a Christian account of violence predicated on a logic of private autonomy. Not only would such an account fail to be properly Christian (insofar as privation theory understands evil itself to be a withdrawal into autonomy, or a lack of participation in the flow of God's creative activity), but it would simply repeat the very structure of violence itself. The upshot of all this for Milbank is that all violence must be carefully diagnosed and judged, since through the lens of privation theory some things appearing to be violent are actually not, while other things (like autonomous self-possession) which do not appear violent actually are.[19]

Before moving on, we may note at this point an additional sense in which Milbank is here setting himself up against the Derridean placeholder. The emphasis from the outset on diagnosis, discernment, and judegment suggests that violence and peace do not name stable realities that we can know (possess) fully beforehand. Peace is never stable (possess-able) because it falls under the logic of gift, which in

[18] Ibid., 27.

[19] Ibid., 28.

Milbank's work exactly explodes categories of ownership. Milbank imagines peace in terms of a harmonious play of difference, of non-identical repetition, of gift-exchange that ever refuses finality and closure.[20] Violence is never stable because it always stands in a privative relationship to peace. It is a destruction, a tearing down, an inhibition of and lack of participation in the Good which comes always as gift and not possession. The ethics of self-sacrifice only functions because it assumes that death names a possessable limit-concept with a stable and unchanging meaning. Milbank's point from the outset is that even death must be judged and not simply witnessed, for its meaning (its participation in the Good or transcendental Peace) is not self-evident in all situations. This is a point to which we will return in the context of Milbank's critique of pacifism, but is important to flag here already.

This emphasis on the need for double diagnosis (exonerating some apparent violence and revealing other hidden violence) leads Milbank to address the thematics of spectatorship. Spectatorship is a pertinent subject, according to Milbank, for at least two reasons; in the first place, because we in the West have become characteristically onlookers of violence.[21] In the second place (and more provocatively) because, as Milbank puts it, "looking at violence is actually *more violent* than participating in violence . . . to be violent *is* actually to survey in a detached, uninvolved fashion a scene of suffering; the *most* violence lies in an occulted violence."[22] Milbank unpacks the second claim through a demonstration of the first, but I want to focus on this second one in particular. What does it mean for Milbank that violence is most paradigmatically spectatorial? It means that the most violent violence involves a stepping back to "watch" the action being performed, and thus the withdrawal of a discreet and possessed self that can be abstracted autonomously from its interactions. It means,

[20] These characteristic descriptors of Milbank's work are also hauntingly evocative of Derrida (especially play, difference, refusal of closure). It is an appropriate reminder that Milbank is in many ways indebted to Derrida, and that his critique could be said to turn Derrida against himself in a quasi-Derridean fashion.

[21] Milbank, "Violence," 28.

[22] Ibid.

I want to argue, that for Milbank the pure Derridean sacrificial gift trades in exactly the stuff of violence at its most "real."

Milbank begins here by engaging in a series of reflections on the taking of pleasure in violent spectacle. The first point to note is that according to Milbank (following Augustine), what makes for the enjoyment of such spectacle is the impossibility of observer interference.[23] He describes this spectatorial non-interference as a sort of "double passivity": "[T]he scene exhibited is only there at all to be watched, but since watching is all the watchers can do, they are themselves confined to a *telos* of mere reception. Neither the players nor the audience may actively intervene in the other sphere, and each sphere—stage and audience—is only there for the other one."[24] Because the double passivity of spectatorship cannot practically extend into the rest of life, Milbank suggests that the whole point of a spectacle is that it will *end*, and that the audience has ostensibly come to observe the manner of its death. As a result, he argues that every staged scene is in fact a scene of horror insofar as it entails a certain diminution of life and a de-intensification of being.[25]

There is thus, argues Milbank, a concrete relationship between the double passivity of all theatricality (spectatorship) and the very essence of violence. All violence, he suggests, is in a sense simulated. Successful acts of violence involve a distancing of ourselves from the effects of our actions, and thus involve the perpetrator uniquely as spectator of his or her own deed.[26] At issue here is the question of boundaries. The violence of double passivity essentially names the reification of a performer/observer distinction which cannot be overcome. Milbank comments as a side note that audience interference in the plot (as in computer games) in no way cancels these boundaries. The player manipulated from the audience is only sealed as the performing "other" who is *watched* as a matter of ontological priority.[27]

The account of violence that Milbank sets out here is thus a necessary extension of his account of gift as exchange. Violence is being

[23] Ibid., 31.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 33.
[27] Ibid., 33-34.

described in terms of the giving of gifts in the utter absence of reciprocity. Spectatorship, theatricality, double passivity are all ways of expressing the sequestration of giving from receiving. Relationality is denied in the withdrawal of self that initiates spectatorship. At issue here again are autonomy and possession. In the Derridean account of ethics as self-sacrifice, this sort of possession functions as the condition of (im)possibility for the ethical, as a possession that always inevitably falls short of absolute completion. Translated into Milbank's imagery of the theatre, we might imagine Derrida's (impossible) supreme ethical act to be the sacrificial death of a player on the stage for the anonymous (and therefore even ideally absent?) audience rendered invisible in darkness by the bright stage lights. Milbank counters this image with a vision of the ethical in which no line exists between spectator and player; a "perpetual Eucharist" that shows the theatrical spectacle for the violence that it is.

One final point on spectatorship is worth noting here. If we in the contemporary West have increasingly become "onlookers" of spectatorial violence, it may be tempting to appeal back to a primitive time of participatory ritual and art; a time before the modern spectatorial fixation. Milbank cautions, however, that the contrast in question is not a temporal one between "modern" and "primitive." In fact, he argues that such ancient, apparently participatory, ritual violence already employed a certain framing that established boundaries of non-interference between performer and spectator.[28] Instead, Milbank suggests that the modern and the "pimitive" pagan are in a certain collusion against a liturgical monotheism which alone[29] can marshal the conceptual resources to imagine the truly participatory ritual in which "all sing and all hear," and no division exists between observer and performer.[30]

Although Milbank does not follow this point up in his essay on violence, the rest of his book, *Being Reconciled*, constitutes a sort of explication. I observed earlier that Milbank's project is one that seeks

[28] Ibid., 32.

[29] Admittedly Milbank also cites Plato as a possible source for such a participatory ethic, but the thrust of the passage is towards a contrast between pagan and monotheistic provenance.

[30] Milbank, "Violence," 33.

to make Christian resurrection meaningful. This is essentially what is going on here as well. Against an ethics of self-sacrifice that inevitably occupies a secular (theatrical) world in which death has ultimate meaning, Milbank juxtaposes a liturgical world of festival and celebration constituted by resurrection. The "heretical" Christianity of Derrida (reading Patocka)[31] is finally no more than a secular paganism under the logic of spectatorship, which Milbank counters with his radical reading of Christian orthodoxy.[32]

III

Having established the context of the conversation to which Milbank thinks himself contributing in his essay on violence, we are now in a position to confront the critique of pacifism he finally offers. I began the previous section by describing Milbank's call for a double diagnosis of violence, seeking as part of its mandate to bring to light the hidden violences which are in fact the most violent. Topping the list of these ironic offenses for Milbank is the phenomenon of modern (especially American) pacifism. At this point, those of us committed to what we call a Christian peace position might be tempted to rise up in righteous indignation, or to simply cut and run. I submit, however, that both of these responses proceed from an unfortunate misreading of Milbank that may well be detrimental to a faithful Christian witness, even to peace. There are two primary reasons why this is the case. The first is quite simply that the pacifism with which Milbank is here taking issue is not the historical Christian peace position of the Anabaptist tradition, for instance. What he has in mind is more specific to contemporary trends, especially in the United States. But more importantly, as I have been suggesting from the beginning, we ought not to dismiss or repudiate Milbank too quickly because pacifism is not what is really at stake in this essay at all; his concern is more truly with a particular reading of possessive secularity. Milbank has no interest in defending the legitimacy of violence for its own sake against the pacifist position. His interest is only to consistently

[31] See Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, especially chap. 1.

[32] See Milbank, "Grace," 141-142.

describe a theological-liturgical vision of the cosmos as an alternative to the heresy of secular reason here embodied in Derrida. To say it another way then, pacifism is not the issue here, but theology is. Pacifism only comes up for critique in Milbank to the extent that it starts to bear the marks of (in this case Derridean) secularity. Ironically, such marks are characterized exactly by a sort of isolated commitment to "peace" as such. I do not mean to suggest by these objections that Milbank would not wish to quarrel with, for instance, historical Anabaptist manifestations of pacifism. That is another question with (I suspect) no unambiguous answer. I do, however, mean to suggest that we ought to take his critique of pacifism seriously, if only because the failure to do so threatens to show our own commitment to peace to be more determined by the secular than the theological.

The critique of pacifism that Milbank does finally offer, then, has everything to do with his account of violence as spectatorship. The growing assumption that it is morally preferable to retain the stance of observer when confronted with a situation of violence is one of the ways Milbank suggests that we in the West have become characteristically onlookers of violence. To assume the innocence of the gaze, however, is to overlook all of Milbank's reflections on spectatorship. Milbank argues that, if confronted with a scene of violence, the pacifist is left with only two options. One can either turn away and avert one's gaze (in which case the gaze still persists in memory), or one can stay and watch. The choice is between a perceived indifference or a perceived voyeurism, but in either case it means an entrenchment into the role of spectator.[33] Thus for Milbank it is not simply that

[33] Milbank, "Violence," 29. On the one hand, Christian pacifists might want to take issue with this account of the alternatives. There are surely nonviolent modes of engagement that neither turn away in silence nor watch voyeuristically from across some unbreachable boundary between performer and spectator. This, at least, is the assumption under which the Christian Peacemaker Teams was formed. Moreover, Milbank leaves little room for the kind of theologically significant "inactivity" that is carried out in the work of lament. Without lament as a meaningful response to evil and violence in the world, Milbank risks falling into the sort of Niebuhrian social "realism" he elsewhere critiques. See Milbank, "The Poverty of Niebuhrianism," in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 232-251. Nonetheless, Milbank's

pacifism is a less "ethical" response than physical counter-violence. Rather, insofar as it involves a looking at violence, the pacifism he is concerned about "is at least as violent, and probably more absolutely violent, than actual physically violent interventions."[34] Why is this? Because the pacifist gaze inevitably makes of every violent confrontation a "scene" and a "spectacle" which, as Milbank argues, participates in the very essence of violence.

The issue here, I suggest again, concerns possession. For Milbank, the pacifist is rightly dismayed and saddened by the ubiquitous violence of a sinful world. The problem comes when he or she fails to recognize that violence is most essentially spectatorship, and thus autonomous possession of self. Thus the pacifist attempts to bypass violence through a withdrawal into spectatorship that only intensifies the logic of self-possession and reproduces a yet-more essentialized violence. Interestingly, Milbank does not condemn pacifism for an inappropriate commitment to peace. Rather, he condemns it for a short-sightedness that does not recognize the heart of violence in its very attempt to "choose peace."

Another way of putting this might be to say that Milbank is concerned about pacifist positions that claim to know too much in advance—positions that claim to know exactly what peace and violence are at all times, and can theorize a response appropriate to all situations. In short, Milbank worries about positions that forget that all violence must be judged. We noted earlier that in Milbank neither peace nor violence names a stable, knowable, possessable reality. In the case of peace, this is because of the ungrounded, unnecessary, ecstatic character of divine gift-as-exchange. With respect to violence, this is because privation theory requires that violence always be negative and destructive; never a positive force that we can finally come to know. To claim otherwise is to fall prey to a heretical Derridean Christianity which on Milbank's reading is finally nothing other than the secular.

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challenge remains an important reminder to pacifists that we are always already implicated in various forms of violence, and that our nonparticipation in traditionally violent activities does not preclude us from the occulted violence that Milbank finds most characteristic of violence itself.

[34] Ibid., 30.

In a sense, then, Milbank's suspicion is that "Christian pacifism" must always necessarily negate itself. He is concerned about the strong pacifist tendency to pursue peace as a prior end and goal independent of theology. In short, he worries that "pacifism" all too easily takes precedence over the "Christian" prefix. In the context of Milbank's broader project, especially, it is clear that theology involves a taking up, and a transformation of all other discourses. Milbank's work does not allow for a sphere of secular autonomy untouched by a theological overlay that "makes strange."[35] There can be no place, in Milbank, for an account of peace that functions in abstraction from theology. To the extent that certain pacifisms involve an intensification of spectatorship as possession, predicated on a Derridean secularity, it is not surprising that Milbank wants to take issue with them.

IV

These are undoubtedly serious criticisms, and it remains to explore the extent to which they may or may not legitimately pertain to the confession and experience of peace churches. Before moving on to engage some of these reflections in the context of Mennonite theologizing about peace, however, I want to briefly follow up on these last few comments that suggest a connection between Milbank's reflections on violence and his larger theological project. My reading of Milbank's essay on violence has proceeded by locating Derrida as one of the primary polemical targets. In doing so, however, I have equally positioned the essay within the broader set of concerns that Milbank's work takes up. His objections to Derrida, as we have seen in part already, flow from a commitment to providing a consistently theological reading of the cosmos, one that characterizes the whole project of Radical Orthodoxy itself.

In the introduction to the original collection of essays entitled, *Radical Orthodoxy*,[36] Milbank (along with Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock) reflects on what is meant by the designation

[35] See "Introduction," in Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*.

[36] John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999).

"Radical Orthodoxy." They locate their account of orthodoxy first in a commitment to creedal Christianity, but more significantly in "recovering and extending a fully Christianized ontology and practical philosophy consonant with Christian doctrine."[37] As Milbank had already described in *Theology and Social Theory*, this is in the interest of recovering a proper theological "arrogance" which can resist being "positioned" by other discourses.[38] Radical Orthodoxy clearly aims to refute all theologically legitimated spaces of secular autonomy. Theology must provide its own narration of other discourses, instead of capitulating to the categories of whichever variant of secular reason is in vogue.

But, the twist comes in differentiating this movement from other projects of orthodoxy, such as that of Karl Barth:

> . . . [B]y refusing all "mediations" through other spheres of knowledge and culture, Barthianism tended to assume a positive autonomy for theology, which rendered philosophical concerns a matter of indifference. Yet this itself was to remain captive to a modern—even liberal—duality of reason and revelation, and ran the risk of allowing worldly knowledge an unquestioned validity within its own sphere. By comparison with this, Radical Orthodoxy is "more mediating, but less accommodating"—since, while it assumes that theology must speak *also* of something else, it seeks always to recognize a theological *difference* in such speaking.[39]

The key word to note here is mediation. Radical Orthodoxy is distinguished by opposition to any account of purified and unmediated faith read over against a purified secular reason. The shorthand employed in the quote above is helpful: Radical Orthodoxy is more mediating, but less accommodating. It is important to recognize, however, that this schematic moves in both directions at once. Elsewhere Milbank notes that the two seemingly opposite poles of pure reason and pure faith are actually bound together in a secret collusion.[40] The assertion

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[37] Ibid., 2.

[38] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 1.

[39] Milbank, Pickstock, and Ward, "Introduction" in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 2.

[40] John Milbank, "The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy?: A Catholic Enquiry*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 33.

of a pure faith untouched by reason is merely a counterpart to the legitimation of a sovereign space set aside for secular rationality. Both are reflective of a particularly modern quest against which Radical Orthodoxy positions itself.[41]

Against this collusion in the name of purity, Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy proposes the revival of a certain pre-modern spirit that engages an account of mediation in both directions. This spirit assumes that there cannot be any secure reason without reference to a vision of the divine. No autonomous realm of secular discourse is to be legitimated. Yet insofar as this position is "less accommodating" to the autonomous secular, it is also "more mediating" in its implication that faith and reason are not alien to one another. If faith is always the transformation and theological completion of reason, then we ought to read these things as Milbank claims Thomas Aquinas did—in terms of varying intensities, or degrees of participation in the mind of God.[42]

When Milbank turns to questions of violence and peace, he does so in the context of these sorts of concerns. This is why he begins his essay on spectatorial violence by locating the discussion in terms of classical Christian privation theory. His interest is first in providing a properly theological reading of violence and peace. For Milbank, this means resisting two simultaneous movements. On the one hand, he remains opposed to any account of peace or violence that establishes itself prior to theological engagement. Milbank is committed to a position less accommodating to non-theological categories and assumptions. On the other hand, it involves resisting any attempt to abstract theology itself into its own realm of purified autonomy. Theology is everywhere constituted by the mediations of language and culture, in addition to those of ethics and politics. For Milbank, it is inconceivable to talk about issues of peace or violence in advance of theological discernment (recall that all violence must first be judged), but it is equally impossible to do theology faithfully without talking about these kinds of ethical and political questions.

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[41] Ibid., 34.

[42] Ibid., 35. See also Milbank's essay, "Intensities," *Modern Theology* 15, no. 4 (1999): 445-497.

V

Reading Milbank's critique of pacifism in the context of his debate with Derrida—and therefore in the context of his larger theological project— suggests at the very least that Mennonite theology ought not to preclude the possibility of a mutually constructive conversation with Radical Orthodoxy. To dismiss Milbank on account of his rejection of pacifism is to neglect some of the important ways in which his work may prove a valuable resource (and at times perhaps even a corrective) to Mennonite theologizing about peace.

To begin with, it seems to me that we ought to take seriously Milbank's work as a way of holding our own "account" of peace (properly and theologically) loosely. Milbank crucially illuminates our temptation to maintain a defense of "peace as such" grounded in a variety of non-theological sources. For Mennonite churches especially, it is easy to recall that we have this thing called a "peace position," and assume that our job is simply to figure out how to put it into action. To the extent that we envision such a given "position," however, that must be "dealt with," "integrated," or "applied" to our theology, the game is already up. Peace cannot be so held, possessed, or distinctly withdrawn. It can only be received in vulnerability as a gift, and even then only through participation in its very giving. Moreover, Milbank reminds us that peace is not a good in abstraction from theology. Epistemologically, Christians must be wary of making peace a prior commitment to which theology must be made to conform.

In the church, we often encourage each other to "choose peace" whenever possible. The assumption is that peace and violence are stable, obvious alternatives that call for an act of will, rather than a work of discernment. Milbank reminds us that this choice is a false one, because every such act of will that claims a final grasp of the options admits of a Derridean failure to account for the inbreaking of resurrection. Moreover, he warns that this appeal to a hypostasized violence and peace involves a logic of possession that inscribes itself in the very heart of violence. This hypostesization leads us to assume that our role is primarily at the place of implementation. Thus

we remind each other that "peace starts at home;" strategizing that efforts on a small scale will eventually yield larger results. Milbank, however, wants to remind us that, if anything, peace starts in the church. Why here? Because only liturgical virtuality is not violence.[43] In other words, only the community participating eucharistically in the *ecstasis* of gift-exchange can maintain a discerning gaze (as is necessary in order to properly judge a violence) which does not seal performer from observer and reproduce the scene of double passivity. This is why Milbank suggests that if peace can be called a virtue at all, it is a peculiarly intersubjective one.[44] One cannot be peaceable by oneself, because without the exchange and reciprocity of a liturgical community, the gaze of discernment becomes spectatorship, leaving only an act of will as purified possession. We ought to take Milbank seriously, finally, in order to be reminded that peace is unstable, that possession is violence, and that any attempt to nail down a "position" on peace too definitively only involves us in further violence.

In the interest of illustrating just how it is that Milbank might helpfully be read in the context of Mennonite peace theology, I turn now to a recent publication called *Teaching Peace: Nonviolence and the Liberal Arts*.[45] This text is a collection of essays from the faculty of Bluffton College (a Mennonite school in Ohio) which explore the significance of Christian nonviolence across the spectrum of academic disciplines. The book took form out of a Bluffton study conference which set out to "[engage] in focused discussion about how explicit [Bluffton faculty] could be in making nonviolence a beginning perspective from which to understand their disciplines."[46] Noble as such an intention may be, it sounds a rather hollow note in light of Milbank. This, it seems to me, is exactly the sort of tendency Milbank worries about: a commitment to nonviolence that gets sedimented as a prior good, such that we might seek to take it as a "beginning perspective."

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[43] Ibid., 43.

[44] Ibid.

[45] J. Denny Weaver and Gerald Biesecker-Mast, eds., *Teaching Peace: Nonviolence and the Liberal Arts* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003).

[46] Ibid., xii.

Unfortunately, this tendency cannot simply be passed off as introductory overstatement. The book is divided into a number of sections corresponding to various disciplinary fields. Before entering into this diverse conversation, however, the editors see fit to include an opening chapter entitled, "Defining Violence and Nonviolence." Included as a special contribution by two social ethicists from Fuller Theological Seminary, Glen Stassen and Michael L. Westmoreland-White, the essay sets out on the seemingly reasonable task of laying some groundwork for the conversations that follow by establishing just what it is that violence and nonviolence refer to. They propose to define violence as "*destruction to a victim by means that overpower the victim's consent*," drawing on a variety of other philosophical attempts at definition.[47] The strategy is to mark the limits of violence such that we can have some sense of what it is that nonviolence refers to. Stassen and Westmoreland-White review a series of options with regard to nonviolence, noting especially the particular versions adopted by Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.[48] They note the success of a variety of nonviolent reform movements for political and regime change, and identify ten practices of nonviolence that can be usefully engaged in the pursuit of justice and peace around the world.[49] Short of a brief overview of the distinction between non-resistance and nonviolent resistance in certain Christian circles, however, no appeal is made in this essay to a biblical or theological imagination. The assumption is quite clearly that whatever violence and nonviolence name, we had better get them sorted out before we start thinking theologically.

There is a sense in which many of the other voices in this book recognize the problematic assumptions that drive this "groundwork" chapter. This is particularly evident in references to John Howard Yoder, to whom the book is dedicated, and who is credited for contributing to the understanding that "the rejection of violence belongs integrally to the story of Jesus Christ."[50] Yet chapters like "Defining

[47] Glen Stassen and Michael L. Westmoreland-White, "Defining Violence and Nonviolence," in *Teaching Peace*, 18.

[48] Ibid., 25-28.

[49] Ibid., 29-33.

[50] Weaver and Biesecker-Mast, "Preface," in *Teaching Peace*, xiii. Reading Yoder

Violence and Nonviolence" cannot help but give the impression that the weight of Yoder's claim (not to mention Milbank's) is being largely overlooked in this volume. One particularly unfortunate incident of this oversight is J. Denny Weaver's essay on violence and atonement.[51] What makes Weaver's essay so unfortunate is that he comes so close to "getting it." He begins the essay by noting the tragic disjunction between ethics and theology in much contemporary Christian discourse and laments that too often commitment to nonviolence has become separated from its theological impetus.[52] Yet Weaver cannot seem to fully shake the temptation to establish peace and violence as given grounds from which to proceed. Two moments on the opening page make this clear. The first is a laudable attempt to read Christian nonviolence through the life of Jesus Christ. The second is a contradictory nod to the definition-producing project of Stassen and Westmoreland-White in the previous chapter.[53] What makes Weaver so tricky (and perhaps a little bit dangerous) is that he *does* take pains to locate nonviolence theologically, in the life of Christ. The problem

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together with Milbank in the context of this discussion would be a most interesting study. There is a sense in which both are concerned to say the same thing. In fact, in the original exchange between Milbank and Hauerwas for which Milbank's essay "Violence" was first written, Hauerwas argues that Yoder (to whom he often credits his own commitment to nonviolence) was in fact not a pacifist, if by that is meant anything other than a disciple of Jesus Christ (see Stanley Hauerwas, "Explaining Christian Nonviolence," in *Must Christianity Be Violent?: Reflections on History, Practice, and Theology*, eds. Kenneth R. Chase and Alan Jacobs [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003], esp. 174). Hauerwas and Yoder, it would appear, share with Milbank this concern to read peace and violence always only in the context of theological discernment. Milbank's concern with Hauerwas is simply that his willingness to so clearly self-identify with something called "pacifism" draws him too nearly to a position abstracted from theology, despite his efforts to the contrary. For Hauerwas, Milbank's refusal to call himself a pacifist points to a lingering desire to retain violence as a last resort in ways that negate the possibility of being trained in Christian virtue by communal and performative confession. Explicating Yoder's work itself in the context of Radical Orthodoxy remains a potentially fruitful project as yet just barely begun by Mennonite theologians.

[51] Weaver, "Violence in Christian Theology," in *Teaching Peace*, 39-51.

[52] Ibid., 39-40.

[53] Ibid., 39.

is that he reifies what he finds there. Certainly nonviolence must be traced back to the story of Jesus, for Weaver, but, once this is done, what we find is timeless and universal.

So, Weaver takes his account of nonviolence and holds it up beside various versions of atonement theology throughout the ages. The task becomes that of imagining an account of atonement that is faithful to our established commitment to nonviolence. There is no doubt that what Weaver comes up with is rooted in Scripture and Christian tradition. He outlines a position he calls "narrative Christus Victor" that draws on the book of Revelation and the gospels to locate atonement in the context of God's inevitable victory over the "old" world of sinful powers and evil Empire.[54] Yet there ought to be something unsettling about the assumption that the theological task consists of identifying that one framework or idiom by which we are to understand God's work in the world. Can we really assume that the gospel writers, or the seer of Revelation, (or God . . .) are "narrative Christus Victor" theologians? There is a certain possessive singularity in Weaver's conclusions that I think can be traced directly back to his rather possessive account of peace and violence. Here Weaver would do well to hear Milbank's claim that we can never fully know what peace and violence name in advance of engagement. Violence must always be judged in the context of theological discernment, not presupposed in the pursuit of theological certainty. To take Milbank seriously is to recognize that questions of peace and violence intrinsically have to do with theological questions like atonement. The process of comparison and compatibility that Weaver undertakes presumes the very distinction between theology and ethics that he disavows at the outset. If we pay attention to Milbank's critique of Derrida, in fact, it becomes clear that the sort of possession Weaver assumes and pursues may itself participate in violence at its most real.

VI

Reading the Bluffton publication, *Teaching Peace*, illustrates some of the ways in which Mennonite thinking about peace might be

[54] Ibid., 47-51.

helpfully challenged through engagement with Milbank's project. When Milbank's reflections on violence are received against the backdrop of his larger body of work (and particularly his engagement with Derrida), they reveal a commitment to the primacy of a consistently theological vision sometimes lacking in we zealous pacifists. The sympathy with which I read Milbank in his essay, "Violence," is due therefore both to what I take to be a potential danger in some Mennonite accounts of peace, and to the conviction that a mutual conversation is best begun in a spirit of receptive openness to gifts being offered. I certainly do not want to advocate an uncritical appropration of Milbank by Mennonite theology. There are, in fact, many places where distinctively Mennonite gifts could be offered back to Milbank in ways that address some of his own problematic moments. Perhaps one of these places could even involve the enactment of a theological peaceableness that need not fall into all of the traps Milbank worries a Christian pacifism must.[55] My intent with this essay, however, has been to suggest that, in order to sustain such counter-gifts, Mennonite theology must attend to the ways in which Milbank's work shows up the dangers of a pre-theological commitment to peace "as such."

My final recommendation for the way forward, therefore, is that we not only take Milbank seriously, but that we continue to engage him in dialogue. I think there is a real sense in which this kind of dialogue participates in exactly the sort of liturgical exchange of gifts, marked by a theological play of difference that Milbank is here envisioning. One way of reading denominationalism in the wake of Milbank might be as the non-identical repetition of the same Word spoken differently, yet united as Christ's body. In contrast to secular reason, as Milbank notes elsewhere, Christianity is the coding of transcendental difference as peace.[56] If my reading of Milbank on violence has any value, it ought to be in freeing a space for this kind of

[55] For one such explication of possible Mennonite counter-gifts to Milbank, see Chris K. Huebner, "Radical Orthodoxy, Radical Reformation: What Might Mennonites and Milbank Learn from Each Other?" in *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Waterloo, ON; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006).

[56] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory,* 6.

theological exchange. We should not dismiss Milbank, nor refute him unilaterally, but receive the gift of his difference even as we freely offer our own.

THREE

Tripp York

THE BALLAD OF JOHN AND ANNEKEN

> *[I]t was the increasing failure of the Church to be the Church . . . which created a moral vacuum which the regnum could not easily fill because ideals of a purely political virtue had been half-obliterated by Christianity.*
>
> JOHN MILBANK

The work of John Milbank has, over the past two decades, maintained a strong influence in the realm of contemporary theology. His book *Theology and Social Theory* ignited an upheaval in theological thinking that, almost twenty years after its initial publication, still captures the attention of various theological schools. To be clear, Milbank's work is not, in his own words "innovative." Innovation, he suggests, is heresy. His work, therefore, should not be read as an attempt to denote a new trend in theological thinking; rather, it is the calling to attention of a form of life displaced by its own progeny: the social sciences. His reluctance to allow these sciences the space to narrate Christianity (as if the sciences are themselves beyond such narration) has created a particular school of thought aptly named "radical orthodoxy."

The appellation of Radical Orthodoxy assumes not just a return to creedal Christianity, but to the kind of epistemological knowing that makes it possible to navigate the recently invented space known as the secular. Inasmuch as theologians assume the legitimacy of this space, their theology cannot help but be shaped by the very forces that, ultimately, undermine Christian performance. Forcing it to play by its rules, its language games, and its grammar, the void eventually

consumes Christian theology until what is left is but an impotent reminder of what once made Christianity Christian.

Despite Milbank's impressive narration of modernity, its false pretenses to objectivity as well as its acute blindness toward its own fideistic practices, many heirs of the Radical Reformation remain ambivalent toward his work.[1] In many ways, Milbank has enabled Anabaptists to better narrate liberalism, the pathos of nihilism, the anti-theological politics that led to the creation of the nation-state, and the political theologies that, despite their best efforts, continue to reinforce the legitimacy of the nation-state.[2] Many of us within Radically Reformed circles have prided ourselves, perhaps not always faithfully, with our ability to present an alternative way of being in the world that is not *of* the world. Milbank's deconstruction of the secular, however, has revealed how embedded even our counter-cultural posture is within the confines of the secular. We may not be quite as interesting as we would like to think.

At the same time, there are numerous good reasons why, despite learning much from Milbank, we may be wise to remain hesitant to jump completely on board with the Radical Orthodox movement. Few Anabaptists are probably anxious to embrace that "remnant of Christendom" Milbank elevates. Though his task is not that of recovering all things pre-modern, some of the theological ideas latent within medieval Christianity, especially in regards to the nature of church/state relations, leave many an Anabaptist suspicious.

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[1] Granted, fideism, inasmuch as it assumes a private language, does not actually exist. My claim here is that much of the discourse(s) that evolved out of modernity is as carefully insulated and painfully circular as its supposed "fundamentalist" opponents. For a more thorough account of fideism, especially in relation to modern theology, see D. Stephen Long, *Speaking of God: Theology, Language, and Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 24-36.

[2] See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006). In chapter eight, Milbank argues that political/liberation theologies propose to challenge the oppressive structures of the status quo, yet cannot but presume the very accounts of society which have legitimized them in the first place. Even if they were to gain liberation on these terms, it would only serve to reinforce the very ideology that created the oppressive structures, reinforcing a vicious cycle of exploitation and dependence upon the nation-state.

To add to the confusion, some characterizations of Milbank's work are not very helpful. For instance, in his *Essays in Critical Theology*, Catholic theologian Gregory Baum speciously labels John Milbank an "Anabaptist or Mennonite Barth."[3] He claims that Milbank's conception of the true church is "an egalitarian, pacifist community" that expresses itself most clearly in the Anabaptist-Mennonite church.[4] Though the ecclesiological hermeneutic Milbank champions may or may not be reminiscent of the ecclesiology of some Anabaptists, I am not entirely convinced that his thought is paradigmatic of Mennonite theology (if there is such a thing). His rather candid Augustinian admission that the church may, on occasion, exercise lethal coercion places his theology in a rather precarious position in light of the Anabaptist commitment to nonviolence.

Baum appears to confuse Milbank's project with the more christologically driven theology of the Anabaptists. He seems to overlook the incompatibility of the apocalyptic Christ—located within much of Mennonite theology—with Milbank's inescapably tragic-ridden ecclesiology. Much of this, I think, is due to Milbank's notoriously thin christology that plays itself out just where it is most needed. For instance, despite Milbank's weighty construal of the ontological peace present at creation, he acknowledges the necessity for the church to exist, at times, violently.[5] I do not intend to belittle the

[3] Gregory Baum, *Essays in Critical Theology* (Kansas City, KS: Sheed & Ward, 1994), 52. He does this for two reasons: Milbank places *praxis* before theory and, secondly, Milbank is, in Baum's words, a "committed pacifist" (70). Without delving into the space necessary to analyze this first point, it is probably enough to suggest that Baum's latter point is simply a misreading on his part. In Milbank's article, "Enclaves or Where is the Church?," Milbank asserts that "in no sense does *Theology and Social Theory* recommend "pacifism," and the formal specification of truth as peaceful relation cannot be applied as a criterion authorizing non-resistance." *New Blackfriars* 73 (June 1992): 349.

[4] Baum, *Essays in Critical Theology*, 54.

[5] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 418-422; John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 26-43. I am not, in this paper, going to discuss his critique of the pacifist gaze. I think it is enough to say that his understanding of those who would simply stand by and watch, as a spectator, the violence of one done to another, is truly a sin of omission. If this was an assumed practice within the framework of Anabaptist nonviolence, it would warrant further comment.

distinction Milbank draws between an assumed ontology of violence and a church that, if need be, acts coercively. Rather, I want to suggest that his case can be more consistently made if the church does not forget the life that Jesus lived and the kind of life he required his followers, if they would be called his friends, to live. By placing the church as the centre of the Christian story, Milbank, rightly so, requires the church to assume the ontological priority of peaceableness. Yet, any account of peace separate from the teachings of Jesus accomplishes very little work. Precisely because of the church's difficulty in producing a people willing to follow Christ to the cross, its ability to narrate a genuine picture of creation as ontologically peaceable is suspect. Rather, the manner by which the church takes shape in the world—its very witness—is the best argument for ontological peaceableness.

There is little doubt that Milbank would agree with my emphasis on witness. His argument that Christians can only "out-narrate" competing narratives is a testimony to his profound understanding of witness (despite the potentially inherent violence associated with the language of "out-narrating"). Nevertheless, Milbank's overall argument fails to deliver where it is needed most. Does he deliver an account of witness that is capable of producing witnesses? His narrative, while beautifully orchestrated and desperately needed, remains abstract primarily because of his underdeveloped christology. By pressing Milbank on this matter, I will argue that any claim for created peaceableness not predicated on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus can only produce the kind of ontological peace that both ironically and tragically accepts violence as a necessity during this time between times.

I will briefly examine Milbank's proposal for a counter-ontology and the ecclesial implications this generates. I will then discuss why such an account, though a necessary aid to the resistance of nihilism, is finally incapable of producing the witness necessary to demonstrate to the world the way that Milbank suggests it really is. I will conclude by presenting an image of what his understanding of the performance of such ontological peace must look like and why arguments for peace have more to do with discipleship than rigid epistemological accounts of being that sever the life of Jesus from the lives of his followers.

Milbank's Counter Ontology ("You've got to go back.")

> *[T]he institution of the "secular" is paradoxically related to a shift within theology and not an emancipation from theology.*
>
> JOHN MILBANK

Milbank begins *Theology and Social Theory* with the assertion that if theology does not wish to be positioned by secular reason, then theology must seek to position secular reason.[6] If not, it is inevitable that competing discourses will narrate theology in such a way that theology is held hostage to these discourses. Milbank argues for the reestablishment of theology as the queen of the sciences; theology must assert itself as a meta-discourse.

By denying the sociologist, political scientist, nihilist, or Marxist the privilege of describing reality, Milbank refutes the notion that there can be a significant sociological reading of Christianity. Theology is itself a social theory that may or may not draw upon the aforementioned ideological perspectives. The idea that "theology must borrow its diagnoses of social ills and recommendations of social solutions" from other discourses must be challenged if theology is to avoid being held captive by its own renegade creations.[7] This does not mean that theology cannot draw upon whatever wisdom it finds in other discourses; it simply means that such wisdom must be held accountable to the wisdom that is the *logos*.

The (re)positioning of all other discourses in relation to theology allows Milbank the space to develop a formidable critique of the secular. His chief task is that of exposing nihilism's ontology of power as a *mythos* capable of being countered by an alternative *mythos*.[8] He rejects the metaphysics of violence embedded within our various

[6] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 1-4.

[7] Ibid., 3.

[8] I hope not to confuse matters by occasionally substituting the word violence for power. As both Nicholas Lash and Debra Dean Murphy argue, power is not violence, but rather violence is the lack of power. Cf. Debra Dean Murphy, "Power, Politics, and Difference: A Feminist Response to John Milbank," *Modern Theology* 10, no. 2 (April 1994), and "Nicholas Lash, Not Exactly Politics or Power?" *Modern Theology* 8, no. 4 (October 1992). I use this term here to indicate its connection with Nietzsche's understanding of what seems at times to be the interchangeable nature of power and violence.

discourses (Christian and non-Christian), and assumes the difficult task of explicating an account of a nonviolent creation. Milbank refuses to concede that, at bottom, there is only the reality of conflict. Instead, there is a peaceful reality capable of being claimed by an *altera civitas*: the ecclesial community (*Civitas Dei*).

For Milbank, everything hinges upon the account one gives of "in the beginning." According to the ancient Greeks, as well as within the writings of exponents of classical liberalism, in the beginning was violence. Both traditions have in common agonistic accounts of existence that find a new home in the work of Nietzsche. Nietzsche's agonistic retelling of reality is not that it is simply chaotic; rather, for Nietzsche there exists a fatalist notion of tragedy. In recovering the ancient Greek concept of tragedy (exemplified in Sophocles' play *Oedipus*), Nietzsche affirms that human activity is simply determined by the Fates (the gods). There are no character flaws in tragedy; this is just the way the world is. The best that humans can hope to accomplish is to transform tragedy into a secular aesthetic, into something beautiful.

Such transformation requires Nietzsche's infamous "will to power." The will to power is the will to life. It is the striving to "grow, spread, seize, become predominant—not from any morality or immorality but because it is *living* and because life simply *is* the will to power. . . . If this should be an innovation as a theory—as a reality it is the *primordial* fact of all history."[9] According to Nietzsche, this is the fundamental element in human nature (because it is primordial) that is supplanted by the religion of resentment: Christianity. Christianity usurps the will to power by frustrating the will in its ignoble attempt to establish and promote the virtues of charity and humility. Nietzsche argues that Christianity is the "religion of pity—and pity stands in opposition to the tonic emotion which stimulates the feeling of being alive: it is a depressant. A man loses power when he pities."[10]

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[9] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 61.

[10] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The AntiChris*t, trans. H. L. Mencken (North Stratford: Ayer Company Publishers, 1997), 11.

Christianity, in stark contrast, does not recognize an original violence. The infinite is construed as harmonic peace by which violence is a "secondary willed intrusion." That is, Milbank is claiming that

> Christian logic is not deconstructible by modern secular reason; rather it is Christianity which exposes the non-necesssity of supposing, like the Nietzscheans, that difference, non-totalization and indeterminacy of meaning necessarily imply arbitrariness and violence. To suppose that they do is merely to subscribe to a particular encoding of reality. Christianity, by contrast, is the coding of transcendental difference as peace.[11]

Nietzsche could not choose a more formidable foe than Christianity. As *the* enemy, Christianity is unique in that it refuses to grant "ultimate reality to all conflictual phenomena."[12] Christianity, Milbank argues, is the only viable alternative to the nihilist narrative because all other myths, or narrative traditions, affirm an original violence.[13] This does not mean that Christianity can rationally refute the ontology of difference at the heart of Nietzschean philosophy; rather, as Stanley Hauerwas suggests, it can only "help narrate why, given the creation of 'the secular,' Nietzsche's account of the 'world,' insofar as it is the world created by 'liberalism,' was inevitable."[14]

Milbank's response to nihilism is a counter-ontology that, as a *mythos*, is "equally unfounded," but is inimitable inasmuch as it embodies an ontology of peace "which conceives differences as analogically related, rather than equivocally at variance."[15] Christianity's narration of nihilism's malign mythology fails if it does not show the secular to be but another religion or story. Milbank contends that the "secular episteme is a post-Christian paganism, something in the last analysis only defined, negatively, as a refusal of Christianity

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[11] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 5-6.

[12] Ibid., 262. Milbank suggests that Judaism may also be unique if it truly denies an original primordial violence. Given that Milbank's arguments are, however, contingent upon belief in the trinitarian God, one may expect some "peaceful" difference on this point.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Stanley Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing 20th Century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 190.

[15] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 279.

and the invention of an 'Anti-Christianity.'"[16] Nihilism can only be undone by the church's ability to expose it as nothing more than an anti-theology.

Tragedy and Coercion ("You know, they didn't even give us a chance.")

> *One can, however, hold out for a tragic refusal of the pacifist position without denying that it is likely that any implication in violence is likely to prove futile in the long run.*
>
> JOHN MILBANK

By placing the church as the bearer of history that interprets all other histories, combined with the attempt to un-think the ontological necessity of violence, Milbank has established the need for a counter-community capable of performing a counter-history/counter-ethic/counter-ontology. Unfortunately, this community, the church, has "failed to bring about salvation" and in its place ushered in the secular.[17] Milbank invokes the language of tragedy to describe the failure of the church, and it is with this move that Milbank's grand (re)narration becomes narrated by, what I argue to be, a non-Christian *mythos*.

Milbank concedes the ongoing failed project of the church to be a tragic event. He contends that the judgement of God in the midst of history has already occurred. It is therefore the church's responsibility to either enact the paradisal vision constitutive of the ecclesial narrative "or else it promotes a hellish society beyond any terrors known to antiquity: *corruptio optimi pessima*."[18] He continues:

> For the Christian interruption of history "decoded" antique virtue, yet thereby helped to unleash first liberalism and then nihilism. Insofar as the Church has failed, and has even become a hellish anti-Church, it has confined Christianity, like everything else, within the cycle of the ceaseless exhaustion and return of violence.[19]

This could be read as a confession of the horrors unleashed on the world when the church becomes something other than itself. It seems,

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[16] Ibid., 280.
[17] Ibid., 381-382.
[18] Ibid., 433.
[19] Ibid.

however, that Milbank has something else in mind when he states that the church

> . . . must seek to extend the sphere of socially aesthetic harmony—"within" the state where this is possible; but of a state committed by its very nature only to the formal goals of *dominium*, little is to be hoped. A measure of resignation to the necessity of this *dominium* cannot be avoided. But with, and beyond Augustine, we should recognize the tragic character of this resignation: violence delivers no dialectical benefits, of itself it encourages only further violence, and it can only be "beneficial" when the good motives of those resorting to it are recognized and recuperated by a defaulter coming to his senses.[20]

The recognition of the tragic character of a *necessary*, albeit potentially beneficial, form of violence comes as out of place in Milbank's narrative. Despite his suggestion that the church is *the* place where escape from tragic profundity is possible, his admission of tragedy allows for a surprising move: the rejection of the church as a community of nonviolence.

Milbank is close to articulating the communal practice of nonviolence as he suggests that the Christian worship of the triune God "originates all finite reality in an act of peaceful donation, willing a new fellowship with himself and amongst the beings he has created." He states that our freedom from sin requires

> . . . "liberation" from political, economic and psychic *dominium*, and therefore from all structures belonging to the *saeculum*, or temporal interval between the fall and the final return of Christ. This salvation takes the form of a different inauguration of a different kind of community. . . . [T]he "city of God" founds itself not in a succession of power, but upon the memory of the murdered brother, Abel slain by Cain.[21]

Milbank concludes that the peace within the city walls existent in opposition to the "chaos without" is no real peace at all when compared to the peace coterminous with the triune God. He claims that space is now "revolutionized: it can no longer be defended, and even the barbarians can only respect the sanctuary of the Basilica."[22] As impressive as

[20] Ibid., 422.
[21] Ibid., 392.
[22] Ibid.

this may sound, it seems that Milbank is not very consistent. Though the church may not require defense against the barbarians, coercion against those inside the church, and lethal coercion against those who intend to oppose the sphere of aesthetic harmony, is an unfortunate reality. This is even more unfortunate for the latter as any potential "medicinal" benefits are eradicated along with the opposition.

Milbank's conception of the church, though suggesting a "substantial peace," is, nevertheless, a peace that is "imperfectly present in the fallen world."[23] Such peace allows for the possibility of the church to exercise violent coercion against its own and toward those who would disrupt the social harmony of the commonwealth. As for the fallen church members, Milbank argues that Augustine is correct to admit the need for some measure of coercion, even if such action is dangerous or risky—as it could produce resentment. The risk is offset, however, by the possibility that the recipient will eventually be grateful for the external inconvenience of physical coercion. Though such action may not be peaceable, it can still be redeemed by retrospective acceptance that allows for it to "contribute to the final goal of peace."[24] This is hardly innovative. The myth of redemptive violence is an old myth; one that I would think to be at odds with an ontology of peace. Yet, protecting the unity of the church, as well as the civil peace, is simply part of that *dominium* which, apparently, cannot be avoided, and must, finally, be thought of in theologically grounded pragmatic terms.

Given all that has preceded this concession, such an apology for the tragic necessity of coercion, violence and punishment leaves one wondering, along with David Toole, whether or not "any meaningful line between tragic profundity and any other possibility has been erased from Milbank's text."[25] Toole suggests that such a line is put in jeopardy when Milbank argues that retrospective consent is capable of redeeming coercion—though it is clear that such coercion is not

[23] John Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short Summa in Forty-two Responses to Unasked Questions," *Modern Theology* 7 (April 1991): 229.

[24] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 418.

[25] David Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 83.

peaceable.[26] Even if it is the case, as Milbank contests, that the purpose of ecclesial coercion is peace (and what body-politic justifies their use of coercion by any other rhetoric?), the contradiction has already been made: the church, as that alternative society practicing peaceableness, must exercise violence against its own, and others, in an effort to sustain such peace. In agreement with such an assessment, David Burrell states that

> . . . the community of followers of Jesus has not consistently professed its faith in that original peacefulness, but has resorted to coercion to attain its goals, is but one more indication of the fact that this community lives under the sign of an eschatological judgment, re-enacting the death of the Lord until he comes.[27]

Clearly, being an eschatological people requires something other than re-enacting the death of Christ; it also means we are a people who practice resurrection. We re-enact the life of Christ by continuing to provide a precarious witness to the original peace of creation as creation is understood christologically. As Burrell suggests, it is upon such witness that "hangs the hope of the rest of the world—for peace."[28] We live eschatologically when we refuse to concede the reign of tragedy and narrate it within the apocalyptic reign of God. Toole rightly notes that when Milbank eliminates the practice of peace as a virtue (and names it strictly as an eschatological goal), he has departed from an apocalyptic politics, a politics of resurrection, where he now remains confined to the limits of secular reason.[29]

Getting a "Peace" of Milbank (Or, "Fifty acorns tied in a sack.")

> *An abstract attachment to non-violence is therefore not enough—we need to practice this as a skill, and to learn its idiom.*
>
> JOHN MILBANK

Milbank's comment above on the skillful practice of nonviolence seems to make very little sense in light of his understanding of ecclesial

[26] Ibid.

[27] David Burrell, "An Introduction to Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason," *Modern Theology* 8, no. 4 (October 1992): 329.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo,* 83.

disciplining and justified use of violence. Though this idiom is "built up in the Bible, and reaches its consummation in Jesus," there still resides the tragic necessity of violent practices.[30] The question then becomes: How do we practice nonviolence in a world constituted by tragic profundity? Is it even a possibility, or is nonviolence fated for failure since it cannot serve as anything more than an unattainable ideal in this time between times?

These questions are further problematized, or at least rendered even more perplexing, by Milbank's suggestion that Augustine is correct to place "the Church, and not Christ alone" as the centre of the Christian narrative.[31] Is this a legitimate verdict the church must negotiate? Was there ever a point up to Augustine where the church was placing Christ alone, against itself as a gathering body proclaiming the risen Christ, as the centre of its narrative? Plus, how is the question as to which is centre not cyclical as the church is the arbiter as to what counts as Scripture and what counts as correct teachings in terms of Christ?

The point of these questions is not to make a distinction where a distinction should not be made. The church *is* the body of Christ and it, therefore, acts as Christ throughout history. Accompanying these questions is the recognition that Milbank's argument loses vitality precisely where he fails to stress what the teachings of Jesus have to do with the church being the bearer of non-antagonistic social practices. This is also where Baum's analysis misses the mark, because for descendants of the Radical Reformation the nonviolence of an original creation cannot be known except through the revelation of God in Jesus. Therefore, the life of Jesus is *the* convincing argument of the ontological priority of peaceableness. If the church is incapable of producing lives that are inexplicable had Christ not been risen from the dead, then the church will become a "hellish" society—a society that exists only as an end in itself. Once this occurs, Jesus' function is only important as an incarnational moment in history that makes the church a possibility. Yet the incarnation, without ascension, eschatology, and the concrete teachings of Jesus, becomes an unintelligible moment in time that does little to transform a world constituted by tragedy. The incarnation

[30] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 398.

[31] Ibid.

is more than a manger scene; the incarnation is about Jesus' life, his teachings, his death, his resurrection, and it is about our participation in this incarnational life.

I am not suggesting a dualism between the incarnation and the maintaining of a high christology. Such a dichotomy could only be false. Since Jesus is grace incarnate, our very way of being in the world, as the body of Christ, must be christological. For instance, in his book, *The Politics of Jesus*, Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder claims that he is attempting to present a view of Jesus more radically Nicene and Chalcedonian than so-called classical (and now "radical"?) orthodox views. He asks that the "implications of what the church has always said about Jesus as Word of the Father, as true God and true Man, be taken more seriously, as relevant to our social problems, than ever before."[32] He further asks what we are to make of the incarnation if "Jesus is not normative man? If he is a man but somehow not normative, is this not the ancient ebionite heresy? If he be somehow authoritative but not in his humanness, is this not a new gnosticism?"[33] Yoder's argument is that the ontological claims made about the existence of Jesus displayed in the incarnation are true because Jesus' teachings are in conformity with the way the world was created.

In his book, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, Stanley Hauerwas takes a similar approach and argues that christology often becomes the problem when the life of Jesus is sequestered from being the Christ:

> Christian ethics has tended to make "Christology" rather than Jesus its starting point. His relevance is seen in more substantive claims about the incarnation. Christian ethics then often begins with some broadly drawn theological claims about the significance of God becoming man, but the life of the man whom God made representative is ignored or used selectively. . . . This emphasis on Jesus' ontological significance strikes many as absolutely essential . . . Christologies which emphasize the cosmic and ontological Christ tend to make Jesus' life almost incidental to what is assumed to be a more profound theological point.[34]

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[32] John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus:* Vicit Agnus Noster (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 102.

[33] Ibid., 10.

[34] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*

Such a forsaking of Jesus as the normative human reveals itself in Milbank's work. Hauerwas notes that what is missing in Milbank "is the concrete display of such forgiveness and reconciliation that makes God's peace present. What we need are stories, witnesses. . . ."[35] I could not agree more. What I would find to be of more interest, however, is how Milbank's "measure of resignation to the necessity of this *dominium*" and the requirement of tragic, yet possibly redemptive violence, plays out within both the church and civil life. That is, what would it really look like, and what would he consider to be faithful examples of what it means to embody an ontology of peace while in the pursuit of extending the sphere of social aesthetic harmony in light of the "tragic character of our resignation" to the necessity of the formal goals of *dominium*? What makes for a faithful concession to this resignation?

Extending the Sphere of Social Harmony ("We're only trying to get us some peace.")

> *Is violence the master of us all?*
>
> JOHN MILBANK

The *Martyrs' Mirror* recalls the story of Anneken Heyndricks. Anneken was an illiterate fifty-three-year-old woman arrested by the local church/state authorities for being an Anabaptist. Though she was tortured for an extended period of time, she neither cursed nor renounced her radically reformed faith. One of the bailiffs fed up with her obstinacy told her that

> . . . "Sir Albert, our chaplain, is such a holy fellow, that he ought to be mounted in fine gold; and you will not hear him, but make sport of him; hence you must die in your sins, so far are you strayed from God." Thus they suspended this God-fearing aged woman . . . by her hands, even as Christ had been, and by severe torturing sought to exhort from her the names of her fellow believers, for they thirsted for more innocent blood. But they obtained nothing from Anneken, so faithfully did God keep her lips. . . . Thereupon she was sentenced to be burnt alive.

(Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 72-73.

[35] Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings*, 195.

> She thanked the lords, and said with humility, that if she had done amiss to any one, she asked them to forgive her. But the lords arose and made no reply. She was then tied to a ladder. . . . Thereupon Anneken steadfastly said: "Though I am sentenced and condemned by you, yet what you say does not come from God; for I firmly trust in God, who shall help me out of my distress, and deliver me out of all my trouble." They did not let her speak any more but filled her mouth with gunpowder, and carried her thus from the city hall to the fire into which they cast her alive. This done . . . the underbailiff was seen to laugh, as though he thought he had done God an acceptable service.[36]

She "thanked the lords" and asked their forgiveness if she had sinned against them.

Such a story represents the faithful who, rather than accepting tragedy by conceding its viability, absorb tragedy (and/or church discipline) as Christ-absorbed evil. It is not that Anneken, or any sort of commitment to christological nonviolence for that matter, necessarily denies the presence of tragedy (though it very well may), but what it does, along with the death of Jesus, is absorb it, refuse to perpetuate it, and then bring it to an end as it is overcome by the resurrection. The story of Anneken Heyndricks, as with many other martyrs, truly authenticates an ontology of peace as their story resides within an apocalyptic politic that resists the temptation of tragedy. Neither Jesus nor Anneken were victims of some tragic necessity; Jesus gave his life freely, and Anneken was but a participant in the ongoing creation of a world constituted by a cross and an empty tomb.

I imagine Milbank might agree with this brief assessment of the lack of tragedy in martyrdom, though I am not sure he can do so, as a rule, in the case of Anabaptist martyrdoms. After all, both Catholics and Protestants were merely attempting to root out heresy in order to protect the bodies and souls of countless people who could fall under the influence of the heretical and subversive Anabaptists. Were not the ecclesial and civil authorities merely accepting that measure of resignation to the necessity of *dominium*? Were they not practicing *dominium*, and, therefore, both extending and preserving the social

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[36] Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theatre or Martyrs' Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, 2d ed., (23rd printing), trans. Joseph F. Strohm (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 872-873.

harmony for the good of the commonwealth? Their concern for the civil peace of society, rooted in the commandment to love one's neighbour, demanded the harsh disciplining of these subversives. Their deaths may have been tragic, and perhaps even unnecessary—as a good Augustinian may suggest that they simply needed to undergo more torture, not death.

Yet, given Milbank's resignation to the necessity of force, it is difficult to argue that what the Catholic and Protestant churches were doing to the Anabaptists (and each other) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was wrong—even if it was tragic. For if the church honestly thought that the Anabaptists were threatening the unity of the one true church, as well as the civil peace, then what better way to serve one's neighbour than to eradicate their influence by eradicating them? It is difficult to imagine Milbank labelling such persecutions (or "prosecutions" as Catholics and Protestants were required to call it) mistaken or tragic, because how would the church ever convince the magistrate and executioner that what they were doing was in service to God yet, simultaneously, tragic? The persecution/prosecution of Anabaptists in the sixteenth century could only be conceived as an act of service to the kingdom of God, but how could anything be tragic that was in the service of God's kingdom? However, this is precisely the only way Milbank can respond as he has rendered tragedy a historical necessity even when certain actions are performed as dutiful among Christians. As Milbank suggests, in some contexts "'peaceableness' may inhibit or prevent the exercising of other Christian virtues such as justice, or even comfort and support of others." We, therefore, cannot "evade tragic choices."[37] Though Milbank is not here talking about ecumenical disagreements (rather, he is discussing the possibility of Christian participation in warfare), as charitable as I would like to be, I fear Milbank's theology would have easily been placed in the service of ecclesiastical forces that would have resulted in a number of writers in this volume, had they lived several centuries ago, being burned at the stake.[38]

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[37] Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 30.

[38] I imagine that Milbank would say that such actions of the church were wrong, or he may simply contend that in these cases the church was not the church. That is, it had become a hellish society. I am arguing that his use of tragedy is odd, for

Perhaps that is a terribly unfair assessment to make. Then again, perhaps not. Tolerance is, after all, quite the liberal virtue.[39] Maybe Milbank would agree with Nietzsche who once remarked that if Christians actually believed what they claimed to believe they would still be killing heretics since they lead "legions into eternal damnation." For it is not "their love of men but the impotence of their love of men keeps the Christians of today from—burning us."[40] That Nietzsche correctly diagnosed the apathy of doctrinal concern within Christianity should not be lost on us. I believe, along with Milbank, that doctrine does matter, and this is precisely why I would have the teachings of Jesus matter more in the work of Milbank. As Hauerwas mentioned earlier, what is required to flesh out the intelligibility of his work are witnesses. If not only the life of Jesus, but those that followed Jesus to a cross play a more significant role within his work, perhaps he would be able to recognize that this world is ruled not by the artistry of Sophocles, but by the power of the slaughtered Lamb. Of course, it may be unfair to juxtapose Milbank's tragic concession to violence against those on the receiving end of it. It may also be unfair to ask of his work that which he is not attempting to deliver. After all, for as compelling a book as *Theology and Social Theory* is, and it is compelling, it is certainly not a book about martyrdom. But can you imagine how great it would be if it was?

how could it be employed in such a way as to differentiate between how much coercion is too much? And how does one convince a church that such behaviour on the part to act coercively is tragic since it can only really be known, as tragedy, retrospectively?

[39] Tolerance is also, as Slavoj Žižek astutely points out (though contrary to what I am sarcastically suggesting), an ideological category. Cf. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 140-177.

[40] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 84.

FOUR

C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell

THE WORD MADE SILENT: REFLECTIONS ON CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND SCRIPTURE

A passing glance at the index and titles of the many books and articles written by those associated with the Radical Orthodoxy group might suggest that Scripture plays a very minor role in their theological project. Such an assertion would be unfair, on the one hand, for at the heart of Radical Orthodoxy stands the objective to "reclaim the world by situating its concerns and activities within a theological framework."[1] And after all, one assumes that the Scriptures play a central part within such a Christian theological framework. Furthermore, Radical Orthodoxy is quite emphatic that its own re-envisioning of Christianity as a harmonious order is done so by mingling "exegesis, cultural reflection and philosophy in a complex but coherently executed collage."[2] Yet, on the other hand, it is also fair to point out that the Bible rarely figures in its so-called coherent collage. Even more disturbing is the fact that precisely because Radical Orthodoxy lets modernity's version of such themes as know-ledge, revelation, language, and bodies set the tone for its agenda, Radical Orthodoxy falls prey to modernity's inability to see Scripture as formative for the life of the church. In many areas, but especially regarding the reading and practicing of Scripture for an understanding of Christian identity, Radical Orthodoxy has much to

[1] "Introduction," in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1.

[2] Ibid., 2.

learn from the Radical Reformation. At the end of the day, Radical Reformers (past and present) might be accused by Milbank and company of being "ploddingly exegetical."[3] But contrary to Milbank's use of the phrase, here this is meant as praise.

Yet before embarking on a journey to show the necessity of practices of faithful Scripture reading in the church, there are important lessons to learn from Radical Orthodoxy's project of reflecting upon the Word and recovering what Milbank calls its "strangeness and authority for theology today.

Word as Scripture and Word as Logos

Milbank's book, *The Word Made Strange*, begins with a proposal for a surprise—that we Christians be "re-surprised" by the strangeness of our God-made-flesh, and that the practices of the church are precisely practices of "repetitive making strange." Thus Milbank proposes not something new, but the renewal of something ancient in "an endeavour to make the Christian logos sound again afresh. . . ."[4]

In this project, priority is given to the linguistic mediation of truth, where language is understood both as mediator and as creation. In other words, we know things through language, we construct and make sense of our world linguistically, and language itself is not given nor static, but is itself construed. Milbank further suggests that a specifically theological account of language must be developed, and that within this development theology must provide an account of how language mediates truth. "Word" in this sense is always that which is illumined by God and comes from God. That is, theologically speaking, "being" is never divorced from God.

Milbank rightly explains that one of the key problems in modernity was the insistence upon questions such as, "What is meaning?" or "How do we know that X is the true meaning of Y?" An error was made in presupposing that to answer such questions one must bracket theology and only secondarily seek to relate theology to the answers

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[3] A phrase used pejoratively by Milbank to describe Barthianism; see ibid.

[4] John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 1.

obtained. Through an analysis of the philosophies of Hamann, Vico, Cusanus, and others Milbank shows, in chapter 3 of *The Word Made Strange*, that culture and history, including language, are not external to a theological ontology, but integral and internal to theology.[5] Our faith is linguistically circumscripted (Milbank's term) and any corrections to it are also only realized through language. To understand the mystery of this situation is to affirm faithfully that it is explained transcendentally. But,

> . . . this is no pure a priori, but rather a metahistorical foundation which invokes (via encounter with the historical Jesus) acknowledgment of the writing, speaking God of Israel. This God, says Hamann, like Jesus in St. John's Gospel, "stoops to scrawl on the ground," and by this kenotic act of writing, creates the world and human history as a present sign whose concealment-revealment of the absent God is the possibility of man's free creative response which unravels gradually through time.[6]

"Verbum" is the term Milbank prefers to use to understand the transcendental Logos. According to Milbank, following Vico, Hamann, and Nicholas of Cusa, "the key transcendental is neither Being, nor Unity, but the Verbum itself" which realizes a perfect tension between Unity and Being and transforms all transcendentals into trinitarian categories. Milbank argues that such an understanding of the fundamentally trinitarian ontology of language allows for a more thoroughly historical and cultural understanding of God.[7] It is the Holy Spirit, as the "subjective excess or power" within language that also ceaselessly generates language. It "is only an insistence that the Son is also logos, in the sense of language, that allows us to make any sense of this place [the place of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity] at all."[8]

Word, for Milbank, thus is understood both as language, in the sense of being the Divine Word that is spoken to creation and through whom all is created, and as Scripture—the written narratives of this kenotic act of writing. The brilliance of Milbank's work is the reminder

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[5] Ibid., 78-79.

[6] Ibid., 78.

[7] Ibid., 80.

[8] Ibid., 3.

that theology has its own logos, its own rationality that inheres in Christ. This same point was already made by Paul in Colossians 1.[9]

Fundamental to an understanding of Radical Orthodoxy's "theology of the word" is a comprehension of the story of philosophy that Milbank attempts to narrate. Unlike in his book, *Theology and Social Theory*,[10] where Milbank shows that the objects of the social sciences are mere fictions, the focus of his *The Word Made Strange* (and the group effort, *Radical Orthodoxy*), is not a denial of philosophy's object, but a showing of how philosophy needs theology in order to fulfil itself. That is, only theology can offer an adequate account of "being" (philosophy's object) because only theology properly understands the analogical relationship of being to Being.[11] Thus, in *The Word Made Strange*, Milbank offers a reading of history that discloses the rise of misunderstandings of the Word in Western Christianity.

According to Milbank, the (negative) turning point in the West was Duns Scotus' move from a Thomist understanding of analogical speaking of God, later made clearer by Eckhart, to a univocal affirmation of the divine.[12] This move gave rise to a metaphysical idolatry of God, making God an object of preconceived notions of "being." Milbank wants to recover the early Christian emphasis on the "utter unknowability of creatures which continually alter and have no ground within themselves, for [the Christian thought] derived them from the infinity of God which is unchanging and yet circumscribable, even in itself. Between one unknown and the other, there is no representational knowledge, no 'metaphysics,' but only a mode of ascent which receives something of the infinite source."[13]

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[9] Samuel E. Ewell, unpublished lectures presented at South American Theological Seminary, Londrina, Brazil, 21 May 2007.

[10] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006).

[11] Cf. John Milbank, "Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi," in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 37, n. 49.

[12] It is important for the reader to know that Milbank's account of Scotus (and other historical figures) has not gone unchallenged and is in fact highly controversial. However, such debates are not very interesting nor relevant for our purposes here, so I leave it to the reader to examine the controversy on her own.

[13] Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 44-45.

This leads us to a fundamental point in Milbank's theology of the Word—that is, the Word as gift or donation. Truth, even as it is mediated through language, is a gift that overflows to us from God. Theology does not first ask "What is truth?" in order then to see how God fits into that understanding of truth; rather, we assent to the reception of truth from God. It is important to note that word as Scripture and Word as Logos are not distinct alternatives for Radical Orthodoxy. Rather, Word, as both Scripture and Logos, is understood as "gift" where Logos or Verbum is not only gift but is the Giver.

Scripture and Revelation

The gift of Scripture is perhaps better understood in Radical Orthodoxy's account of revelation. In the story told by Radical Orthodoxy, one of the problems in modernity was that Scotus, and those who followed him, proposed an understanding of revelation that was based on an autonomous ontology. John Montag rightly explains that modern theology was led astray when it agreed to the divorce between receiving truth from accepting it as truth. There was a loss of the link between sign and thing signified such that the content of revelation became one thing, and acceptance of its authority another, separate thing.[14]

In response to such a misunderstanding of revelation, Radical Orthodoxy proposes a recovery of a thoroughly Augustinian (and Thomist) view of participation mingled with the theologies of Jacobi and Hamann on language. The result is that the truth of reason itself is only made possible through revelation. Thus Radical Orthodoxy explains,

> [N]o finite thing can be known, not even to any degree, outside its ratio to the infinite. . . . Hence, there can be no reason/revelation duality: true reason anticipates revelation, while revelation simply is of true reason which must ceaselessly arrive, as an event, such that what Christ shows supremely is the world as really world, as creation.[15]

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[14] John Montag, "Revelation: The False Legacy of Suárez," in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 38ff.

[15] Milbank, et al., *Radical Orthodoxy*, 24.

In its articulation of Augustine's doctrine of participation, Radical Orthodoxy insists on using Plato's notion of *methexis*, as the framework of a truly Christian theology. Through its proposal of a participatory ontology, Radical Orthodoxy "understands transcendence as an essential feature of material reality."[16] Creation is thus rightly understood as just that—creation. It is not an independent or autonomous realm but, following Aquinas, is graced by its Creator and ultimately is really real only insofar as it is dependent upon and has its being in its Creator. The "shape of this theological or participatory ontology is nonreductive and incarnational: On the one hand, it affirms that matter as created exceeds itself and 'is' only insofar as it participates in or is suspended from the transcendent Creator; on the other hand, it affirms that there is a significant sense in which the transcendent inheres in immanence."[17] Word as revelation is only rightly understood in an Augustinian sense, in which revelation is that which reveals the fact that the world is not a given, but is dependent upon, and is a gift of, the good Creator.[18]

Among the Radical Orthodoxy crowd, it is perhaps Graham Ward's portrayal of Augustine that comes closest to providing Christian theology with a rich account of Scripture as Word and the role of Scripture in the formation of Christian identity. This is true insofar as Ward rightly notes Augustine's emphasis on the particularity of revelation. For Augustine, this particularity is christological as it is revealed in the narratives of Scripture. While Ward's intention is not a focus on the practice of right Scripture reading in the church, he points (unintentionally) to the centrality of Scripture in his analysis of Augustine as one whose identity and theology is "shaped by determinate liturgical practices and a contentful theological confession."[19] This shaping of identity, Ward explains, is due to Augustine's understanding of covenant and the ways in which the

[16] James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 185.

[17] Ibid., 191.

[18] See Graham Ward, "Questioning God," in *Questioning God*, eds. John D. Caputo, Michael Scanlon, and Mark Dooley (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 2001), 280-281. Cf. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 117-118.

[19] Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 119.

particularities of this covenant form the African bishop's self-understanding of being in Christ.

Smith explains that, for Augustine, the revelation of God in Christ is that which is attested to in the Scriptures.[20] Yet it is the particularity of this revelation that is lost in the pages of Radical Orthodoxy. Precisely because of their fear of dualisms, Radical Orthodoxy adherents end up conflating a "theology of the Word" into general liturgical practices that shy away from making claims such as the necessity or the shape of Scripture reading and discernment within the community. Perhaps out of a fear of applying "modern" interpretive skills to the Bible, Radical Orthodoxy says, at most, very little about the particularities within the scriptural narratives or about the "application" of the texts to the formation of Christian identity. The Word is silenced and we are left with vague notions of participation through revelation.

It is precisely in its emphasis on participation in the poetic vision—the vision and praxis of the beautiful[21]—that Radical Orthodoxy so desperately needs the Radical Reformation's Scripture. Radical Orthodoxy scholars are right to stress that knowledge of the world requires participation in God, but they fail to show that it is not participation as such. Rather, knowledge of the world requires the display of a way of life committed to Jesus of Nazareth. This is what the Radical Reformers called following the Bible: "discipleship." Order is the way things are in life in Jesus' kingdom.

What Radical Orthodoxy fails to see in its readings of Augustine is this Scripture-shaped life. As Smith rightly points out in his critique of Caputo, Augustine's answer to the questions—"Who am I?" and the epistemological doubt, "What do I love when I love my God?"—is found in Christ as he is testified to in Scripture.

> This is crucial and constitutes the heart of anything that would claim to be Augustinian: the interruption of Augustine's musings by the infusion or surprise of revelation. . . . We see this first and most importantly in book VII of the *Confessions*, where what disturbs Augustine's reading of those Platonic books is the very un-Platonic

[20] Ibid., 115.

[21] Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 129.

> idea of incarnation found in John's Gospel. Indeed, the narrative in books VII and VIII, particularly at the culmination of Augustine's conversion, is persistently interrupted by the insertion of the Word of God.[22]

For Augustine, there was no distinction made between identity in Christ and the revelation of the formation of this identity in Scripture.

A passing glance at *Martyrs' Mirror* shows that this was also the case for the radicals described in those pages.[23] While most martyrs did not seek to display the ways in which their theology might or might not be Augustinian, it is clear that for them, knowledge of God and knowledge of the Scriptures were one and the same thing. This did not imply, however, that the texts "contained" God—this would be to make God an object of knowledge in the sense rightly criticized by Radical Orthodoxy—but simply pointed to an emphasis on how one learned the shape of faithful living.

Word and Identity

In his book, *GodStories*, H. Stephen Shoemaker suggests that we "are story-formed creatures." We are "homo narratus."[24] This is a helpful analogy to John Howard Yoder's approach to Scripture in that the biblical texts are for him the stories that form and inform the life of the Jewish and Christian communities. Yoder writes,

> The category of story and the claim of that story to be rooted in real people and places distinguishes Christian faith from most other

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[22] Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 113.

[23] See, e.g., "If we suffer with Him," that narrates the inquisition of Claesken Gaeledochter (15??-1559), a Dutch woman who suffered imprisonment and death by drowning following her testimony of her theological convictions regarding Christ and the church. Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theatre or Martyrs' Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, 2d ed., trans. Joseph F. Strohm (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001). In addition to *Martyrs' Mirror*, this text is reprinted in J. W. McClendon, C. Freeman, and R. V. Ewell eds., *Baptist Roots: A Reader in the Theology of a Christian People* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1999), 54-60.

[24] H. Stephen Shoemaker, *GodStories: New Narratives from Sacred Texts* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1998), xiii.

> religions before and since. That faith is therefore documented not primarily in visions and in speculative theories about divine reality, but in narratives and pastoral letters which claim to be testimonies to the norming process within an ongoing community.[25]

Scripture is, according to Yoder, "the collective scribal memory, the store par excellence of treasures old and new."[26] The scribe, who serves as an "agent of memory" in the community must herself be a disciple of the Kingdom "before the texts can live as the community's memory through the charismatic aptness of the scribe's selectivity."[27] That there is a community in place with such agents of memory, of order, and so on is prior to questions regarding which literary or historical theories will be employed for the analysis of Scripture.

Citing New Testament scholar John Knox, Yoder states that "the memory is the reality it remembers, it cannot be known otherwise. In no other way can past reality exist than as remembered."[28] Here there is an overlap between Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation (as represented by Yoder)—both rightly understand that our knowledge is linguistically shaped. But, on the theo-political level, Radical Orthodoxy's focus remains simply an analysis of how this is the case, whereas Yoder presumes that it is, and goes on to show the particularities of this language. Thus Scripture as story and memory are two complementary sides of Yoder's argument for how Scripture should be read in the church—both are historically contingent and function under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, working in and through the community for their proper telling and recollection.

The notions of humility and patience before the text are perhaps the most dominant themes in Yoder's approach to Scripture and theology, and offer a contrast to the generally critical and imperialistic posture of Radical Orthodoxy. Yoder's approach is at the same time an understanding of how God speaks to us through the narratives of Scripture and includes a sense of the contingency of one's own

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[25] John H. Yoder, *To Hear the Word* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 63.

[26] John H. Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 31.

[27] Ibid.

[28] John Knox, as quoted in Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 62.

reading of such texts. This contingency for Yoder is not something to be lamented but is simply how we exist as creatures; in other words, one way to see the difference between Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation regards their general "theological posture."[29]

In Milbank this posture is exemplified in his analysis of liberation theologies.[30] Milbank stops at the level of critique with a suggestion that there is very little to be learned from liberation theology because from the start, the appropriation of, for example, Marxism, was wrong-headed and leads only to nihilism. In versions of Radical Reformation, such as Yoder's, it is clear that there is a deeper engagement with history, for Yoder questions not tradition as such, but questions what is "faithful tradition."[31] Thus, rather than throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater, Yoder might agree with Milbank that Marxism or the social sciences in general are futile or nihilistic or inherently based on an ontology of violence. But, significantly, Yoder asks questions such as: "Why did those Christians in the 1960s or 70s feel the need to appropriate Marxism in the first place?" Or, "What questions was the church not answering that then led them to the social sciences?" And finally, "What can be learned from so-called liberation theologies?" Therefore, in its theological posture, Radical Orthodoxy can be described as a project of recovery and rebuilding of the temple, whereas the Radical Reformation seeks to move forward and set up a tent in the wilderness.

In *The Priestly Kingdom*, Yoder argues that any Christian hermeneutic must presume the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding and directing the community in that community's reading of Scripture. The exercise of the various gifts within the community is part and parcel of a right reading of the text and a right living of the disciple life. Thus for Yoder, scriptural reading cannot be separated from other aspects of the life of the church and what he calls "the rule of Paul" which shapes this ecclesial life. This notion of the "rule" comes from 1 Corinthians 14 and is what Yoder calls "dialogical liberty"—the

[29] Samuel E. Ewell III and Willie J. Jennings, unpublished lectures.

[30] For example, chapter 8 in Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*.

[31] See, for example, "The Authority of Tradition," in Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*.

"working of the spirit in the congregation is validated by the liberty with which the various gifts are exercised, especially by the due process with which every prophetic voice is heard and every witness evaluated."[32] This process of discernment and the exercising of many gifts in the community presume an openness and patience that thus resist, or safeguard against, coercive interpretations. This hearkens back to his emphasis on humility before the texts. All interpretations are tentative and subject to revision. Yoder "recognizes that faithfulness is always to be realized in particular times and places, never assured and always subject to renewed testing and judgment."[33] A faithful reading is always a historical reading and thus always open to correction. "Scriptural orientation sharpens our ability to discern the signs of the times, but it is just as true that temporal orientation sharpens our ability to discern the signs of Scripture."[34] The practice of reading Scripture is, like other practices, both historical and contingent, never independent of the community's other practices, and always with the goal of the upbuilding of that same community and its witness to the wider world.

Radical Orthodoxy also recognizes the importance of the historical practices of the church.[35] However, as Reno points out, "the actual structure and form of Anglo-Catholicism emerged out of an idealized picture of catholic faith and practice. It [Radical Orthodoxy] had to turn toward the ideal, because for the actual and particular forms of Christian practice, established Anglicanism as well as Roman Catholicism were inadequate."[36] It is the "messiness" of ecclesial life and witness that is lacking in Radical Orthodoxy precisely because of its extreme emphasis on coherence and the vagueness of its project.

For Yoder, to take the biblical texts as authoritative for the life of the community means to take them seriously in and because of their

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[32] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 22.

[33] Ibid., 3.

[34] Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 52.

[35] Cf. Smith's example in *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 150. When Radical Orthodoxy writes "theological discourse" they mean also to include ecclesial practices.

[36] Reno, R. R. "The Radical Orthodoxy Project," *First Things* (February 2000): 42.

historical particularity. Yoder alludes to Lessing's "ditch" and aims to show that the very question posed by Lessing was a mistake in the first place. Rather than answering Lessing's doubts on Lessing's terms, Yoder assumes that one need not construct another plane on which to establish truth or authority that is independent of history: "The less narrow truth over there is still also provincial. Reality always was pluralistic and relativistic, that is, historical."[37] It is a good thing that the Spirit guides the church precisely in the occasional nature of the texts and in passing them on through generations. In Yoder's own words, one is left "in the continuing uncertainty of life within history, the arbitrariness and the particularity of all historical existence, and the arbitrariness and particularity of hermeneutics within history, which is precisely where we ought to be, since that is where God chose to be revealed in all the arbitrariness and particularity of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Jeremiah, Jesus and Pentecost, Luke and Paul, Peter and John."[38]

The Politics of Identity

Yoder claims that the calling of the church is its christologically-shaped identity. It is precisely because God has come in Jesus that the community's identity is one of openness and dialogue. As he writes in "Meaning after Babble," there is a particular historical and political community that has been called together by God. Scriptural reading and an understanding of God's vision of this new community go hand in hand. "It is . . . the vision of a coming world, a community, larger than any present community, but still finite, historically real, . . . larger than the Messianic Jews and the Hellenists, because it was created . . . out of the costly reconciliation of both of them, by means of one instance of . . . vulnerable cross-cultural communication."[39] Therefore, to understand one's identity in relation to Christ necessarily means living in such a manner that one could not anticipate in advance

[37] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 59.

[38] Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 67.

[39] John H. Yoder, "Meaning after Babble: With Jeffrey Stout beyond Relativism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 133.

the kind of community that might be formed out of new dialogical encounters because this is how the Christian community was formed in the first place. As we look back to understand the formation of this new identity, we see, to use Yoder's terms, that it is always still a looping back: "What we find at the origin is already a process of reaching back again to the origins."[40]

For Yoder the church exists as "a public offer for the entire society" and thus its disciplines constitute what it means to be the church—the identity of the church is not distinguishable from the church's witness to the world—"To participate in the transforming process of becoming the faith community is itself to speak the prophetic word, is itself the beginning of the transformation of the cosmos."[41] Such disciplines do not attempt to secure a handle on truth, but presume rather that all truth is historical. As Romand Coles writes, "Truth is always a finite historical incarnation. For Yoder, what might endure, is "a community of dialogic practices responsive to Jesus; one that might allow truth to manifest itself ever anew in the specificities of historical encounter and discernment."[42]

Given Yoder's understanding of Christian identity and his assumption that any discussion of such identity must also be a dialogue about christology, it makes sense that his arguments about identity are also arguments about what it means to be the church, the body of this slain and victorious Lamb of God. The church is in this sense both an open community, the yet unfinished business of God's calling of various peoples, and a community shaped by its faithfulness to Jesus of Nazareth, as the church discerns this calling and what such faithfulness looks like in particular historical situations.

Mission and identity go hand in hand. Yoder writes, "How God is doing it [bringing into existence a particular people] is not distinguishable from what God is doing, and how the world can know about it is again the same thing. . . . Having a particular identity and making

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[40] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 70.

[41] John H. Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 27-28.

[42] Romand Coles, "The Wild Patience of John Howard Yoder: 'Outsiders' and the 'Otherness of the Church,'" *Modern Theology* 18, no. 3 (July 2002): 311.

sense to one's neighbors, serving their well-being, are not disjunctive alternatives."[43] The identity of this new community is located precisely in their service to the world. This is how Yoder reads not only the apostolic texts, but also the Scriptures of Israel and in particular the prophetic texts such as Jeremiah 29.

Baptism, then, means that one is "in Christ" and thus one has "entered this new history. Interethnic reconciliation is part of redemption. It is not a social idealism supported by an appeal to creation or reason. It is the result of the cross."[44] Thus, the identity of the new community inaugurated by God is identical to the reconciliation that has been made possible, through Christ, between Jews and Gentiles. Moreover, the markers of this new identity are precisely those of the practices that witness the reconciliation of Christ to the world. This reconciliation is the peace to which God had already called Israel, at least since the time of Jeremiah, and for which God now enables the church through Christ.[45]

Like Milbank, in the Radical Reformation the "logic" of Christian theology is its ontology of peace. Also similar is the insistence of both Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation that such an ontology is ultimately knowable because of Christ. Yet, here the paths diverge into vagueness for the former and particularity in Radical Reformation. For Milbank, Christ is the "unexpected fulfilment of human intent, the proper word of God, and the true fulfilment of Creation in the realm of human works."[46] One might ask, unexpected for whom? After all, do we not see throughout the New Testament attempts to show how and why Jesus of Nazareth was exactly the expected messiah of Israel? That certain Jews (and Gentiles) chose not to see this does not make the coming of the Word less expected.

When discussing the politics of the church Yoder never strays far

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[43] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 41.

[44] Ibid., 44.

[45] Yoder argues elsewhere that "making peace" according to Ephesians 2 and Galatians 2 is a more helpful and faithful way to understand what "justification" means: Justification "is . . . in the language of Galatians the same as 'making peace or 'breaking down the wall' in the language of Ephesians." John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus:* Vicit Agnus Noster (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 220.

[46] Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 139.

from God's calling of Israel. For Yoder it is Paul's self-identification as a Jew that makes sense of Paul's ministry. The new people inaugurated by Christ must, because it proclaims this Messiah as Lord, be a people that is also committed to the historical particularity of Israel and God's promises to Israel. In other words, to narrate the identity of the new community must necessarily involve a narration of the events of God with Israel because apart from such narratives the new community becomes, at best, abstract and ahistorical, at worst, oppressive and supersessionist.

For Milbank, Christ becomes the "figura" of God himself—the poetic notion of the concrete universal. This is fundamental because it reveals the idolatry of a univocal reference to God. That is, univocity with reference to God is ultimately idolatrous. Therefore, theology must seek something other as its basis for critical consciousness—something that shows theology its own tendency toward idolatry. Theology finds its answer in the figura of Christ because only God himself can "establish his own proper image."[47] Yet here, argues Milbank, lies the importance of Israel: it is not the particularity of Israel as the chosen people that matters, but rather "one might now venture to say that the very reason why we recognize Israel as exemplary is that the Jews, uniquely among primitive peoples, possessed a pre-reflective criticality, adequate to theology."[48] In other words, Israel's importance stands in the fact that it alone was aware of the state of general human fallenness, a fallenness that leads to idolatry. Jesus' particularity stands almost as a mere cipher to his universal significance.[49] Michael Horton claims that citations such as these reflect the ways in which Milbank verges "on a Marcionite treatment of the Old Testament and its God" and illustrate "a larger tendency [in Radical Orthodoxy] to make Scripture subservient to an a priori scheme and perhaps even to reject whatever does not fit."[50]

In stark contrast to Milbank, one sees in the work of another

[47] Ibid., 133.

[48] Ibid., 33.

[49] Ibid., 149.

[50] Michael S. Horton, "Participation and Covenant," in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition,* eds. James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 128, n. 70.

Anglican's discussion of what inter-faith dialogue might look like as a display of the necessity of Israel for a proper account of Christian theology. Rowan Williams makes the argument that a faithful account of the central claims of the Christian faith necessarily depends on the narratives of God's calling of Israel. A rejection of Israel, on Williams' terms, would thus also be a rejection of Jesus in that, apart from Israel, there can be no Christian story of Jesus. Israel's rejection of Jesus does not deny this claim. Williams' emphasis is that, short of the eschaton, no people can claim to have secured the totality of meaning of God's work in the world. That is, no identity, whether Jewish or Christian, can be said to be the final or comprehensive identity because the ways in which God calls God's people are already a judgement and a scattering of the world's notions of peoplehood and identity: "The challenge posed by Israel's existence is to do with understanding God strictly in terms of God's relation to a people summoned to manifest what human life looks like when systematically and unprotectedly exposed to the pressure of that initiative power that lies behind all contingent events and agencies, and understanding that the effect of that pressure is tsedaqah and shalom, equitable and healing relations."[51] This directly relates to Yoder's emphasis on the connections between identity and mission—for both Williams and Yoder, the "mission" of Israel and the church has to do with living at the borders, where securing power is not only not necessary, but is itself a denial of the lordship of the God who has called them together. In Yoder, this is exemplified in his emphasis on the character of "exilic" living; the identity of the people of God is not one defined by land, power, or even language, but is constituted in the various ways the community seeks to live the word in its given context. In some ways, this parallels Milbank's notion of the "strangeness" of the word, but again, the specificities of this are lost in what Reno calls the "speculative grasp" of the theologian.[52]

In other words, to affirm the Lordship of Christ works precisely against any claim to supersessionism and the finality of the church as institution or absolute truth-bearer since to claim a "finished account of

[51] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 98-99.

[52] Reno, "The Radical Orthodoxy Project," 42-43.

Christ . . . would make christology non-eschatological."[53] Any account of the lordship of Christ cannot be separated from God's calling and formation of Israel, from the narratives of promise and fulfillment, obedience and disobedience, that constitute what it means to be God's people in the world. To try to be faithful to the rule of God requires both a looking back and a retelling of the stories that have shaped God's people, and a looking forward to the fulfillment and consummation of the kingdom of God. Thus to narrate a christology that is eschatological must also entail a narration of God's acts with God's people in history—in the contingency and particularities of that same history.

A Scandalous Word

In Matthew 15:21-28 (cf. Mark 7:24-30) the evangelist narrates the story of a Canaanite woman who attempts to ask Jesus to heal her daughter from demon possession. Calling Jesus "Lord, Son of David" she begs for mercy, but her request at first is not even acknowledged. The disciples urge Jesus to send her away and he responds, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (v. 24). Yet she perseveres, claiming that even dogs receive crumbs that are dropped from the children's table. Jesus answers her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you as you desire" (v. 28). And her daughter is healed.

The inclusion of the Canaanite woman, through Jesus' gift of mercy, into Israel's story is what Willie Jennings calls the "scandal" of Gentile inclusion.[54] Citing Ephesians 2 (also one of Yoder's favourites), Jennings argues that Christianity in the West "no longer feels this Gentile inclusion."[55] Yet, unlike Yoder's emphasis on Christ breaking down the dividing wall, Jennings looks more closely at verses 11-12:

> Remember then your former condition, Gentiles, as you are by birth, "the uncircumcised" as you are called by those who call themselves

[53] Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 94.

[54] Willie J. Jennings, "A Difference that Matters: Being Church in Racial America," unpublished lectures presented at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, on 24 February 2003.

[55] Ibid., 3.

> "the circumcised" because of a physical rite. You were at that time separated from Christ, excluded from the community of Israel, strangers to God's covenants and the promise that goes with them. Yours was a world without hope and without God. (Revised English Bible)

Jennings' point in recalling this passage is that we assume too quickly that we are "already in" and the scandal of this inclusion is lost to us. "We cannot feel, touch, hear, or see this inclusion. This inclusion is of the body, the individual body and the social body. But we have no sense of it. This inclusion clarifies the status of all peoples before the face of Israel and the God of Israel, hopeless and Godless. But this shared status of all ethnic groups, our shared status means far more than a pious pronouncement that 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.' Gentile inclusion means the death of racial definition, ethnic determination, and nationalistic hope, and the birth of a new people in the body of messiah Jesus."[56] In other words, Jennings' argument resembles Yoder's in that he claims that the identity of the new community inaugurated by the Word is a people that shows to the world the end of racial divisions and of the nationalities that heretofore had defined our identities. But, unlike Yoder, before we move too quickly to an affirmation of that new community, Jennings argues that we need to take stock of the ways in which racial reasoning and race constructions have shaped the very ways in which we tell these stories—we need to become better, truthful, storytellers.

The story of the Canaanite woman and the lessons from Jennings' lecture suggest that to understand what faithful identity looks like requires a looking outside of ourselves to the stories that have shaped us and to the stories of others. That is, the Canaanite woman knows only that she is not Israel. She must look to Jesus, to that which is other in order to be brought into the story and to receive the blessings thereof. Likewise, to make a claim for Christian identity requires of us Christians that we look outside ourselves, through Jesus to Israel, in order to learn who we truly are—in order to learn that we are in fact "the dogs," and thus to be reminded that even the dogs can receive the blessings of Israel. To speak about how God relates to the world must

[56] Ibid.

start with God's accommodation to Israel, and thus, whether God relates analogously, or hierarchically, or whatever, can only be known by listening to someone else's story; it is only by overhearing what Israel says that we can begin to know this God.

Therefore, to overcome such divisions as part of understanding the divine call on the shaping of our identities, we must be able to tell the story of how we were "once not a people" but by the grace of God ("mercy," on Luther's terms) we have been made part of Israel's story by an act of Israel's God. Israel's acceptance (or not) of this Gentile inclusion does not change the truthfulness of the Christian claim "to be the dogs." It should, however, at the very least, serve as a reminder for Christians that our inclusion is indeed scandalous and is not something to be taken for granted or secured on our own terms. According to the biblical accounts, there were not once Jews, Romans, Greeks, Babylonians, and so on. Rather, there were two distinct identities: Jews, the chosen people of God, and everyone else, the goyim. It is only because of an act of that Jewish God that Christians can begin to understand what it means to participate in Israel. Apart from Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, we have no part in Israel. And what it means to "have a part in Israel" cannot be divorced from the narratives of this very God with the chosen people. Therefore, to understand what it would mean to be made part of this people in history requires the patience, the discernment, and the humility not to grasp or to secure a finalized identity, but to be open, vulnerable to listen to the stories that shape our lives and to the ways in which God disrupts and transforms those stories in ways we could not have desired or even determined in advance.

There is a parallel impulse among the Radical Reformation's attempt to propose an alternative Christian witness from inside the borders of the medieval European empire and Radical Orthodoxy's attempt at recovery and reconstruction of a throroughly Christian logic within collapsing "post-modern" Europe and North America. Yet, the biblical narratives that shaped Radical Reformation's theological identity both in the context of Claesken Gaeledochter in the sixteenth century and John Howard Yoder in the twentieth century are precisely the narratives that are muted in Radical Orthodoxy's

project. In order faithfully to develop their ontology of peace, Radical Orthodoxy must "let go" of its speculative grasp by refocusing its perception on those who suffer, those who are their neighbours and their enemies, as did the Word incarnate. The daily, concrete struggles of learning to set a table where both rich and poor can feast is where and how God meets his creatures and is the working out of a "proper" theology of the Word.

FIVE

Craig Hovey

NARRATIVE PROCLAMATION AND GOSPEL TRUTHFULNESS: WHY CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY NEEDS SPEAKERS

Let us begin with an observation that is at home within Radical Orthodoxy: Written texts can be misleading insofar as what they report can be imagined as free-floating facts, events, or ideas; that is, unbounded by the realities of cultural existence, of conditions surrounding both the production and reading of texts. This observation makes plain how we may be tempted to draw a straight line from the meaning of a text to the truth of that meaning, assuming that both can be exhaustively captured and assessed on the basis of the written word alone.

Radical Orthodoxy pursues these kinds of hermeneutical questions in order to show two things. First, it shows that texts themselves are not the sole bearers of their own meaning. Therefore, questions of a text's truth cannot be answered on the basis of texts alone.[1] Second, it helps us imagine domains of truth and meaning that are embodied in time. These are, as Catherine Pickstock argues, ultimately enacted in worship and praise.[2] The pasts intended to be reported in written texts are taken up into the present-tense actions of people for whom the truth of statements is not separable from their own participation in the truth. Though it sounds

[1] This, of course, is not a unique contribution of Radical Orthodoxy, but is adopted from some strains of continental postmodern philosophy.

[2] Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

strange to put it this way, the worship of God is therefore "more true" than anything that can be said about it. This is because, as long as meaning and truth are allowed to float free of people's cultural and historical existences, such people will only awkwardly and inauthentically find themselves attesting to such meanings and truths through maintaining a distance from them. Such distance is only traversed in practice. Speech is better than writing, then, since there is a temporal immediacy between words and actions; therefore, speakers (unlike writers) cannot escape the meanings and consequences of their own words as they speak them. The truth of statements is thus bound up with the truthfulness of speakers.

I

These prefatory comments rightly lead us into our main topic: a discussion of witnesses. Witnesses who swear to tell the truth in a law court indicate a connection between witness and truthfulness. But what can we say about this connection? We may agree with Hannah Arendt that some things can only be known through the testimonies of witnesses. The fragile nature of facts that could be otherwise makes testimony the necessary mode of their transmission: "Factual truths are never compellingly true. . . . Facts need testimony to be remembered and trustworthy witnesses to be established in order to find a secure dwelling place in the domain of human affairs."[3] This is especially the case with unusual events, those things that violate our assumptions about how the world normally works, of cause and effect, of ranges of possibility. Therefore, if we are to know such things, there will need to be people who tell the truth in their testimony and there will also need to be people who trust that they are speaking truthfully.

The trouble is that we would rather not have to trust witnesses. We would prefer to be able to subject the testimonies we hear to a more incontrovertible mode of knowledge, one that is attained and sustained with greater certainty. We would rather be able to rely on the confidence afforded by science with its comprehensive explanations

[3] Hannah Arendt, "Lying in Politics," in *Crises of the Republic* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1972), 6.

and its ability to give accounts of otherwise mysterious facts on the basis of its grand theories. After all, why should we trust witnesses? In the real world, testimonies notoriously contradict one another; witnesses have selective memories and end up reporting some facts and not others. Our legal system makes use of juries and judges because it cannot be the case that every testimony will be true. Answering the question about the connection between witness and truthfulness, therefore, begins to take the form of appeals for certainty: how to certify the truth of what is spoken, how to guarantee that witnesses will not lie, and how to catch them when they do.

But our appeal to the idiom of courtrooms and trials actually intensifies our question. Judges and juries make appeal to a body of law in order to determine the truth of testimony. Not only does law exist as a prior set of codes that help make such determinations, but those who pass judgement on the truth of testimony exist in their roles by virtue of how the law is embodied institutionally. From the physical structures of courthouses and the elevated chairs of judges to the national guilds of legal professionals with their exams and licenses to practice—all of these institutions are constituted by the fact that laws exist and their existence requires institutional support.

Consider, for example, how oath-taking is one such institution that supervenes rather directly on the giving and hearing of testimony. We even began this paper by observing that *swearing* to tell the truth indicates the connection between truthfulness and witness. But what if the oath is only ancillary to the truthfulness of witnesses and not internal to it at all? In this respect, we have only to notice that an oath does not actually guarantee true testimony. All it does is ensure that the words about to be spoken will submit themselves to legal discipline should they be found to be false within the legal sphere into which testimony is given. Lies become perjury when spoken under oath, and perjury is taken to be more serious than lying because it entails more severe legal consequences. In other words, oaths subordinate testimony to sovereign authority.

On the surface, an oath seems to be an exercise that is prior to, and separate from, testimony. Oaths function as a prior justification and *guarantee* of what is about to be spoken. But we immediately need

to correct this impression since any explanation of the subsequent discourse is part of that discourse, not prior to it. The truthfulness in which the oath is spoken cannot be greater than the truth of the testimony it is meant to control. This means that nothing can be said in addition to a true testimony in order to guarantee that it will be true. Put differently, it is more important to tell the truth than to *promise* to tell the truth (since even a promise to tell the truth must be told truthfully if it is to have any meaning). When oaths are sworn in courts, the introduction of an allegedly higher standard (symbolized by the oath) that denotes the subsequent possibility of perjury really introduces a *lower* standard for speech that is *not* spoken under oath. Another way to make the same point is to say that the practice of oath-taking depends on justifying oaths quite apart from justifying truthfulness. A person will generally be persuaded to swear an oath for reasons that are different from the reasons he may have for speaking the truth. Jesus' teaching on oaths in the Sermon on the Mount even seems to indicate that oaths are often taken in order to avoid doing the thing that is promised. Moreover, people who think that there is more at stake for speaking truthfully when under oath are less likely to have their characters formed according to the commitment to speak the truth all the time.

Heirs of the Radical Reformation like Anabaptists and Quakers sometimes faced severe opposition for their resistance to oath-taking. Anabaptists in particular found that by resisting taking oaths, they were resisting attempts by the authorities who understood oaths to be a foundation of civil society. The latter was a perspective shared by Reformers like Luther, Melanchthon, and Heinrich Bullinger.[4] A seventeenth-century Puritan offers a clear example of how oaths serve ruling authorities:

> Oaths are necessary for the execution of the magistrate's office and the preservation of human society. For without such oaths the commonwealth hath no surety upon public officers and ministers: nor kings upon their subjects; nor lords upon their tenants; neither can men's

[4] Bullinger called the oath "the bond, which holds together the whole body of the common good of just government." Cited in Alan Kreider, "Christ, Culture, and Truth-telling," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 15, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 217.

> titles be cleared in causes civil, nor justice done in causes criminal; nor dangerous plots and conspiracies be discovered against the state.[5]

It is striking that the emphasis here is not on how *truthfulness* is the basis of civil society, but *oaths*. It is the guarantee that is most important since the guarantee is an acknowledgement of who has authority to punish, who has a right to the truth, in which setting, on what matters, and so on. An oath pays homage to the one who is responsible for the security brought by the binding nature of an oath and the punishment that attends to perjury. But as the Anabaptists and others discovered, oaths then become more important than the truth itself. It is easy to commit perjury, but it is very difficult to refuse to swear an oath, especially when one might face being put to death as a heretic.[6] Against this, those who refused oaths took their understanding of truthful speech from the Sermon on the Mount: "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No;' anything more than this comes from evil" (Matthew 5:37, RSV). Jesus' disciples should not look for ways of making their speech true or of certifying it apart from speaking truly, since an oath is redundant in the face of true testimony. Oaths condition truthful speech in the same way that theories of truth condition truth—both rely on what they purport to control. Oaths safeguard the truthfulness of the truth in advance of testimony, betraying a reliance on the power of magistrates—and ultimately the sword—at the expense of the power of a truthfully spoken "yes" and "no."[7]

In a sense, therefore, oaths are posturing and bluffing. They accomplish nothing because they are just an exercise of power that obtains only insofar as testimony is connected to power.

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[5] Daniel Featlt, *The Dippers Dipt* (London, 1646), 142. Cited in ibid.

[6] Ibid., 218.

[7] Some common expressions such as "and that's the gospel truth" function in the same way. Furthermore, oaths are based on lying. As the Quaker, William Penn, observed, where there is no lying, there is no need to govern testimony by oaths: "[I]f Christians ought never to lie, it is most certain that they need never to swear; for swearing is built upon lying; take away lying, and there remains no more ground for swearing; truth-speaking comes in the room thereof." William Penn, *A Treatise of Oaths: Containing Several Weighty Reasons Why People Called Quakers Refuse to Swear* (1675), in *Selected Works*, vol. 2 (1825), 44. Cited in ibid., 218-219.

But what about testimony that is given irrespective of power relations and the violence that undergirds them? For Christians, this is not an abstract or merely academic question since it touches directly on our mission in the world: bearing witness to the good news of Christ. Christians have been commissioned to proclaim to the world the resurrection of the Son of God, to make him known by word and deed, to attest before and for the world that salvation is in Christ, that the world belongs to him, and that his works are good. Christians undertake this without submitting their testimonies to the requirements of sovereignty—indeed, do so in the face of such sovereignty, inasmuch as the gospel is a direct assault on the pride of the nations.

II

How else might we speak about truthfulness and testimony? In many aspects of modern philosophy and conventional wisdom, there is a preoccupation with questions about how something can be known and how it can be known to be true. The former is explicitly within the domain described by epistemology; the latter takes knowledge of the truth to be a subset of epistemological questions, or at least a function of our ability to answer those questions. This construction implies, for one, that we would seem to be entitled to believe that something is true only insofar as we are able to prove its truth; we can only claim to know something if we can demonstrate that it is "knowable." This immediately foregrounds some related political questions. Possible justifications for true beliefs must then include all rational people since justifications must appeal to some shared criterion, beyond the belief in question. Viewed from this perspective, people who doubt an (allegedly) justified belief are thought to be irrational, as they have rejected not merely the belief, but also the entire structure of shared reason which grounded the belief in the first place. The irrationality of others is political because it is how we make clear that *they* are not one of *us*.

As a result, as long as those who deliver a testimony accept these requirements of justification for the truth of what they say, they will find themselves making two kinds of statements. The first kind

of statement is, in some sense, the more basic—it is the testimony itself, the eye-witness report, "This is what I saw . . ." But taken alone, this will not be enough since a second kind of statement will also be needed. This is the statement that justifies the testimony, the rationale for why it is true, the account of why it should be believed, the explanation for how it counts as knowledge. This two-tier construction is so prevalent that those who dare to speak the first kind of statement without the second, that is, those who speak testimony without justifying it according to reason, are themselves accounted as irrational or fideistic. Not only do they believe what they say because of a faith that responds to the peace and beauty of the truth, but they also hope that others will believe it on the same basis. In the face of modern epistemology, this can only be seen as an affront to reason itself. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that faith and reason have been set up in opposition to each other.

But some serious questions have been raised against the ascendancy of this two-tiered epistemology in recent years. Here we may probe some of the inadequacies inherent in constructing knowledge according to a model that privileges justification. In particular, because Christians are witnesses rather than judges, issues of justification are not immediately suited to the Christian mission of making Christ known to the world. In fact, making Christ *known* has nothing to do with explaining the testimony about him. Our ability to clarify how this is the case has been greatly enriched by the work of Radical Orthodox theologians and their associates. For example, as John Milbank observes when discussing Paul Ricoeur, "'Narrating' . . . turns out to be a more basic category than either explanation or understanding."[8] Testimony tells a narrative that is *temporally structured* and, while it usually cannot point to its necessity on the basis of universal laws and first causes, it *can* point to antecedent causes and what has (contingently) followed from them—what comes immediately before and after.[9] As with characters or readers within a story

[8] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 267.

[9] See also Stanley Hauerwas and David B. Burrell, "From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics," in *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 28-29.

that is not yet finished, we do not judge at a remove from the story itself but only on the basis of what has been given through the story. If we could draw conclusions from what went before (that is, without narrating subsequent developments in plot), we would not wonder: What happens next? Christian witness thus is in the strange position of declaring the truth about Christ without containing him, of narrating a true story without being able to lay claim to its definitive interpretation nor the exact nature of its conclusion.

Dispossessed of the force of explanation, however, Christians are nevertheless not off the hook with respect to their mission to the nations since the proclamation of the gospel is characterized by peaceful invitation rather than the assertion of power in the guise of rationality. In this way, Christians may make selective use of "postmodern" thought, in order to overcome certain totalizing and pretentious elements of modern thought. As David Bentley Hart comments, Christian thought "has no stake in the myth of disinterested rationality," rightly suspecting that the epistemological project of modernity is a ruse for power.[10] Against this, Hart goes on to argue that "postmodern theory confirms theology in its original condition: that of a story, thoroughly dependent upon a sequence of historical events to which the only access is the report and practice of believers, a story whose truthfulness may be urged—even enacted—but never proved simply by the process of scrupulous dialectic."[11] The story of Christ come and risen cannot be demonstrated according to the force of reason; the church is equipped with "no means whereby to corroborate its wildly implausible claim, except the demonstrative practice of Christ's peace."[12] Therefore, when the peaceful offer of the Christian proclamation is rejected by others, we cannot attribute such rejection to their irrationality, but their sin; that is, their exercise of freedom before God to reject God. This kind of attribution is crucial to the peaceable offer that Christian proclamation makes since the

[10] David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 4. There seems to be no consensus on whether Hart should be counted among the ranks of Radical Orthodoxy. However, there are enough points of contact to justify using Hart as I do here.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 3.

temptation to overcome and overwhelm human freedom in the name of rationality is a form of violence.

It is important to see how what we have said about oath-taking and power relates to the modern preoccupation with epistemological certainty. Both are ways of ensuring true speech, though neither operates at the level of the testimony itself. Both, in fact, hover above testimony, only making contact with it at points that are conditioned by either the threat or actual exercise of violence and coercion. Oaths become incoherent when divorced from a system of power that can enforce them. This is why courtroom oaths only have the appearance of swearing to God when in fact they are a way of affirming the authority of the state and its right to use force in the name of securing the truth.

But surely we are left wondering what to do when we are presented with conflicting testimonies. On the one hand, it seems quite absurd to ask, "Well, did they swear to tell the truth? If so, then they are telling the truth." This is because if someone is determined to lie at the level of testimony, they are likely also to lie at the level of the oath. Put differently, this logic only works if the witness' loyalty to the truth of her testimony is no stronger than her loyalty to the government. On the other hand, it is less absurd to ask, "How can we be sure that what we have heard is true? How can these witnesses know what they claim to know?" This is clearly less absurd since we are bound to rely on these kinds of judgements despite our waning confidence in oaths. Nevertheless, such questions are still one step removed from testimony itself and so find themselves operating on an epistemological level of proofs and evidence or, in the philosophical realm, relying on theories of knowledge and truth.

III

In order to make more concrete some of these comments about knowledge, witness, and truth, it is interesting to consider the 1951 Japanese film by Akira Kurosawa, *Rashomon*. The film tells the stories of several witnesses to a rape and a murder. But rape and murder are not what makes the film disturbing and, as many of its

first viewers thought, even morally objectionable. Instead, it is the way that the conflicting testimonies of the witnesses are portrayed. Until *Rashomon*, audiences were accustomed to taking for granted that what they saw portrayed was the reality internal to the film itself. Seeing was believing, even though it was occasionally violated by plot elements such as the discovery that it was all a dream. But Kurosawa deliberately presented viewers with several conflicting testimonies: by an eye-witness, the rape victim, the murder victim (from beyond the grave through a medium), and others. All provided details in which they themselves were implicated in the violence or in other ways presented facts that were irreconcilable with the other testimonies. At the start of each testimony, the violent scene is shown according to that report. But rather than the camera showing what really happened, the camera merely echoed the words of the conflicting witnesses.

What Kurosawa refused to do was to intervene at the level of adjudication. The camera did not rise above the fray of conflicting witnesses and discordant testimony. Instead, as members of the film's audience, we are actually involved in the film itself in the character of the camera. There is no omniscient narrator that secures the certainty of our vision. Some thought Kurosawa was making the (now monotonous) point that there is no objective truth, but this misconstrues what is conveyed by displaying the conflicting testimonies of witnesses without deciding for us which one is true. As disturbing as *Rashomon* has been for audiences who have wanted to know what really happened, it is striking that the film is only less like films up to that point, and almost mundanely much more like our lives. We are familiar with the fact that we must trust the testimonies of some people if we are to have any knowledge apart from what we have experienced ourselves. Not only this, but we find that we actually need to trust most people to tell the truth most of the time in order to live free from the constant anxiety of continual doubt. Three of the film's character's debate this point:

COMMONER: And I suppose that is supposed to be true.

WOODCUTTER (*getting to his feet*): I don't tell lies. I saw it with my own eyes.

COMMONER: That I doubt.

WOODCUTTER: I don't tell lies.

COMMONER: Well, so far as that goes, no one tells lies after he has said that he is going to tell one.

PRIEST: But it's horrible—if men do not tell the truth, do not trust one another, then the earth becomes a kind of hell.

COMMONER: You are right. The world we live in is a hell.

The priest represents the attempt to draw a conclusion about human behaviour (people tell the truth and trust one another) because he fears the kind of world that would be indicated if it was not true (it would be hell). In this sense, the priest seems irretrievably naïve, simply unwilling to admit that the world might actually be what he fears most. By contrast, the commoner seems heroic, courageously facing up to the reality of the world as it really is, unafraid to declare it and determined to continue living life in the face of a hard truth.

But here we see the deeper level of the film. Kurosawa is not actually interested in the question of whether truth is relative or objective. He is interested in what it means to live with human faculties and limitations. We cannot know the details about the murder and the rape because we were not there. Even those who were there are prejudiced toward their own testimonies because they each have interests bound up with what they say. In other words, we are like the witnesses; like them, we do not see clearly and our blindness is invested with what it means to be human. Audiences wanted the clear-sighted knowledge they had been used to seeing at the movies without being reminded of the uncertainty that marks our creaturely existence. In this way, Kurosawa would not allow the audience to "escape" human limitation through appeals to greater levels of knowledge.

Kurosawa knew that we would rather be judges than witnesses. In *Rashomon*, the flashback scenes that depict the testimonies are captured by a shaky, hand-held camera, punctuated with glances at the blinding sun. In this way, audiences are involved in the limited

vision of the witness, immersed in the tussle that affects vision as much as understanding and judgement. But in the courtroom scenes, the camera is fixed and stable. The questions of the prosecution come from off-screen and the witnesses answer them by speaking directly into the camera, straight to the audience. In these scenes, we are not the witnesses but the prosecution and judges, interrogating the discordant versions of the story in order to get to the truth. Kurosawa is aware that cinematic convention generally panders to our narcissistic fantasies as judges but he refuses to sanction the certainty usually afforded to audiences by this juridical mode of storytelling.

Rashomon challenged the truth of observation that audiences had hitherto relied on as an unshakable epistemological principle. Instead, the question of knowledge was recast as a *moral* question. The priest in the story gives voice to this shift. He is not so much concerned with what the fact of conflicting testimony means for the truth they are meant to declare, nor does he try to harmonize their disparate accounts by overwhelming the fragile (though always possibly false) details they provide. He is primarily interested in what conflicting testimonies tell us about the witnesses themselves.

PRIEST: But the woman turned up in prison too, you know. It seems she went to seek refuge at some temple and the police found her there . . .

WOODCUTTER: It's a lie. They're all lies. Tajomaru's confession, the woman's story—they're lies.

COMMONER: Well, men are only men. That's why they lie. They can't tell the truth, not even to themselves.

PRIEST: That may be true. But it's because men are so weak. That's why they lie. That's why they must deceive themselves.

COMMONER: Not another sermon! I don't mind a lie. Not if it's interesting. What kind of story did she tell?

PRIEST: Hers was a completely different story from the bandit's. Everything was different. Tajomaru talked about her temper. I saw

> nothing like that at all. I found her very pitiful. I felt great compassion for her.

Both the priest and the commoner agree that lying is bound up with our humanity, but only the commoner is satisfied by his own cynicism over against the priest's compassion for human weakness. Neither of these men is going to solve the problem of epistemology, partly because their conversation has sketched out the way that the problem involves the very aspects of their two characters that they display in that conversation. We might say that cynicism and compassion are the two basic character-orientations to the truth of testimony. Both define a relationship to truth, but not by directly interfacing with facts; instead, both relate to the human other from the standpoint of the person of the witness, the one who delivers testimony.

IV

How shall we appropriate these insights to a discussion of the Christian testimony? Christian witnesses are indispensable because what they tell cannot be known apart from testimony. That God raised Jesus from the dead cannot be deduced through logic nor arrived at on the basis of a theory about how the world works. The details of testimony are contingent, which is to say, they might have been otherwise. Witnesses claim that the details were this way as opposed to that, though they cannot certify their claims by appealing to anything more stable and convincing than their testimonies. One of the positive and constructive aspects of postmodern developments is precisely the declining legitimacy of totalizing meta-narratives, leaving Christians with only a narrative proclamation, which is all that Christians have ever had anyway.[13] Our postmodern situation highlights how Christian testimony narrates details without claiming to know what it all means. Testimony claims that Jesus is risen without exhaustively laying claim to the nature of resurrection. This is what we see in the New Testament: a refusal to *explain* what a resurrection is, but

[13] Of course Christians have often purported to have more than this and, in fact, some forms of modern philosophy were based precisely on a certain comfort with construing some Christian beliefs according to necessary reason.

nevertheless affirming it by narrating the change it enacts and inaugurates. In the same way, the narrative proclamation of Christ does not rest on comprehensive explanations but remains open to the possibility that the resurrection may yet continue to disclose itself in new ways in the world. A risen Christ will continue to act in unexpected ways, which points to how the resurrection is not only an historical occurrence but a confession about how reality is full of surprise. But this is only another way of saying that what is real is created full of variety and promise, that what is created is a gift always insufficiently laid hold of even by our most ingenious efforts.

Then again, Christian testimony is more than a set of eternal truths disclosed by the reality of Christ. It resists being construed in general terms as, for example, pointing to more fundamental notions such as love, suffering, and compassion. Instead, Christian testimony is irreducibly particular; there is nothing more fundamental than the facts it tells.

We should admit that this seems like a paradox. On the one hand, Christian witness refuses to lay claim to general, foundational notions for its justification; on the other hand, it testifies to the inexhaustibility of the substance of its own testimony. Christ is not a symbol of something else; yet to speak of Christ is to speak of a fullness that cannot be exhausted by what we say about him. Put differently, Christ is the shape of all reality and yet is only disclosed through the particular instances and claims that are given to Christians to proclaim.

Though this sounds paradoxical, it is only a paradox according to the way that modern philosophy and conventional wisdom would have us think about the truth of testimonies, that is, the knowledge of witnesses. Testimonies were meant to explain things or otherwise meant to be validated on some grounds other than their own truth. But such validation could only be achieved at the expense of unique testimony, that is, at the expense of testimonies that would speak anything genuinely new. When something is known because it accords with our prior understanding about how the world works, such workings can never be the subject of critique. And when something is known because it is submitted to the control of sovereign power, the absoluteness of that power's authority can only be questioned by

risking the offer of testimony unsupported by the guarantees institutionally enshrined by that power. Both the inflated claims of epistemology and power-imbued legal protocols are set against Christian testimony insofar as Christians attest to a reality that is unbounded and free. The proclamation of Christ's resurrection is bound up with the confession that he is sovereign over the nations and that they are subject to his judgement. But precisely because worldly sovereignty is exposed as pretentious are Christians therefore enabled to appear as witnesses rather than judges.

Testimony of the risen Christ is an invitation to others to look again at the world with wide-eyed expectation. If Christ is risen, then the proclamation that he is risen will always speak of Christ in the present tense: Christian testimony does not just narrate historical facts of the past, but discloses the reality of the present. Moreover, the church's ability to proclaim at all is part of that present reality. The church does not simply tell a story *about* Christ, but the telling is part of the content of its proclamation insofar as the risen Christ is free to surprise the church in its own speech. Proclaiming the resurrection is therefore not separable from giving an account of how it is that Christ speaks now in this very proclamation since anything less would demonstrate that the resurrection is not true.[14] Christian proclamation must therefore respect the freedom of the risen Christ since the substance of the testimony itself attests to the unpredictable actions that Christ will continue to perform insofar as he is alive. A living person will act freely in ways that are not knowable simply by knowing the person. In this, Christian witness holds that Christ is not only knowable as an historical occurrence, but as an abiding reality. Therefore, a consequence of the claim that Christ is risen and is therefore alive is that he can surprise us; that he can be known but, because he is living and will act freely, he cannot be anticipated or predicted.[15] We never know what he will do next, except insofar as he binds himself

[14] But the reverse is not true. It is not possible to demonstrate the truth of the resurrection by any means, though its plausibility can be attested to by a people whose life together is characterized by a free, living Christ. The impossibility of demonstration is exactly what we would expect, given the logic of resurrection.

[15] See Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Triune God*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 198.

to his promises.[16] The resurrected Christ must be attested by a people who expect him to exercise the freedom that comes with being alive. Sometimes dissatisfied with the lack of control this involves, Christian witness will be tempted to condition its own testimony in one way or another in order to make it more convincing or, at its strongest, irrefutable.

But it remains that what Christians believe and proclaim to the world cannot be known apart from witnesses. If it could, then it would not be true.[17] This is because God has created and redeemed the world through sheer contingency: he did not have to create; he did not have to redeem. The actions of God in the world cannot be explained through extrapolation or logical argument. Moreover, Jesus did not rise from the dead for "reasons" that could be offered as proof apart from the fragility of those who attest that Jesus is risen. That Christ's witnesses risk being ignored, disbelieved, or silenced through martyrdom is inherent in the gift God has given the world by refusing to overpower human freedom. The fact that some will believe and others will not is not a function of Christian failure to anchor its proclamation in something more solid and convincing than the contingency of the church's own existence. Instead, the existence of the church already attests to the reality of a non-necessary creation. Just as God did not need to create the world, Jesus did not need to call disciples and God did not need to create the church. And since the church's continued existence depends on proclaiming the gospel for the sake of the new belief of each generation, the connection between proclamation and the success of the church's witness is one of promise and gift. For those who have inherited the Radical Reformation tradition in one way or another, it may not be difficult to grasp how the Christian

[16] The *Schleitheim Confession* argues against oath-taking on grounds that, while God is able to keep his promises under his own power, we are not. In this way, we might go on to say that human faith knows the future of God insofar as God has made promises about some things. This is another reminder that knowledge is relational and that the freedom of God to surprise is only ever limited by God's will to hold himself to his word.

[17] As above, however, this statement must also not be construed as a proof of Christian truth. See Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2001), 207.

ability to resist sovereign power, particularly when it is abusive in its pretentious claims, will depend on the ability of Christians to persist in offering peaceful, unbounded testimony to the world.

SIX

Peter Dula

FUGITIVE ECCLESIA

> *We must always be ready to change sides, like justice, the eternal fugitive from the camp of the victors.*
>
> SIMONE WEIL

In 1996 Sheldon Wolin published an essay entitled "Fugitive Democracy." It was, according to William Connolly, pervaded by a "mood of disappointment," a despair about the possibility of democracy.[1] Throughout history, but especially in the modern world, not least in those countries, mostly in the West, which claim to be democratic, democracy can only be momentary, occasional, sporadic, and evanescent, to use just a few of the words Wolin and those commenting on the essay have used to describe it. He wrote:

> I shall take the *political* to be an expression of the idea that a free society composed of diversities can nonetheless enjoy moments of commonality when, through public deliberations, collective power is used to promote or protect the well being of the collectivity. *Politics* refers to the legitimized public contestation, primarily by organized and unequal social powers, over access to the resources available to the public authorities of the collectivity. Politics is continuous, ceaseless, and endless. In contrast, the political is episodic, rare.[2]

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[1] Connolly, "Politics and Vision," in *Democracy and Vision: Sheldon Wolin and the Vicissitudes of the Political*, eds. Aryeh Botwinick and William Connolly (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 13.

[2] Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 31.

Among the more commonly noted examples of the political are movements like the 1989 revolution: Poland's Solidarity movement and the Charter 77 dissidents. The anti-war movement and the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s would also be examples of the political. All these movements share several things in common. Most important among those things is that their power sprang from the grassroots; they were diverse coalitions; they were not political actors coming together but individuals formed into political actors through their common deliberation; and the moments at which they achieved "the political" were fleeting, fugitive. Not only were they fugitive, they often degenerated into something authoritarian and reactionary.

This essay explores a number of similarities between Wolin's "political" and much of contemporary political theology's "church," particularly that which draws its inspiration from the work of John Milbank. I refer not to the occasional radically democratic elements[3] in some theologians, or to the re-conception of the political which refuses to confine it to statecraft, but to its fugitivity. It seems that the trajectory of the argument among Radical Orthodox theologians such as Milbank and others like William Cavanaugh and Daniel Bell moves toward what we might call "fugitive ecclesia." Often, however, they seem reticent about saying so explicitly. They seem caught between the inescapability of the fugitive and the promise to Peter. To put it as bluntly, if a bit crudely, as possible, theology is faced with the unbearable suggestion that modernity/late capitalism/postmodernity/the secular/neo-neo-neo-Constantianism—pick your epithet—is tantamount to the gates of hell.

That the church is fugitive for these theologians isn't hard to see.[4]

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[3] "Occasional" should be stressed. Generally speaking, Radical Orthodox theologians demonstrate a striking lack of interest in democracy. I don't say they don't care about these things but that they do not spend much or any time reflecting on them.

[4] Stanley Hauerwas, a theologian with great influence in Radical Orthodox circles would complicate this in interesting ways. He doesn't "travel" the way these others do. Sometimes he points not to churches in general (the Mennonites or the Catholics) but to specific practices of Christians such as caring for the sick or the mentally handicapped. He also occasionally points to contemporary groups like

Milbank has to go all the way back to the eleventh century to find his ecclesia.[5] William Cavanaugh and Dan Bell travel both temporally and spatially: in Cavanaugh's case, the eleventh century and Chile;[6] in Bell's, twelfth-century Cistercians or Latin American base communities.[7] Milbank's church was helpless to resist even the faintest birthpangs of modernity. Cavanaugh's is co-extensive with the Pinochet persecution and, like Solidarity or the German Confessing Church, seems unlikely to survive "normalcy." Bell's base communities seem to be more durable but he is unable to give a very thick description of them so we have reason to be skeptical.[8]

Perhaps not surprisingly, much the same observation could be made of the most important contemporary Radical Reformation theologian, John Howard Yoder. Yoder looks back to the sixteenth century to find his ecclesia (and, unlike the Radical Orthodox adherents, is scathing

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the Mennonites or Catholics or to his own congregation. But it is difficult to know how to read such essays. Mennonites and Catholics often find their communities unrecognizably idealized in his descriptions. And it is never clear to the reader just how to read the accounts of his congregation alongside his denunciations of the rest of middle-class American Christianity. Do they contradict each other? Is he just being nice to his friends? Should he revise his conclusions about most liberal capitalist Americans as "shitty people" in light of those he goes to church with? Or perhaps he is simply marking out a reachable goal for other churches, a first step as it were? Or are they deliberate misrepresentations yet ones that may inspire those churches he claims to be representing to attain his vision for them? Then what he is doing is asking them to learn to see themselves through his eyes and therein find ways be more faithful. I take it this is what he is getting at by comparing himself to Everett Chance from David James Duncan's *The Brothers K* in his *In Good Company* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press), 19.

[5] "Once there was no secular . . . but the invention of the secular began at least in the eleventh century." John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 432.

[6] William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

[7] Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *Liberation Theology after the End of History* (London: Routledge, 2001). See also William T. Cavanaugh, "The Ecclesiologies of Medellín and the Lessons of the Base Communities," *Cross Currents* (Spring 1994): 67-84.

[8] See Bell, *Liberation Theology*, 199, n. 84 where he explains why "it is not possible to display the technologies enacted by the church of the poor in the same detail that attends an account of the Cistercians."

about medieval Catholicism which only heightens the fugitivity in his work).[9] Yoder's Anabaptism managed to be "church" for at most a generation or two until it faded into the Mennonitism for which he had nothing but scorn.[10]

There is an unmistakable note of desperation in such travelling. It is as if the theologians are duplicating the role of the colonial anthropologists who found themselves having to go farther and farther upriver, deeper and deeper into the jungle, in order to find the pristine, the pure, the traditional. There may be several reasons for this. One, I think, is simply a profound disappointment in North American and European churches' inability to live up to any kind of radical mandate. Such travelling is provoked by an anxious "it's got to be somewhere." That sort of pressure results in a demand to find what we want to find, what we need to find if we are not to lose hope. It is not that we might lose hope, but that we must lose hope. Here is how Milbank puts it: "Either the Church enacts the vision of paradisal community . . . *or else* it promotes a hellish society beyond any terrors known to antiquity."[11] The all or nothing here, the refusal of any sort of middle ground, sounds the note of desperation. For Radical Orthodoxy, it seems, everything hangs on church being what they say it is. Without "church" the gospel isn't true. I do not wish to contest the convictions that lead to this account of church. I share many of them. But, if we only have a fugitive ecclesia, is that enough to support the weight that we have hung on the church's witness? What happens to claims like: "The meanings of the word 'God' are to be discovered by watching what this community does;" or "The church is the organized form of Jesus' story;" or "There can only be a distinguishable Christian social theory because there is also a . . . definite practice"[12]

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[9] He has also, though rarely, pointed to more recent communities such as the Kimbanguists in the Congo or the Mukyokai of Japan, but he has never done more than mention them in passing.

[10] See for example, "The Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality," In *Consultation on Anabaptist Mennonite Theology*, ed. A. J. Klassen (Fresno, CA: Council of Mennonite Seminaries, 1970), 1-46.

[11] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 433.

[12] The first quote is from Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), xii; the second is from Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of*

when the only thing that might count as that community is episodic, evanescent, fugitive?

Just as Sheldon Wolin recognizes that the space for democracy is severely constricted, all these theologians recognize that church is in a similar situation. But unlike Wolin, they never go on to declare it fugitive and be, if not happy with it, at least resigned to it. Fugitive ecclesia, while abundantly attested to in their writings, is a distant second best. The guiding assumption of their writing, partly because so many of them are attached to a particular Anglo-Catholic account of tradition, *seems* to be that something more consistent is possible and that the current fugitivity is something that we should expect to overcome if only we properly understand the nature of the enemy and surmount our current apathy.

But that possibility is assumed more than it is argued. A rather bleak account of modernity is essential to their ecclesiology. Their churches are described and, to some degree, and not improperly, determined by their cultural-studies driven accounts of "world." The appeals by pragmatists such as Jeffrey Stout for more nuanced critiques are criticized for implying that "things aren't as bad as they seem."[13] But the irony, which turns into a trap, is that things have to be bad enough to justify the rigid church/world dualism but not so bad as to make church impossible. It is tempting to force a choice: either church is possible and therefore things are not so bad; or things are every bit as ugly as they often seem and therefore we should give up hope for anything more than fugitive ecclesia. The latter seems to be the unacknowledged assumption haunting the work of these theologians.

Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 50; the third from Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 380. I should note that Williams has a response to this question, or at least a helpful way of lingering with it, running throughout all his work. Once you say, as Williams does, that "Puzzlement over 'what the church is meant to be' *is* the revelatory operation of God as Spirit," the conversation changes. See Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 144.

[13] The subtitle of Hauerwas and Philip Kenneson's review essay of Jeffrey Stout's *Ethics after Babel*, was "things aren't as bad as they seem." See Stanley Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 97-110.

Milbank and Yoder, however, both seem to accept the fugitive with at least some degree of clarity. Milbank says things like: "We are forced to admit that it [church as he understands it] can only have been present intermittently during the Christian centuries."[14] He accepts the choice and takes the latter option. But he doesn't say if this is just a distant second best or if it is the best that we can achieve within modernity's constraints. Yoder is interesting because he complicates forcing such a choice. His account of world has always been more ambivalent than the others. To borrow terms from Stout, Yoder takes a more stereoscopic and ambivalent view of modernity and liberalism.[15] Moreover, Yoder's lack of interest in diachronic accounts of church undermines conventional accounts of tradition in ways that acknowledge and accept the fugitive. My earlier claim that Yoder's "church" only lasted a generation or two, was misleading. He seems happy to say, in ways that make some Catholics shudder, that throughout history the Holy Spirit has been active in bringing forth, if only briefly, faithful communities of witness to Christ's Lordship—the Waldensians, the Czech Brethren, the Anabaptists, the Society of Friends, the restoration movement, the Kimbanguists, the Mukyokai, and so on—and that despite the unpredictability of such emergence, there is no reason to think that it will not continue. Moreover, he steadfastly resists drawing genetic connections between these movements in ways which would grant the traditionalists what they need. "Democracy," Wolin wrote, "has no continuous history."[16] Yoder and Milbank, it seems, would say the same about church.

This paper will proceed in three sections. First, I will give a brief account of what Wolin meant by fugitive democracy and look at some (friendly) critics of the idea. After that I will return to theology and draw some parallels between fugitive democracy and Radical Orthodox church. In the last section I try to draw out some possible implications and directions of ecclesial fugitivity. The claims of this

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[14] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 432.

[15] See, for example, his claim that Hauerwas' account of modern liberalism is "too simple." John H. Yoder, "Meaning after Babble: With Jeffrey Stout beyond Relativism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 125-139.

[16] Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," 42.

essay are meant to press the ambivalence about fugitivity more than to contest the adequacy of these theologians' accounts of church. I try to follow the trajectory of their arguments just far enough to pose the question: Given what we have learned from these theologians, what do we need to go on to say about the fugitivity of the church, and what should or may follow from that? I will conclude by gesturing towards options that might follow from a clearer recognition of fugitivity, but it is no part of my argument that fugitivity is or is not an adequate account of church. I mean only to say that, according to what I understand of much of the best recent writing on ecclesiology, fugitivity is what we have. But in doing so I do not mean to close off the possibility that fugitivity is an inadequate account of church (or that fugitivity may be a misreading of some of these theologians) so much as to insist that that the best of recent ecclesiology has neglected to tell us why it is inadequate.

I

In order to begin to understand what Wolin meant by fugitivity, let me hazard an all too brief description of democracy by explicating one of Wolin's most succinct accounts of it:

> The idea of democracy that I employ runs roughly like this. Democracy should not depend on the elites making a one-time gift to the demos of a predesigned framework of equal rights. This does not mean that rights do not matter a great deal, but rights in a democracy depend on the demos winning them, extending them substantively, and, in the process, acquiring experience of the political, that is, of participating in power, reflecting on the consequences of its exercise, and struggling to sort out the common well-being amid cultural differences and socioeconomic disparities. The presence of democracy is not signified by paying deference to a formal principle of popular sovereignty by ensuring continuing political education, nor is democracy nurtured by stipulating that reasonable principles of justice be in place from the beginning. Democracy requires that the experiences of justice and injustice serve as moments for the demos to think, to reflect, perchance to construct themselves as actors. Democracy is about the continuing self-fashioning of the demos.[17]

[17] Sheldon Wolin, "The Liberal/Democratic Divide: On Rawls' *Political Liberalism*,"

These brief remarks show that, as Wolin has written elsewhere, "First, democracy means participation."[18] But participation is never just voting or office-holding or even "civic responsibility." Participation, or what Wolin here calls "experience of the political," is experience in which persons negotiate their conflicting interests instead of leaving it to the bureaucrats and managerial elite. But that doesn't quite say enough. It is misleading if it suggests that such deliberation simply replaces what the bureaucrats do. Rather it creates new tasks, foments new conflict. Democracy is a way of "constituting power."[19] It is the "self fashioning of the demos." Democracy isn't just sitting there, waiting to be seized by some person or another, one group or another. It must be created.

It follows that it is also a way of constituting individuals. "Democracy is committed to the claim that experience with, and access to, power is essential to the development of the capacities of ordinary persons because power is crucial to human dignity and realization."[20] The democratic citizen is one who, in the practices of democratic negotiation, is forged into a political being. He or she is truthful, vulnerable, and accountable (for his or her actions and to others). That means each person's (or group's) account of the good must take shape the same way. Democracy is deliberation about what constitutes the good and how to achieve it, not about how to achieve a good known in advance. It requires attentive and receptive listening to different others *and* a willingness to give undiluted voice to my own self-interest. Just as I must not silence others, I must not silence myself. Democracy encourages the voicing of differences. It welcomes and demands dissent from the most unruly corners of the demos. But it is never difference for the sake of difference, or unruliness for its own sake. As Rowan Williams puts it in an essay Wolin would have appreciated, the task is to "find the way in which the goals of individuals and groups might be seen as interdependent,

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Political Theory 24 (1996): 98.

[18] Sheldon Wolin, *The Presence of the Past* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1989), 150.

[19] Ibid., 154.

[20] Ibid.

interwoven. A social vision is what makes it possible to *connect* different sorts of need or want" and which suggests that my needs or wants cannot be discovered or understood in isolation from yours.[21]

Now we can begin to see at least one reason or cluster of reasons why democracy is fugitive. When through such deliberation a collective good emerges and is then achieved, it all too quickly becomes a "common good." That is, it is allowed to be the sort of good that overrules emerging conflicts. This is the attempt to possess the good, to refuse to see it as provisional. It is the democrats themselves who allow this to happen and understandably so. Precisely because of the magnitude of the achievement and the intensity of the struggle, they are unwilling to entrust the achievement to the process which made it possible. Often this takes the form of "constitutionalism." For this reason Wolin reads Plato and even Aristotle as anti-democratic theorists. They are simply the first examples of the perennial resistance to the always transgressive political. It must either be destroyed or contained. For Wolin, the principle agent of containment is the constitution and "They [Plato and Aristotle] invented constitutionalism."[22] "Constitutional democracy" or "political liberalism" is the taming, restraining, and containing of democracy. It is a way of giving a manageable form and structure to the unruly, protean demos. This much is essential to Wolin's account. Democracy always invites resistance, creates its own enemies. The various other agents of containment we find today—the modern state and the market—are in many ways unprecedented, but the fact that democracy is always resisted is as old as Athens. As soon as the democratic moment tries to stretch itself into permanence, as soon as it becomes institutionalized, it loses its transgressive energy.

It should be pointed out that what is fugitive here seems to be the moment when diverse coalitions achieve the political at the national level. At times Wolin grants the name democracy to local, small-scale movements and seems to think that they are not fugitive (democracy

[21] Rowan Williams, "Christian Resources for the Renewal of Vision," in *The Renewal of Social Vision*, eds. Alison J. Elliot and Ian Swanson (Edinburgh: Center for Theology and Public Issues, 1989), 2.

[22] Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," 37.

but without the political[23]). He writes, "Surprisingly, despite the attenuation of democracy at the level of national politics, there still exists a highly flourishing archaic political culture that is democratic, participatory, localist, and, overall, more egalitarian than elitist in ideology. . . . They can be bigoted, provincial, myopic, and anti-intellectual. Yet their archaism represents the main, perhaps the only, democratic counterthrust to statism."[24] But at other times he emphasizes the limitations of localism, which can only be surmounted "by seeking out the evanescent homogeneity of a broader political."[25] That it so rarely does is simply evidence of the contemporary containment of democracy. The modern state can tolerate the local as long as it remains local. "Localism is that state-sponsored Potemkin Village in the age of *Wolfahrtsstaaträson*."[26] That said, it remains true that any attainment of the political will depend upon and grow out of such local participatory democracies. But the worry is that even democratic localism is now momentary and fugitive.

Wolin is driven to this latter mood of skepticism about the local because of the power of what he calls the megastate. Briefly, the megastate is Wolin's way of attending to the manner in which political power is now far too diffuse to be confined to the specific institutions of the state apparatus and instead reaches out into all levels of civil society. There are similarities to Michel Foucault here but Wolin's central debt seems to be to Max Weber, and the role of the corporation in the megastate is emphasized far more than in Foucault. Important for my purposes is that Wolin's account of the megastate helps to explain why he reserves the title "the political" for the level of the entire collectivity. The local may be democratic but it can't be the political because only a movement as broad as the collectivity itself can present a challenge to the enormous power of the megastate, can escape the mutual colonization of public and private into one massive "Economic Polity."

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[23] This seems to me true of Wolin's essay, "Fugitive Democracy," and of some of the essays in his *Presence of the Past*. By the time of the second edition of Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), however, it is clear that Wolin will recognize localism as the political.

[24] Wolin, *The Presence of the Past*, 81.

[25] Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," 44.

[26] Wolin, *The Presence of the Past*, 179.

Many of the essays in the recent *Festschrift* for Wolin, *Democracy and Vision*, are preoccupied with "Fugitive Democracy" (far more than with *Politics and Vision* or *Presence of the Past*). The responses to the essay are multiple but I want to focus on three of them—Nicholas Xenos, Peter Euben, and Stephen White—all of which concur with Wolin's invocation of the 1989 revolution in Eastern Europe as a stellar example of the political.

Xenos takes the fugitive character of democracy for granted and, unlike Connolly, thinks that Wolin's argument is "without nostalgia or despair." Xenos' essay closes by reflecting on Timothy Garton Ash's account of "the central voice" of Czechoslovakia's resistance, the Civic Forum. According to Ash, the Civic Forum defied the categories of political theory. He wrote, "A political scientist would be hard pressed to find a term to describe" the Forum. It was, in Xenos' words, a "democratic moment that cannot be understood in terms of a preexisting entity." It was ad hoc and spontaneous. Ash is tempted to call it politics in a "pure" form. It is not a formal, centralized party. It lacks "a legitimating structure to undergird its claim to being representative" yet it is unmistakably the voice of the *demos*. In Havel's words, it is "infused with enthusiasm for a particular purpose and disappearing when that purpose has been achieved." Havel's presidency, then, is the end, not the beginning of the political. That is the democratic moment. "Democracy eludes definition because it has a protean nature, but it is not unrecognizable. It is transformative, but it leaves no institutional product. It exists in the moment when we open ourselves and our communities to the unfamiliar and the unsettling, then dissolves when a new familiarity and a new settlement take place."[27] It is invariably "unsustainable, episodic, unpredictable, and rare."[28] For Xenos, this provokes no disappointment at all. The political simply is fugitive and since there is no reason to expect that it might be anything more than that, there is no reason to be disappointed in its lack of sustainability.

Peter Euben doesn't directly engage Xenos or "Fugitive Democracy" and is less interested than Xenos in exegesis of Wolin. The bulk of

[27] Nicholas Xenos, "Momentary Democracy," in *Democracy and Vision*, 36.
[28] Ibid., 34.

his essay is concerned with describing Athenian democracy, the Stoic reaction to its collapse, and an incisive critique of Martha Nussbaum's espousal of an updated Stoicism. He ends his essay with an attempt to retrieve, in contrast to Nussbaum, a democratic ethos inspired by Athens but cognizant of the great historical chasm separating the globalized world from the polis. Here his remarks become pertinent to my discussion. His interest is in how to cultivate a radical democratic politics in the context of globalization without underestimating the importance of place. To that end he invokes those "places in civil society where participatory opportunities" exist and finds a great many such places. They parallel to some degree what Wolin calls the "archaic" or the local. Any such place may be called a "parallel polis," the term used to describe the engine of the 1989 revolution. He argues that the parallel polis "is an ever present possibility even under the most inhospitable conditions."[29] It remains possible even under conditions as inhospitable as the megastate, which Euben says we must acknowledge but doesn't think it means that we must abandon the state/civil society distinction. If the parallel polis could work in Eastern Europe, it can also work elsewhere. According to Euben, Havel "argued that the situations [the parallel polis] was meant to combat . . . was present in the Western democracies as well."[30]

Stephen White brings out the contestable nature of this last claim in a very thoughtful essay. He writes,

> It is difficult, at least for someone like me, not to find Wolin's radical democratic conception of the political inspiring. And yet, the more I ponder its trajectory and ethos, the more I find it to be tailored to what is too extraordinary, too heroic, at least in regard to the realities of late modern democratic life. No doubt, Wolin intends moments of forging commonality to be extraordinary in some senses. But I think his conception of the political is extraordinary in ways that make it too remote from the ongoing expression of democratic energies, which is something he does not intend.[31]

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[29] Peter Euben, "The Polis, Globalization, and the Politics of Place," in *Democracy and Vision*, 258.

[30] Ibid., 282.

[31] Stephen White, "Three Conceptions of the Political: The Real World of Late Modern Democracy," in *Democracy and Vision*, 177. I understand White's ques-

Like Xenos and Euben, the example Wolin appeals to in "Fugitive Democracy" is from Eastern Europe, specifically Poland's Solidarity movement. White asks, "Would it make sense to expect such a Solidarity movement in Poland today?" The democratic achievement of Solidarity, he argues, was "deeply bound up with the clarity, intensity, and extensiveness of the oppression in Communist Poland. The extremity of the injustice called forth an extraordinary response."[32] For White, Wolin's democracy becomes a possibility only in response to particular circumstances. Wolin's vision is "appropriate primarily for situations ripe for revolutionary transformation." Such situations are ones in which there is a "relatively monolithic source of injustice that can become a clear and steady target or foe."[33] In the absence of such moral clarity, or in the absence of a clearly identifiable enemy, the political will be much less likely but also should not be expected. White thinks Wolin's account is inadequate in a way that Xenos doesn't. There is a certain agreement between the two about where and when democracy is possible. The difference is that it worries White and not Xenos. But White also thinks that episodes like the 1989 revolution cannot be invoked as easily as Euben does. One way to describe what White is doing is to say that he shifts the question from: "What makes it *impossible* to achieve anything more than a fugitive political?" to "What makes it *possible* to achieve it at all?'

II

Two of the finest works of political theology in recent decades are Daniel Bell's *Liberation Theology at the End of History* and William Cavanaugh's *Torture and Eucharist*. While both are deeply indebted to thinkers like Hauerwas and Milbank, they add to them an engaged activist anger, intensity, and sensitivity. Furthermore, especially in the case of Bell, the reading of the liberationists demonstrates an attentiveness and creativity that few others have managed. I turn to them

tions for Wolin's democracy to be similar to Jeffrey Stout's questions for New Traditionalism. See Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[32] White, "Three Conceptions of the Political," 177.

[33] Ibid., 178.

now partly because of my great appreciation for both texts, but primarily because important similarities and crucial contrasts between fugitive democracy and fugitive ecclesiologies show up most clearly here.

A central target of Bell's and Cavanaugh's critiques is the claim that civil society politics (grassroots social movements, for example) provide a way to influence the state apparatus for the better without taking hold of the reins of the state itself. This is problematic, first of all, because it is still wedded to politics as statecraft. It may not want to occupy Caesar's throne or be the ruling party, but it will not allow any such activity to be an end in itself or political in itself. Its value is not intrinsic but comes from the influence it can have on the state, which is still seen as the political actor par excellence. But secondly, they argue that the distinction itself is no longer useful. Here they are influenced by a reading of Foucault and Gilles Deleuze articulated most clearly by Michael Hardt.[34] Instead of state and civil society we now have what Foucault called "governmentality." The state is no longer the sole agency of disciplinary power but is part of a diffuse network of such agencies. The institutions of what gets called civil society—the factory, school, church, hospital—are part of this network. Civil society is not a free space from which to contest state power; it is part of the network of normalization and is so in such a way that makes a distinction between it and the state impossible. The failure to realize this is a failure to offer any real resistance to governmentality. Hardt goes on from here to show how Deleuze moves one step beyond Foucault from the disciplinary society to the society of control. The disciplinary society was made up of clearly defined institutions, each with relatively distinct logics. The society of control is the collapsing of these distinctions into a generalized logic of control and the passage from what Marx called the formal subsumption of labour to the real subsumption.[35]

But a question emerges here because neither Bell nor Cavanaugh are clear about how it is that their churches of choice manage to escape governmentality. In the case of Bell's base communities that may be easier to imagine. But Cavanaugh (in *Torture and Eucharist*)

[34] Michael Hardt, "The Withering of Civil Society," *Social Text* 14 (1995): 27-44.
[35] Ibid., 35ff.

consistently has in mind the entire Chilean Catholic community. (To put it in Wolin's terms, Bell's base communities, unlike Cavanaugh's church, are examples of local democracies that do not achieve the political.) I mention this to bring to light the crucial and instructive difference with Wolin. While he does not make explicit use of Foucault's governmentality, his "megastate" functions to make a similar point about the usefulness of civil society as a space in which to locate resistance.[36] It is precisely this that makes him fear that the political will be fugitive at best. It doesn't occur to him to suggest a withdrawal from civil society in order to get something more than the fugitive, because it is not at all clear what such a withdrawal could possibly mean. Governmentality or the megastate is not something you withdraw from or transcend or escape or elude. The whole point is that there is nowhere to go. If there is an outside then it is not megastate or governmentality or the society of control.[37] So it seems that, in Bell and Cavanaugh, there is a curious sleight of hand by which the church, unlike Hardt and Negri's proletariat, somehow manages to escape but in a way that is not accounted for. I am not quarrelling with their visions of what church can be—a disciplined body formed by particular practices and which understands itself as a politics in its own right, a politics that does not have to influence the state in order for its politics to count. But it is not clear to me how this gains a privilege over or outside contemporary technologies of control.

Hardt's account allows for two ways of making an argument for some kind of outside.[38] Since his account begins with Hegel, concrete labour still counts as an outside to civil society. For Hegel,

[36] See, for example, "Collective Identity and Constitutional Power," "Democracy and the Welfare State," and "Democracy without the Citizen," in Wolin, *The Presence of the Past*.

[37] The point has been deftly made in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). As they insist, it was clear long before them in Michel Foucault: "It seems to me that power *is* 'always already there,' that one is never 'outside' it, that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in." *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 141.

[38] For the following, see Hardt, "The Withering of Civil Society," 37-39.

civil society was the organization of abstract labour, the taming of the "unruly and savage beast" of concrete labour, which, for Hegel, the peasant's labour was paradigmatic. Secondly, the move from civil society to the society of control is marked by the passage from the formal subsumption of labour to its real subsumption. For Marx, formal subsumption meant capital's ability to incorporate, or abstract, already existing labour, labour born prior to and outside of capital's demands. Real subsumption means that capital creates its own labour. It no longer has to incorporate the external, but instead labour is born internally. Therefore, an argument for pockets of labour which were still pre-real subsumption would be outside to the society of control, a civil society that could be thought of on Gramsci's terms instead of Foucault's. Bell and Cavanaugh don't attempt any such arguments. This is not surprising. It is not clear that they can be made and Hardt himself only gestures towards the latter. But the point is simply that Hardt acknowledges the space he is in and the difficulty of escaping it. I fear Bell and Cavanaugh are not as careful.

Alternatively, if this vision of church is achieved, as they argue it is in the base communities or in the Chilean Catholic community and as they seem to think it can be in North America, then there is space to entertain the argument that maybe Hardt, Negri, and others have overstated their claims about the withering of civil society. It might be that some grassroots social movements or "civil society" organizations may also occasionally become free spaces.[39] I do not mean to

[39] In other words, I don't understand why Cavanaugh and Bell don't take the path chosen by Romand Coles. He writes, in an essay on the Industrial Areas Foundation, "Following a period in the 1980s and 1990s, during which students of politics too often uncritically celebrated a cure-all notion of civil society, many are beginning to articulate more nuanced perspectives. On the one hand, civil society harbors emergent democratic associations, fosters broader grassroots participation, spawns movements that offer resistance in the face of corporate markets and state bureaucracies, and is a site of various forms of 'micro-politics' that tend to transform our sensibilities and practices in more pluralizing and egalitarian directions. On the other hand, when one examines associational life in terms of things like resources, membership, access, norms of identity/difference, circuits of power, and capacities, one sees it is often colonized by corporations and bureaucracies, is the abode of myriad fundamentalist movements, and tends to manifest racial, class, gender, and other biases. Given this messy complexity,

insist, with Hardt and Negri, that there is and can be no outside. My claim is only that if there is it must be accounted for.

Much of the persuasive power of Cavanaugh's *Torture and Eucharist* comes from a similar sleight of hand. His focus on Chile's *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional* is, of course, appropriate. But to make the argument about civil society, he would have to have also dealt with the more prosaic, mundane functions of the state in Chile. His refusal of the state/civil society distinction should lead him to also discuss all the institutions which, for example, Foucault gave so much attention. But the Pinochet regime's extensive reliance on torture allows Cavanaugh to avoid all of Foucault's institutions (such as school, hospital, factory) except the prison. The book succeeds brilliantly as an argument for, and explication of, a particular case of ecclesial resistance to the modern state. But it is not as clear that it can also be an argument with governmentality.

In his later book Cavanaugh does make that argument, extending his critique of civil society and adding significant detail to the argument in *Torture and Eucharist.* In *Theopolitical Imagination*[40] he makes many important criticisms of "civil society" organizations and grassroots social movements, criticisms that I often find to be appropriate. But I remain baffled by the way weaknesses and failures in social movements are taken to be *essential* to the movements, while the same weaknesses and failures in the church are somehow accidental. Moreover, it is not clear to me why Cavanaugh's critique of civil society doesn't lead him to consider varieties of politics recommended by non-church thinkers who are just as critical of the concept of "civil society"—for example, Wolin or Hardt and Negri. Of course, Hardt and Negri play a foundational role in the critique, but their proposals for a radical politics are never allowed to be either potential allies for Cavanaugh's church or to complicate Cavanaugh's theory of church. It becomes entirely too easy to forget that the animating vision of the believer is not a holy church; it is creation restored. (Better put,

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there is a growing sense that our analyses of civil society must be more subtle and variegated." Romand Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 213-214.

[40] William Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (London: T&T Clark, 2002).

as Rowan Williams does, it becomes entirely too possible to see these as mutually exclusive.[41]) Williams writes,

> Christians in general and theologians in particular are thus going to be involved as best they can in those enterprises in their culture that seek to create or recover a sense of shared discourse and common purpose in human society. This can mean various things. The most obvious is some sort of critical identification with whatever political groupings speak for a serious and humane resistance to consumer pluralism and the administered society.[42]

He goes on to note as examples of grassroots civil society movements around ecological issues, feminism, civil rights, and peace. It is not clear that Cavanaugh or Bell would disagree with this (but not clear enough that they would agree). But what is clear is, first, that they rarely if ever acknowledge such "enterprises" or "political groupings," and second, that their account of civil society makes it unlikely that they could even if they wanted to (and I suspect they do want to).

In contrast to Bell and Cavanaugh, Milbank seems to have taken significantly more from his recent attention to Hardt and Negri. Where he once said things like: "Either the Church enacts the vision of paradisal community . . . or else it promotes a hellish society beyond any terrors known to antiquity," his recent work is more nuanced: "How is the Church to evaluate these circumstances [the circumstances of postmodernity]? . . . Our attitude is bound to be a complex one. Not outright refusal, nor outright acceptance."[43] Unlike Bell and Cavanaugh, Hardt and Negri seem to have taught Milbank that the old spaces of purity, whether named church or proletariat, are no longer to be found.

It is not yet clear what that may mean for how we read some of Milbank's earlier work. For example, he once wrote, "Our given

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[41] As usual Rowan Williams puts it well, reminding us of the church's "vocation to join in God's creation of a world imaging his own life." Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 1994), 50.

[42] Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 37.

[43] John Milbank, "The Gospel of Affinity," in *The Strange New World of the Gospel*, eds., Carl E Braaten and Robert H. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 8-9.

historical circumstances limit the chances we have of behaving ethically. . . . [T]he nature of our present historical condition is such that we are faced with tragic dilemmas in which it is impossible to avoid complicity in evil."[44] We "can only decide and act ethically within the way of arranging, picturing and speaking of the world" that society provides us with. Our "moral capacity is extra-ethically constrained." Some of the language here is troubling—i.e., it is not at all clear what the "unlimited," the "unconstrained," or "extra-ethical" could intelligibly be, and "tragic" is in desperate need of explication. Against Hauerwas' pacifism, Milbank writes that in "extreme market liberalism . . . the church is simply robbed of certain possibilities of realizing certain practices which should define its nature."[45] Here again it is certainly fair to say that "extreme market liberalism" may make certain desirable ecclesial practices impossible. But for the moment the question is simply this: If violence is to be permitted under the guise of tragedy and historical conditions, what is it about modern Christian (non) practice that doesn't get the same absolution? Milbank must tell us what possibilities he doesn't think we are robbed of under liberalism. He must help us distinguish between possibilities and impossibilities, between the opportunities squandered by our unfaithfulness and opportunities closed off by liberalism. Take, for example, an essay like "Can Morality Be Christian?" Surely much of what is suggested here is, like pacifism, an ideal which liberalism has robbed us of. How much of this does he expect us to be faithful to and how much can we ignore in light of "extreme market liberalism? On what grounds can we give up on pacifism but not the suggestions in "Can Morality Be Christian?"? Milbank owes us such distinctions if we are to know to what he is calling the church.

Interesting contrasts with Yoder and Hauerwas emerge here. Yoder doesn't engage in the sort of cultural criticism to which the rest devote so much attention. On one hand, that is one of the most refreshing things about him, the ability to do theology well in the manner Barth suggested, "as if nothing had happened." He does not allow his vision

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[44] John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 234.

[45] Ibid., 30.

of church to become dialectically over-determined by "world." But, on the other hand, it means that he leaves us without a diagnosis of *why* church is fugitive. The implicit suggestion that church was no easier in the Middle Ages is certainly true. But we still need some account of the particular circumstances that presently make for fugitivity. Without that we are left to think that church is fugitive because we just aren't trying hard enough.

By contrast, Hauerwas does provide an account of the circumstances that make it difficult to embody church. But there too it is sometimes hard to avoid the impression that the message is "if only Christians would quit selling out to liberalism then we could recover a faithful witness." The church is criticized for selling out as if it was something it had a choice about, which is odd to say, at least given how much Hauerwas resists the language of "choice"—as if there is a certain freedom to maneuver that, due to a lack of will or conviction or commitment, we just aren't taking advantage of.[46] The reader rarely gets that impression from Wolin (or Milbank) whose emphasis is on the increasing unavailability of such spaces of maneuverability. That doesn't mean Wolin is more pessimistic or that he is apathetic or cynical. It means he is more relentless in pursuing the conclusions implied by the critique. It is never clear to Wolin just what we might do. Of course he knows that we must quit thinking of politics as statecraft. He knows that "democracy needs to be reconceived as something other than a form of government: as a mode of being that is conditioned by bitter experience, doomed to succeed only temporarily, but is a recurrent possibility so long as the memory of the political survives."[47] Not only is the political impossible to institutionalize or to sustain for very long, its emergence is also impossible to predict. We may try to cultivate a readiness for its appearance, even to foment its appearance (by active participation in the grassroots social movements, by actively encouraging such movements to be democratic), but when and where we will succeed is impossible to know

[46] This may be because Hauerwas never pushes his critique of liberalism to the Deleuzean distances that Bell and Cavanaugh do and therefore feels more confident in civil society. But I doubt it.

[47] Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," 43.

in advance. All the odds are stacked against us. That will mean one thing for Wolin and another for theologians. Wolin doesn't have the same kind of weight hanging on the embodiment. For the theologian what is at stake is the validity of the church's witness.

III

There are many possible paths that might be taken from here, few of which are mutually exclusive, and aspects of which are present in all of the theologians of the fugitive ecclesia. In conclusion I briefly sketch some of them.

First, we may simply want to accept fugitive ecclesia, even heighten it. Then we would say that the possibility of church in the culture of the late capitalist West is now something like the possibility in, say, India or Saudi Arabia where the Christian presence is very small (I leave uncontested the suggestion that small is bad) and the missionary efforts almost negligible—that in contrast to the premodern era when the West was more like contemporary Africa where Christianity swept across the continent in a matter of decades. There is, however, the important difference that we are *post*-Christian. Now, instead of fertile soil for the flower of Christian faith to grow, we have a sort of post-nuclear ash in which the church cannot take root any more than can other robust forms of democratic community. This is simply the way it is and therefore we should celebrate the moments of fugitivity rather than mourn that that is all there is. It could happen that the more we stress this, the less culpable we are, hence, the more lethargic. Pessimism breeds apathy. But it could also happen that we learn to cultivate joyfully a readiness for the episodic ecclesial moment.

A second option would be to say that our expectations are simply too high and should be scaled back, be made more "realistic." We would say that we need to face up to the fact that historical conditions simply rob us of some possibilities of faithfulness. But it is hard to see how a faith rooted in the example of Christ can have expectations that are too high without sacrificing the priority of that example. The inadequacies of Reinhold Niebuhr's christology make the point.

Moreover, this is what we have. It is the problem that in one way or another all these theologians are wrestling with; it is not a solution.

Third, we could, like Karl Barth, refuse to make the church bear so much weight. Barth is as fond as Milbank of the adjective "only." But for Barth it modifies "Jesus Christ," not "the church." The Barthian option maintains the high expectations and standards, but doesn't pin so much on meeting them—better, it doesn't have to pin so much on the church meeting them because Jesus Christ met them on the cross and everything is pinned on that event. While "the world would be lost without Jesus Christ and His Word and work . . . the world would not necessarily be lost if there were no Church."[48] It is not clear, but I think it is highly doubtful that any of the theologians I have been concerned with would agree with this claim of Barth's. However, it is this which enables such radical dispossession on Barth's part. It also makes an acceptance of the fugitive possible, even necessary. Milbank accepts fugitivity because he must in light of his understanding of the secular. Barth accepts it because he can in light of his understanding of the primacy of Christ. He adamantly refuses the temporal travelling of Radical Orthodoxy. "It is not in any sense strange that the world is secular. This is simply to say that the world is the world. It was always secular, *there is no greater error* than to imagine that this was not the case in the much-vaunted Middle Ages."[49] From the perspective of fugitive ecclesia, the common criticism that Barth's ecclesiology sacrifices concreteness loses some of its force.[50] For Barth, as with Yoder, this makes defenselessness possible. *If* we accept the fugitive, then the recourse to authoritarian models of leadership (exemplified in Milbank and occasionally Hauerwas) becomes pointless as well as unfaithful.

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[48] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1962), 826.

[49] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 668 (emphasis mine).

[50] See, for example, Reinhard Hütter, "Karl Barth's 'Dialectical Catholicity': Sic et Non," *Modern Theology* 16 (2000). Hütter argues that Luther shows the way past Barth because "instead of pointing as witnesses to the Holy Spirit's activity [as they do for Barth] these practices [the marks of the church] rather embody the Holy Spirit's work." The question then is, "What do we do when churches bearing those marks become fugitive?"

A fourth option, which Hauerwas comes closest to and from which Milbank and Yoder remain distant, would be to say that we lack the necessary skills and capacity for seeing the ways in which we might actually already be meeting those expectations. This means we must confess that we may be blinded by certain habits of vision, blind to our successes as much as our failures. Of course here too, the more we accept fugitivity, it may be that the less confident we can be of our ability to unlearn those habits. But there may be reason to hope that if we can unlearn those habits, then possibilities emerge for perceiving new shapes of faithfulness. I say *might* because the point is that until we unlearn those habits we will never know if or how we are faithful or if and how we are not being faithful.

The habits in question, it is worth insisting, are *academic* habits. Milbank began *The Word Made Strange* with a frank acknowledgement that, "For all the talk of a theology that would reflect on practice, the truth is that we remain uncertain as to where today to locate true Christian practice." But his infamous response was, "In his or her uncertainty as to where to find this, the theologian feels almost that the entire ecclesial task falls on his own head. . . . It can feel as if it is the theologian alone . . . who must perform this task of redeeming estrangement."[51] That is, instead of joining a monastery or a Catholic Worker house or becoming a carpenter, Milbank proposes to crawl deeper into the ivory cave. At worst, this is simply counter-productive. At best it is startlingly unimaginative. Theologians are the last people to look to in a situation of fugitivity. The poor, as Herbert McCabe repeatedly insisted, are the first.[52]

Fifth, this might also suggest the importance of a certain renewed interest in what is going on outside the church, in other religious groups, in various social movements. If it is true that we need to try harder, then outsiders may be able to teach us how. Instead of, or along with, being driven to such great distances to find the fugitive ecclesia, we might look more intently for what Barth called "secular parables"

[51] Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 1.

[52] See, for example, McCabe, "Poverty and God" in *God, Christ and Us*, ed. Brian Davies (London: Continuum, 2003), 53-57. It is a telling measure of Milbank's work that the poor are almost totally absent from it.

of the church (not that they are any less fugitive), to ways of being in the world which may witness to Christ's lordship if not in name. "Once some who affirm the name deny or pervert its historic content, the door is also open for others, if they want to affirm the content, to do it without the name."[53] Am I mistaken in thinking that, with the exception of Yoder and Williams, the search for the fugitive ecclesia has created a defensiveness, a resistance to doing so? As if what is now most needed is to secure an account of the church which precludes finding joy outside it even, or especially, since it can't find joy inside it? On one hand, it can sound as if Bell and Cavanaugh exemplify this defensiveness. On the other, their work is indispensable in showing us the great care that will be required if possibilities for church are not to be determined by an account of civil society.

Sixth, and finally, fugitive ecclesia could also create the space for a renewed attention to friendship. If church is as rare as these theologians think, then all their reflections on the church, while important, also make room for greater attention to pairs instead of communities. We may even want to revive the long discredited epithet "organized religion." It may suggest that all we can hope for is the occasional intimacy of two or three. In the novels of contemporary continental writers such as W. G. Sebald, it is the intimacy of just two or three which has become fugitive.

I take my cue here from Aristotle as well as Sebald.

> But, with a few exceptions, Sparta is the only state in which the lawgiver seems to have paid attention to upbringing and pursuits. In most states such matters are utterly neglected, and each man lives as he pleases, "dealing out law to his children and his wife" as the Cyclopes do. Now, the best thing would be to make the correct care of these matters a common concern. But if the community neglects them, it would seem to be incumbent upon every man to help his children and friends attain virtue. This he will be capable of doing, or at least intend to do.[54]

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[53] John H. Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 259-260.

[54] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1962), 1180a, 25ff.

Hauerwas and Charles Pinches gloss this with: "Thus friendship becomes for Aristotle the ground of a true polity. Further, if a state fails to achieve this polity, the only available resource of virtue is, again, the association among friends."[55] They hear in these lines a sadness and poignancy produced by Aristotle's awareness that he writes amid failures to achieve this polity just as we do. "The failure of the political represents a failure in political friendship, the only recourse after the failure being a narrower friendship that begins the pursuit of virtue over again at a much reduced level."[56] Hauerwas and Pinches are on to something very important here. They write, "The only political alternative we have [given the modern state] is friendship." But they go on to add, "particularly the friendship we call 'church.'"[57] But it is not at all clear that this final move is warranted. I mean to say that acknowledgement of fugitivity suggests that the honest appropriation of Aristotle here shows that friendship is an alternative not just to the collapse of the polis, or to the modern state, but also to the church when it has become fugitive.

Perhaps such a line of thought helps us to reread Milbank's declaration about the theologian alone. A couple of pages back, I took Milbank to task for the arrogance of this claim. But perhaps I misread

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[55] Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 38.

[56] Ibid., 37-38. Elsewhere Hauerwas addresses the same passage from Aristotle, writing, "It is well known that Aristotle thought 'ethics' to be primarily a branch of politics, since 'becoming good' ultimately depended on the existence of a good politics. Yet Aristotle was by no means ready to despair at the possibility of producing morally decent people if such a polity did not exist. . . . Friendship thus becomes the crucial relationship for Aristotle, since, in the absence of good polities, it provides the context necessary for the training of virtue. It is certainly not too far-fetched to suggest that Aristotle's description of his social situation is not that different from our own." Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. John Barkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 236-237, n. 24.

[57] Hauerwas, *Christians among the Virtues*, 186, n. 4. Paul Wadell in his fine book *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1989) also makes this passage central to the need for a defense of friendship in a world not that different from Aristotle's Athens. But like Hauerwas and Pinches, "friendship" is immediately assimilated to church.

it. Perhaps the assertion of aloneness calls us to think of Milbank as a theologian of loneliness. Instead of understanding the line as an arrogant assertion of Milbank's vast theological abilities and correspondingly faithful discipleship, I propose to understand it as a plain-spoken, simple assertion of isolation. Not only isn't it arrogant, it isn't even a claim to uniqueness. Instead of singling himself out with this line, Milbank places himself squarely within "the torment, the sickness, the strangeness, the exile, the disappointment, the boredom, the restlessness" that characterizes the modern subject.[58] Declarations of aloneness such as this are simultaneously pleas for friendship. They are made in the hope that the call will be answered. Such declarations will call forth as many, if not more, enemies as friends. As with Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation, it will often be hard to tell the difference.

[58] This is how Stanley Cavell describes Wittgenstein's portrait of the modern subject. See his *Cities of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 329.

SEVEN

D. Stephen Long

DESIRE AND THEOLOGICAL POLITICS

> *But an anxiety to make a clear distinction between the two orders, natural and supernatural, must not prevent faith from bearing its fruit.*
>
> HENRI DE LUBAC

I was washing dishes after putting my one-year-old daughter in her crib. My three-year-old was waiting for me to read her a story before she too went off to bed when suddenly our evening was interrupted by a noise that sounded like a bomb going off in their shared bedroom. I ran into the room to find splinters of glass everywhere and a large cinder block lying on the pillow on my older daughter's bed. The cinder block was intentionally thrown through a window into their bedroom. My one-year-old was covered with the splintered glass, but thankfully unharmed. I picked her up out of the crib, carefully brushed off the glass, took her into the next room and sat down, stunned, frightened, and angry. I wondered who would do such a thing? I desired to find out who did this and to make sure that they would not be able to threaten my family again. This incident generated strong passions, emerging out of a basic animality grounded in my love for my children. I would have done almost anything to protect them.

Many people, I assume, have some such story of violence perpetrated against them and the corresponding passion and desires it generates. In our case it was the crack dealers next door who harassed us. To live next door to a household that you know is

willing to do you harm causes you to think long and hard about the reasonableness of violence, self-protection, the role of the police in society and even the legitimacy or illegitimacy of war. It raises the question of the legitimacy of those passions that would instinctively lead you to defend those you love as well as those who are innocent. I recognize one cannot easily move from an argument for the legitimacy or illegitimacy of self-defense in a neighbourhood, to the legitimacy or illegitimacy of war among nation-states, or among peoples who have no legitimate nation. Self-defense and/or policing might be morally legitimate whereas war would be illegitimate. Or if we were to follow Saint Augustine, policing and war may be legitimate whereas self-defense is illegitimate. But I do think a common desire, a common "natural inclination," brings these issues—self-defense, the role of the police, and war—together. The desire to prevent the violent from unjust aggression against one's own person, family, neighbourhood, and even nation is both a naturally human and possibly a supernaturally inspired desire. After all, what kind of father would I have been if I were unmoved by the events that unfolded that evening? Had I turned away from that violence, pretended it did not happen or that it was not a genuine threat to my children, had I gazed upon it without ordering those natural desires to legitimate ends, had I met it with nonchalance or a stoic indifference, then surely those observing my actions would rightly question my love for my children.

The desire to protect, possibly even to use violence against unjust aggressors for the sake of our neighbours, is most often, I am convinced, the cause of war.[1] Any analysis of war that does not take this into account, any analysis that assumes war is always some plot for the wealthy to gain riches or the powerful to triumph over the oppressed and powerless (although such may certainly contribute to war), fails to recognize the moral rationality of war and will most likely be dismissed by all who are not already committed pacifists,

[1] I believe this is much more basic to the causes leading to war than that all too common analysis that claims dogmatic attachments to truth produces war. That analysis, found from Kant to John Lennon, suggests that "epistemological humility" should lessen war. It has not worked.

and for good reason.[2] In fact, these natural desires may be the very basis for political community, not in the Hobbesian sense that we are drawn together out of a desire for protection against each other, but in the sense that our desire to be with the ones we love seeks expression in families, neighbourhoods, cities, and so on. We seek to live in neighbourhoods where peace and harmony prevail.

If we do have such natural desires, and I think such unformed desires are part of our creaturely being, then how do we properly order them? Are these desires sufficient for political and social community? Can they serve that end without any reference to our natural desire for God? Can these natural desires be finally separated so that we could have a thoroughly "natural beatitude" that governs political and social life and a "supernatural beatitude" that governs the Christian life? Since the work of Henri de Lubac, these questions have become important questions for theological politics. Radical Orthodoxy developed its alternative political theology, an alternative to both the liberal Protestant metanarrative and also liberation theology, based upon the importance of these questions. For John Milbank, a positive answer to the first two questions and a negative one to the third leads to the consequence that Christians should eschew pacifism. Although I find his answers to these three questions persuasive, I am not convinced they lead to this consequence.

Milbank affirms a proper desire to protect the innocent; he understands it as part of our "animality" that springs from "unfallen intuitions." But he does not explore its phenomenology adequately in view of our natural desire for God, a desire that can only be satisfied supernaturally. He does hint in such a direction, and this hint fits better his earlier work where he drew upon both de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar to develop a theological politics that sought to "supernaturalize the natural." In this essay, I will first discuss the importance of de Lubac's questions for how we think about natural desires. Then I will explore von Balthasar's development of those questions for a theological politics, which he suggested but inadequately developed.

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[2] For a good discussion of this see Stanley Hauerwas, "Should War Be Eliminated?" in *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1985).

Finally, I will return to Milbank's defense of our natural desire to defend the innocent and suggest it should not lead to the prohibition against pacifism (or celibacy) as he suggests.

De Lubac's Questions

If we have a purely natural desire for social and political community, then an analysis of nature alone could suffice in order to explain those communities. Most political and social analyses since the Renaissance assume natural means alone provide all we need to accomplish social or political analysis. This was based on the claim that the ancients, without any recourse to Christian theology, set forth persuasive theories of political life. This Renaissance idea continues into present-day university education. Introductory courses in political science may have students read Plato's *Republic* or Aristotle's *Politics*, but they will not require the biblical Sermon on the Mount. We clearly distinguish the natural ends served by our desires for political and social community from "supernatural ends" served by desires for God. In fact, the former now police the latter, requiring them at most to be private so that they will not interfere with political life.

Henri de Lubac found this division deeply problematic and one of the reasons for the emergence of secularism in Western culture. He found its origins in the development of a "new system" of desire, tracing it to receptions of Aristotle's teaching in the later Middle Ages. Based on the Aristotelian principle that "every being must find its end, corresponding to its natural appetite and natural power, within the limitations of its own nature," some Scholastics developed a notion of a natural beatitude based on what had been a purely hypothetical speculation: God could have created the human creature with a pure nature, without any grace that would in human nature per se direct the human creature toward God. Without any "natural desire" for God the creature could still be happy in social and political community. Once this natural beatitude became more than a hypothetical possibility, it became the basis for moral and political theory. This raised the question: Could moral and political action attain, outside of grace, the moral ends necessary for political life? This trajectory

was accentuated by the proper fear among the magisteria that any natural desire for God would require God to owe to human creatures supernatural beatitude, taking away its gratuitous character. Both the condemnation of Baianism by St. Pius V and Pius XII's *Humani Generis* sought to secure God's graciousness from any nature that would be owed grace because of its natural merits.[3]

De Lubac traces the history of this development of a "pure nature" from Luis de Molina to Francisco Suárez and argues that it results in a departure from Christian tradition. "A purely natural order was therefore possible, not only, as many had allowed for long past, at different degrees among their numberless hypotheses 'from the absolute power of God,' but from 'ordained power;' 'a natural end is sufficient.'"[4] This produced a "fatal separation" between "nature and the supernatural," which led de Lubac to ask, "Was not the relative autonomy which it granted nature, as it defined it, a temptation to independence? Did it not encourage in this way the 'secularization' let loose at the Renaissance and already anticipated in the preceding centuries by the Averroist movement?"[5]

De Lubac finds the term "supernature" replacing the traditional "supernatural." Then "nature" and "supernature" become distinct domains regulated by distinctive "desires" that need not bear upon each other; the latter eventually becomes a domain distinct from reason. He writes, "Nature and 'supernature' (the term that was increasingly used) were paired off in such a way that the second came to seem to jealous reason only a vain shadow, a sham adornment."[6] This allowed for a two-source theory of truth where faith and reason policed each other. Such policing was in its origin no part of a secular program that sought to free reason from faith; it was the result of efforts to protect grace that led theologians themselves to erect a barricade between them. Then, as de Lubac recognized, "man settled

[3] De Lubac notes that although Baius sought to free Augustinian thought from impure Aristotelian principles, he in effect committed the same error those who received the Aristotelian principle such as Cajetan, Molina, and Suárez.

[4] Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology* (New York: The Crossroad Publishinig Company, 2000), 227.

[5] Ibid., 233.

[6] Ibid., 264.

into natural religion."[7] De Lubac's critique of this fall into "natural religion" bears striking similarities to Karl Barth's theology. But whereas de Lubac, followed by von Balthasar, finds a positive role for our natural desire for God, Barth gives it only a negative role in God's economy.

Von Balthasar's Natural Acting Area

De Lubac's presentation of what it means to think nature and grace within a natural desire for God that can only be accomplished supernaturally bears important similarities to Karl Barth's theology, especially Barth's principle that covenant is the internal basis for creation and creation is the external basis for covenant. As with Barth, so with de Lubac, we cannot move directly from nature to God. Nor do we find some overarching philosophical framework within which the logic of "'divinely revealed' realities" works. They have their own peculiar logic. All of this Barth certainly would affirm. However, Barth would have little place for a natural desire for God, and, according to von Balthasar, this is what distances his political theology from that of de Lubac's.

The differences between Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar often get unnecessarily exaggerated; Radical Orthodoxy participates in those exaggerations. Yet one place where this difference is not exaggerated is an evaluation of the human creature's natural desire for God. As is well known, for Barth, *homo religiosus* characterizes human fallenness. It is something that needs to be overcome, for his natural desire for God cannot be redeemed until it is first destroyed and replaced. It is a species of the *analogia entis*, which is the "invention of the Antichrist." But for von Balthasar this natural desire is the basis for a christologically determined *analogia entis*. In fact, where von Balthasar provides reflections on theological politics, he draws on the *analogia entis* to counter what he finds to be only a negative account of desire in Barth.

As von Balthasar reads Barth, natural desire has only a negative function. In this respect, he argues for a similarity between Barth and René Girard. The latter finds the origin of all social relations

[7] Ibid.

in a desire that is only related to "power" and "violence," but never "justice." Von Balthasar states, "[Girard's] initial concept is 'désir,' a desire that, compared to animal instinct, has absolutely no bounds. Formerly, in Augustine, this unbounded aspect was the *desiderium (naturale in Deum),* pointing to God. In Girard, as in Barth, it must be totally corrupt, for at the very start of human history it unleashes a war in which everyone is struggling against all, in a way that is reminiscent of Hobbes."[8] Von Balthasar, like Radical Orthodoxy, rejects this negative evaluation of desire. Instead, like Milbank, he emphasizes this natural desire as a positive basis for human action. What is odd is that Barth, who finds so little positive in such a natural desire, can nevertheless recognize an alternative political witness to that of the Hobbesian desire that associates political and social life with an inevitable violence. Von Balthasar and Milbank, both of whom have a more positive role for desire, have difficulty countenancing such a politics. This is more true of von Balthasar than Milbank.

Karl Barth's moral theology is much richer than that which von Balthasar gives us. Despite his protestations against any natural desire for God, Barth does give central place to human passions and desires as he delineates the role of God's commands for our social and political life. For instance, when discussing the biblical command, "Thou shalt not kill," Barth emphasizes that life is first "a life of impulses." The basic "impulses" are "hunger and love," sexuality and rest.[9] These are not negative desires for Barth. In fact, he associates them with godliness, even stating that "a really good horseman cannot possibly be an ungodly person."[10] These desires need to be formed by God's commands, but they are good desires, rooted in a fundamental "will for life." This will brings with it a desire for health and joy, delight and happiness.[11]

On the basis of this will for life, Barth develops an intriguing

[8] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodrama* IV*: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994), 309.

[9] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1962), 344-348.

[10] Ibid., 352.

[11] Barth writes, "The will for life is also the will for joy, delight and happiness." Ibid., 375.

moral theology concerned with sports, health, slaying of animals, abortions, suicide, self-defense, and war (among other matters). Barth "integrates" the natural and supernatural well when it comes to self-defense and war. He writes, "If Tolstoy and Ghandi were wrong, they were a hundred times nearer the truth with their teachings than are the primitive gospel of the mailed fist and all the doctrines which have tried to blunt the edge of these sayings by the sophistical distinction between a sphere in which they are valid and another in which they are not."[12] While he allows for self-defense and war as a *Grenzfall* or borderline case, Barth refuses to countenance a realm of pure nature where the theological virtues have no role to play. This gives a priority to peaceableness such that those who would take up arms are the ones who must justify their position, which differs from Milbank (oddly enough more so that von Balthasar) for whom those who refuse to use violence in the defense of the innocent are more violent than those who do. As Barth puts it, "All affirmative answers to the question [of war] are wrong if they do not start with the assumption that the inflexible negative of pacifism has almost infinite arguments in its favour and is almost overpoweringly strong."[13] Yet in the end Barth agrees with von Balthasar and Milbank. He states unequivocally, "The Church must not preach pacifism."[14]

Von Balthasar accuses Barth of having only a negative account of desire and thus undergirding a Hobbesian politics. Yet it is von Balthasar rather than Barth who, like Milbank, normalizes war and violence as part of the political order where the theological virtues do not seem to give our natural desires their formative character. This is unfortunate because von Balthasar's rich account of desire could supplement Barth's theology, while Barth's ordering of desire via God's commands and its significance for moral and political theology has

[12] Ibid., 430.

[13] Ibid., 455. He also states, "A first essential is that war should not on any account be recognized as a normal, fixed and in some sense necessary part of what on the Christian view constitutes the just state or the political order demanded by God" (456).

[14] Ibid., 460. Barth does say, "The Church can and should raise its voice against the institution of standing armies in which the officers constitute *per se* a permanent danger to peace," ibid.

much to add to von Balthasar. Von Balthasar draws upon Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine in order to find a place for "natural desire" in the divine economy. Gregory's anthropology is based on a "stasis" and "kinesis" or rest and self-motion. Both belong to the "nature" of finite freedom where each person is "for himself" and at the same time "owes his being to Another." The latter aspect of our natural freedom produces a "yearning," and here von Balthasar reads Gregory and Augustine as identical. For Gregory, God gives us finite freedom in our creation; it is "natural;" we "rest" in it. But God also seeks to impart "absolute freedom" to "finite freedom" through the Incarnation that causes our finite freedom to move toward God as its "source and final goal."[15] Von Balthasar finds "the same in Augustine."[16] This desire produces a restlessness that cannot be naturally satisfied; nor does grace destroy it.

Von Balthasar's theodramatics presents the analogical relationship between finite and infinite freedom. The very gift of finite freedom, because it is a gift, requires that the "I" is a given self-being who must also "communicate" externally.[17] Being bears a natural desire to communicate that can only be satisfied with an infinite freedom, which only occurs with the incarnation. It liberates our natural finite freedom and allows it to "participate in infinite freedom." This gives rise to the "paradox" identified by Aquinas: "We arrive at the Thomist paradox (which Henri de Lubac has again brought to light): man strives to fulfill himself in an Absolute and yet, although he is '*causa sui*' he is unable to achieve this by his own power or by attaining any finite thing or finite good. Precisely this, according to Thomas, constitutes man's dignity" (*TD* II, 225). Both Pelagius and the radical voluntarism of Scotus and Ockham lose this paradox and emphasize the first part of it alone, the liberation of finite freedom that allows the human creature to "embrace its own ultimate freedom." But they neglect the second. This freedom can only be liberated when it participates in, and communicates with, something outside of itself—infinite freedom (*TD* II, 230, 245-247). This voluntarism is the basis

[15] This is the argument von Balthasar elaborates at length in *Theodrama* II.

[16] *Theodrama* IV, 372.

[17] *Theodrama* II, 244 (hereafter *TD* in text).

for "modern thought." It truncates the natural desire for the infinite and seeks a natural beatitude alone.

Theodrama IV addresses the tension between *Theodrama* II where the "creature is manifestly free before God" and *Theodrama* III where "only in Christ theological persons can exist at all" (*TD* IV, 11). In addressing this tension, von Balthasar shows why the nature/grace distinction charted by de Lubac matters. Nature is neither pure, nor can it be reduced to grace. We must avoid both possibilities for both will lead us back from Augustine to Pelagius and fail to give us the proper understanding of morality and politics. As von Balthasar puts it, "Nature is what God freely creates, *ens ab alio*; however much grace it receives, it remains eternally *nondivine*, the receptive subject of God's free bestowal of grace, which enables it to participate in the divine goods" (*TD* IV, 374). This is a mariological insight that entails not just a passive perception as one might assume, given von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics, but also an "action." He addressed this mariological insight earlier. Just as Christ's trinitarian procession requires roles for the Father and the Spirit, so in Jesus' mission, "he makes room within himself, that is, an acting area for dramas of theological moment, involving other, created persons. . . . In this way we begin to see that, while the personal mission of Jesus is unique, it is also capable of "imitation" by those who are called, in him, to participate in his drama" (*TD* III, 162). This imitation is a passivity that is at the same time an activity. Jesus hands himself over in obedience beginning with the incarnation and Mary's "yes" (*TD* III, 184-187) and concluding with his death and burial. In turn, Mary and others receive him and in this passive-activity make him possible. Truth emerges as the interplay between receiving the glory of God (aesthetics) and performing that glory in our own lives (dramatics). Logic makes explicit this interplay between aesthetics and dramatics. It will always find worldly analogies in beauty, human freedom, and worldly truth and therefore make common cause with philosophy.

The worldly analogy to freedom entails a place for our finite freedom, but only as it is summoned beyond itself. "Infinite freedom summons finite freedom to go beyond itself and share in the former. This remains a mystery, because the creature, although it is profoundly

affected in its innermost essence, has no way—even at the level of speculation—of translating this offer into the terms of its own finitude. The attempt to do so characterizes all forms of Gnosticism." This mytery is the "analogia entis" expressed both in the Fourth Lateran Council where for every similarity between God and humanity there is a yet greater dissimilarity and in the Chalcedonian definition where it has its "concrete center," which is the "'unconfused and indivisible' with regard to the two natures in Christ" (*TD* IV, 380).

Using this analogy between finite and infinite freedom, von Balthasar gives us some reflections, albeit limited and inadequately developed, on theological politics. For instance, he affirms liberation theology's sense of "urgency and its complex nature" with respect to justice and its concern for the poor. He writes, "This summoning of their crucial, world-transforming cooperation, is at the heart of Christianity. . . . Ever since Genesis, man has been called to shape the earth after his own likeness, which is the likeness of God." But he finds its "greatest danger" to be precisely the lack of a proper analogy between nature and grace. This greatest danger "lies in its tendency to link together the relationship of the first and second Adam, earthly action and the Kingdom that comes down from God, within a single system or overview; in so doing, it succumbs in a new way to theological rationalism" (*TD* IV, 482). Von Balthasar finds liberation theology insufficiently careful in avoiding the three related modern dangers: Pelagianism, voluntarism, and Gnosticism.

Von Balthasar also addresses the social problems of war-making and capitalism. They both violate human nature precisely because they know nothing but human nature and therefore can only work for "survival" or "domination." With the stockpiling of weapons "the threshold has been crossed to a purpose that is immoral because it is inhuman." This is also seen in "exploitation of workers" in the desire to produce for its own sake. "Cultural goods" are "foisted" on the poor for which they "strive," but they "originate in that very realm of technology that is characterized by an insatiability and a mass culture (or nonculture!) that are destructive of the person." Von Balthasar concludes, "Clearly the Christian must throw himself into the cogs of this pitiless machinery" (*TD* IV, 483).

Would throwing ourselves into the "cogs of this pitiless machinery" include the use of violence? Von Balthsar then poses a number of questions in light of the example of Martin Luther King, Jr., and his nonviolent tactics. These questions and responses are puzzling given what von Balthasar argues throughout the *Theodrama*. They lead him to argue for a political realm free from the theological virtues. Does this not reproduce the doctrine of pure nature he and de Lubac sought to exorcise? In response to Dr. King's nonviolent politics, von Balthasar asks the following questions,

> Can a state realistically do without organs of power if it is to uphold public order against criminals of all kinds? How can such organs of power (police, army) be prevented from misuse at the hands of those who wield power? The other question is a deeper one: Can the cross of Christ be changed into a "tactical" instrument in issues that are purely this-worldly? Can the agape that suffers and endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:7) provide a technique for the attainment of political goals? Is not the attempt to take 'divine virtue'—that is, something that is and remains God's own possession—and manipulate it on the human stage? (*TD* IV, 484)

If von Balthasar warns us against turning God into a utilitarian value, then the warning should be heeded. But he seems to be saying something more—theological virtue has no bearing upon political existence.

Von Balthasar's answer to his question is an ambiguous "no." The Sermon on the Mount can be used by an individual, "but it is questionable whether he can legitimately impose this choice on a large multitude for the sake of political goals, or even human goals" (*TD* IV, 485). After accusing Barth and Girard of only finding desire to be negative and a source of Hobbesian power, von Balthasar defines politics in similar terms. He does then qualify this by reminding us "we have no example from the life of Jesus in which he fought for his cause with earthly means of power (not even the cleansing of the temple)." Rather than finding in this a supernaturalized natural, von Balthasar appeals to the "old aeon" that is still with us. We live in the border between these two aeons, which means for von Balthasar that we should never "theologize" our use of violence; nor should we turn

the state into a "theological person." However, "in need man may have recourse to the sword in self-defense" (*TD* IV, 483).

Does von Balthasar suggest that Martin Luther King, Jr., took "divine virtue," which was "God's possession" and "manipulated it on the world stage" by trying to embody it in creation? If so, then he accuses Dr. King of doing something similar to what Barth accused Catholics of doing in their sacraments: "laying hands on God." Is political nature now pure, independent from its orientation toward its supernatural end such that that end bears no relation to those desires? Von Balthasar does not incorporate his limited reflections on theological politics within his own theology. John Milbank recognized that neither de Lubac nor von Balthasar developed the political implications of their theology and sought to remedy this limitation.

John Milbank's Violent Desires

If we have a natural desire for the vision of God, then for Milbank two things must be avoided. First, we should avoid the assumption that social analyses can occur outside the single supernatural vocation that renders our nature itself intelligible. Second, we should avoid any construal of grace as an extrinsic, positive "thing" that comes upon a nature which has nothing more than a potential for obedience that is non-repugnant to it. These are two of the errors that occur when "pure nature" becomes something more than hypothetical speculation based on God's absolute power. Then theologians and philosophers either fail to integrate nature and the supernatural within a single end or they try to integrate them without taking into account the natural desire for God.

Integrating nature and grace outside the common desire for God can relativize the significance of that desire and replace it with a desire that is purely political or social. Milbank finds Gustavo Gutiérrez making this mistake, and he refers to it as "naturalizing the supernatural." Gutiérrez agreed with de Lubac and Rahner that Cajetan was a "less than faithful" interpreter of Aquinas. He also, like Milbank, sought to think politics and economics via "one call to salvation." When he does this, however, he brings back into the analysis something like

a "pure nature" that then authorizes a secular that does not need to know its supernatural end. Gutiérrez writes, "This affirmation of the single vocation to salvation, beyond all distinctions, gives religious value in a completely new way to human actions in history, Christian and non-Christian alike. The building of a just society has worth in terms of the Kingdom, or in more current phraseology, to participate in the process of liberation is already, in a certain sense, a salvific work."[18] To be fair to Gutiérrez, he does qualify his claim that this participation is salvific; it is so "in a certain sense." But how it is qualified is not explained.

If participation in secular processes of liberation (whether they be construed as socialist or the furtherance of capitalist markets, for who is to say a priori what will finally bring "liberation?") is already "salvific" outside the mediation of the church, the sacraments, or the Word, then we have a "nature" that once again is capable of salvation by itself. Milbank, following de Lubac, refers to this as "naturalizing the supernatural." His alternative, following de Lubac and von Balthasar, is to "supernaturalize the natural." Milbank writes,

> Theology must stop "moving from nature to its goal," and rather make sense of human nature in terms of "divinely revealed" realities, which can only be construed according to their own inner logic. To remove any lingering ambiguities in de Lubac's view of things, von Balthasar insists much more strongly on the specific "formed" character of the supernatural life; the "difference" of grace is a visible, tangible difference, as conveyed through the unique shape of the Christic forms, repeated, replenished and completed in the various lives of the saints and the organic unity of the body of Christ. To avoid the extrinsicism of mere assent to propositions about God's offer of grace and to insist on the priority of grace in shaping our lives, one must develop a "theological aesthetic" which identifies a truth and an ethical goal inseparable from a certain attractive appearance which has its own pecular logic, indistinguishable from the order of its manifestation.[19]

This theological aesthetic includes natural inclinations or desires

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[18] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (New York: Orbis Press, 1988), 46.

[19] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 220.

that should be affirmed and completed through supernatural means. John Milbank, rightly, to my mind, emphasizes that desires I noted at the beginning of this paper are not fallen but correct and consistent with the goodness of God's creation. However, there is an ambiguity in this affirmation of "natural intuitions." How could we know when we supernaturalize natural desire and when we naturalize a desire and cut it off from its supernatural completion? Milbank critiques Gutiérrez' defense of a "secular" inclination to justice that finds fulfilment in working for secular justice and yet Milbank affirms a natural inclination to participate in violence that would likewise conclude in a "secular" participation in wafare. Has he naturalized this desire?

To answer this question, we need to examine Milbank's understanding of violence. He argues that what constitutes violence is not self-evident; it needs judgement. Violence is what "ruins an essence" or "diverts from a goal." This means that violence cannot be recognized simply from acts perpetrated. In fact, pacifism is more violent than participating in war. Pacifism only produces two alternatives: "gazing" at violence or "diverting" one's gaze. To gaze at violence is to allow an "essence" to be destroyed without any intervention. Refraining from violence by diverting our gaze is more violent than perpetrating it.[20] For this reason, pacifism is "aporetic;" this aporia conflicts with good, natural intuitions and is the reason most of us feel compelled to do something more than gaze or divert attention in witnessing the injustice of violence.[21] These intuitions to defend the innocent by means of violence "are not fallen ones but created ones, for the impulse to protect the innocent is rooted in our animality, embodiment and finitude."[22] How is this not a return to a pure nature? It seems to be if this natural intuition does not seek, or need completion by, a supernatural end.

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[20] Milbank writes, "looking at violence is actually *more violent* than participating in violence . . ." John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 28; and "pacifism, as looking at violence, is at least as violent, and probably more absolutely violent, than actual physically violent interventions," ibid., 30.

[21] Milbank writes, "pacifism is aporetic because both gazing at and averting one's gaze from violence are intuitively complicit with its instance," ibid., 38-39.

[22] Ibid., 39.

Milbank does then suggest that participation in violence cannot fully define the Christian life. Drawing upon the traditional distinction between counsels taken by the religious and orders lived out by the laity, Milbank suggests that some Christians, both clerical and lay, "should exhibit already the eschatological life of peace."[23] (Milbank appears to find no place for celibacy among lay or clergy in his revision of this traditional distinction.)

Does he then "naturalize the supernatural?" Would this make Jesus' actions in the garden of Gethesemane immoral? Milbank addressed this question in responding to criticisms of his defense of the "natural intuition" to use violence in defense of the innocent. He wrote, "I never intended originally to separate off nature from grace, or a natural from a supernatural end. It is simply that I don't think that grace operates by canceling our animality; it doesn't operate by turning us into angels, into purely spiritual beings: 'In my flesh will I see God.'"[24] This is helpful. Any account of "pacifism" or "nonviolence" that cannot affirm the natural desires that well up within us when confronted with injustice leaves us less than human. But which account of pacifism suggested this? When did pacifists stipulate only two responses to violence: gaze upon it or divert their gaze? Milbank has created a position that does not exist and has, in fact, made it difficult to read well Jesus' response to Peter in the garden when on that night the only truly innocent one was threatened with violence, his response to Peter's act of defense was: "No more of this." Milbank responds to this by arguing that we must take into account the "situatedness" of every act of violence. On this occasion, "Jesus has to take a stand for the truth; resistance is not what is required here." Moreover, he suggests, "It is clearly the case, however, that in general Jesus is suggesting a 'turn the other cheek' strategy, and I suppose one way of looking at this is to say that he is asking us to augment that part of our nature that is naturally generous."[25] This last supposition may concede more than Milbank suggests and provide

[23] Ibid., 40.

[24] Ibid., 222.

[25] "A Conversation between Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank," in *Must Christianity Be Violent?: Reflections on History, Practice and Theology*, eds. Kenneth R. Cole and Alan Jacobs, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2003), 223.

a way to affirm our animality, our natural desire to use violence in defense of justice, our loves, and so on. If we deny the doctrine of pure nature, then natural desires are never self-interpreting. They must stand under the judgement of a single supernatural end. When confronted with violence and those desires well up within us, they only pose a question to us: What do you want? What do you lack in this situation that will render intelligible this desire and bring it to its proper completion? Is it the case that, when confronted with a violent aggressor, we seek his death? What we seek is for the world not to be this way, not to be ruled by violence, by aggression, by death. Christ's betrayal in the garden, his willingness to undergo crucifixion, and then his vindication in the resurrection and ascension "perfects" or "completes" the good moral desires we have to right injustices and protect the innocent. They do so by revealing to us our "natural generosity" even in those moments when we are most tempted to use violence. Which completes and perfects such natural desires? Is it to concede them a "natural" end and give in to them as they are? Or is it to make the proper "supernatural" judgement that Christ's own life and example brings and "forms" them to his end? The result of the latter will never be to gaze upon violence or divert one's attention to it (a problem more for the kind of technological warfare practiced today than for those who refuse to participate in it), but to find our true nature affirmed. We will not lose our "flesh" in such a refusal or be turned into angels. At most, we might be sanctified in our nature, which is the purpose for all our desires.

EIGHT

Cheryl Pauls

HARMONY IN EXILE: REST IN ITS EMBERS

The Congregational Voice: Anxiety of Musical Style

Liturgy is the prayer of the church communing with God's self-revelation; its congregational voice is grained of every thought and action of those gathered in any given service of worship, from and for lives dispersed in the world.[1] The strains of the congregational song enable and bear the church's cries of grief and pain, melding these to its utterances of hope, gratitude, and praise as it waits on and in God's ongoing transformation of the world. For many of those—Anabaptist-Mennonites among others—who accent the belief that the confession of faith in God through Jesus Christ is credible only as infused within a life of radical discipleship,[2] the church's song is sometimes heard as a surrogate sacrament.[3]

[1] The Confessions of Faith of the two conferences most significantly affiliated with Canadian Mennonite University, where I am on faculty, the Manitoba Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches and Mennonite Church Canada, include articles on the assembly or gathering and the mission of the church. Note articles 6 and 7 in the Mennonite Brethren confession, and articles 9 and 10 in the Mennonite Church Canada confession.

[2] Discipleship is the focus of article 17 of the MC Confession and article 10 of the MB Confession.

[3] Irma Fast Dueck suggests that Anabaptist-Mennonite worship views church as sacrament in the absence of a formalised liturgy of sacraments. *A Critical Examination of Mennonite Worship and Ethics: A Praxis Approach* (ThD dissertation, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, 2005), 136. Eric Friesen suggests music is the "mysticism of Mennonites . . . our incense, our vestments, our iconography. Music is our soul." *Sound in the Land: Essays on Mennonites and Music,*

Currently, the corporate expression of this congregational voice bears considerable anxiety; symptoms play out as crises in musical style in ways that mask and embody crises of cultural authenticity and plurality.[4] This performance anxiety is noted best in a thinness of sound—many people do not sing, or at best, mumble along with reluctant conviction. Their pale whimpering gestures often are attributed to the persuasion that certain musical styles are inadequate for the worship of God.[5] Perhaps instead they merely point to the confusion of singers struggling with a plethora of new music styles, not knowing from where to draw breath or when to expire it, gasping fearfully for a song that authentically, today, might flow through to the apprehension of a living God.

To name this fear is dangerous, for doing so risks the accusation of being caught up in material things like form and performance that are taken to detract from the worship of the true, triune God and instead glorify the ancient goddess *Harmonia* herself.[6] Amidst this struggle, harmony—whose infinitely resonating and differentiating capacity for "metaphoric fusion"[7] predates the sweetness of a major triad or the wonder of a polyphony of voices in its musical expression—has been relegated to the status of a mere style.[8] As such the analogous relation

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eds. Maureen Epp and Carol Ann Weaver (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005), back cover.

[4] The Mennonite Church leans more towards global and alternative culture associations, and the Mennonite Brethren more towards urban popular ones.

[5] Most arguments rely on the following oppositions: elite vs. common styles, the catholicity vs. the holiness of God, and expressions of mere personal comfort vs. expressions within which communities have been present with God.

[6] Herbert M. Schueller, *The Idea of Music: An Introduction to Musical Aesthetics in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 1988), 1- 6. The common mythologies trace *Harmonia* either to the daughter of Aphrodite (the goddess of love), and Ares (the god of war), or to the Mother of the muses.

[7] Leo Spitzer traces "metaphoric fusion" to Ambrose. *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 1963), 24.

[8] Three tangents require comment. 1) The musical rationalisation of the major triad in theological terms during the Renaissance era usually is traced to G. Zarlino's *Le istitutioni harmoniche* (1558). 2) Catherine Pickstock invokes this wonder mythology by stating, "Polyphonic music, when it is sounded, lies always beyond our grasp." See "Music: Soul, City and Cosmos after Augustine," in *Radical*

of a theology of church as a priesthood of believers and a body who sings in harmony stands profoundly shaken.

While we musicians struggle for words and expressions of reconciliation for yesterday's war between hymns and choruses,[9] echoes of the little bit of Augustine we likely know ring in our ears. This passage, in which he confesses to "sinning grievously" when "moved more by the song than what is sung"[10] has acted prophetically throughout the centuries, calling music and musicians to return to God through liturgical reform. Such chastizing might even be heard today from Gordon Lathrop, who states that in worship

> . . . the mysterious power of song pulling heart and mind into harmony, proposing order, making room for dissonance and for single voices within . . . a pervasive community must be broken. In the Christian meeting, such power ought not to exist for itself or for the enhancement of the power of the performers . . . [instead] the value of music ought to be judged by its adaptability to the assembly and what the assembly has to do.[11]

Indeed, many of us musicians from the Free Church tradition share the conviction towards the service of the congregation and

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Orthodoxy: A New Theology, eds. John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock (London: Routledge, 1999), 246. 3) Harmony as a style generally is associated with Lutheran chorale-style hymns with four voices in a homophonic texture, with a syllabic setting of a vernacular text. Further, the chorales of J. S. Bach commonly centre the canon of harmony in Western music theory.

[9] The phrase, "beyond worship wars," has come to signal both a rightful favouring of theological over musical concerns, and the realisation that the "hymns vs. choruses" binary categorization is flawed musicologically.

[10] Augustine, *Confessions,* trans. Maria Boulding (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 229. This passage is the only reference to Augustine in many scholarly and pedagogical resources for music history, such as Oliver Strunk's *Source Readings in Music History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965). Further, Schueller's chapter on Augustine concludes by stating, "We may regret the transformation of the enthusiast of music . . . into the bishop who felt the need to castigate every trace of pleasure. . . . One approaches Augustine's later works with the conviction that in them something has been lost in the philosophy of music. . . . " Schueller, *The Idea of Music,* 256.

[11] Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 112. The focus of Lathrop's critique is the glorifying of the aesthetic through "high" art performances disengaged from liturgical form.

liturgically directed form and have refocused our calling; we are now named as worship leaders and music ministers.[12] Yet, we struggle with how to relate to the church musically, and wonder if we can expect those who lead the church's song to be competent enough to hear the score in a chart.[13]

Further, some of us protest Lathrop's call as misrepresenting the inclinations of music and musicians. Firstly, we note that the value of music tends to be measured—in the world, musically—precisely by the extent to which the musician divests herself of the will to power and releases herself into the flow of the music she performs.[14] Secondly, we resist the inference that music exists merely for itself elsewhere, for intrinsic, purely musical meanings in performance are regarded as untenable in most current musicological work. Indeed, recent articulations focus music as cultural work, considering not what music is, but what it does as it is heard and shared.[15] Thirdly, we suggest that music cannot in itself be judged for its adaptability to what the assembly needs to do, or enable stylistic reconciliation in the

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[12] This statement paraphrases Julian Horton who argues that critical theory has not purged music of its insularity but merely has exchanged one set of practices for another. He writes, "We have become 'new' historicists, or critical theorists, or postcolonialists. But there is a diminishing requirement for us to be musicians." See "Postmodernism and the Critique of Musical Analysis," *The Musical Quarterly* 85, no. 2, (Summer 2001): 362.

[13] In my experience, church musicians try too hard to stay in the background and to focus on the words, and often do not read accents and inflections, which are not notated explicitly in charts or scores, sufficiently well to enable good singing in a congregation.

[14] This expectation of a subordination of performer and instrument to composer and score has become destabilised of late. Aden Evens presents this "old immediacy theory" of musicality, with pianists such as Rubenstein receiving praise for getting "out of the way of the music" as no longer persuasive, and argues instead for the agency of a "faculty of music" (attributed to Spinoza via Deleuze) within which the "musical" is a way of being and relating, and not dependent on genius. See *Sound Ideas: Music, Machines, and Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 131-148.

[15] Nicholas Cook presents a performative turn in music theory as cultural work, articulating what music transacts and on whose interests. See "Epistemologies of Music Theory," in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 91-99.

form of a "blended worship"[16] without considering how and how well we practice musical adaptability to liturgical work. This requires that the valuation of musical expression not incline towards theologically indifferent private matters of taste,[17] for how do indifferent voices listen to one another and resonate in the form of an ecclesial body in communion with God? Alternatively, how is musical indifference practiced?

The Pianist: Anxiety of Musicality

Luciano Berio's *sequenza IV* (for piano, 1966)[18] seems continually to render reflexive its materials and inhibit its delivery. This inhibition, a tightness felt in the pianist's palms and the inner sides of her upper limbs, expresses an anxiety of musicality. Which simultaneous and successive notes are to be drawn with an embracing gesture of the palm, accenting a harmony through an inward inclination of release, forming a memory of a musical body in her body in the gap between musical events?[19] And, which notes, and their constituent spectra, are to be dispersed with an outward fling of the palm, granting

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[16] Robert Webber presents a blend of historical and traditional practices with contemporary elements as vital to worship. See *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994).

[17] Marva Dawn referred to musical style as "taste" at least five times during plenary sessions at the *Refreshing Winds Conference in Music and Worship* (Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, MB, January 2007), seemingly encouraging a summary dismissal of how musical experience is negotiated elsewhere, and upon which our capacity to sing in worship depends. I'm assuming this as unintentional, for she herself laments that the competencies of musicians too quickly are rendered passé in the church. See *A Royal "Waste" of Time* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 208.

[18] Luciano Berio, *sequenza IV.* Score: London: Universal Edition, 30137, rev. 1993. Recording: There are several commercially released ones, for example, *berio sequenzas* (featuring all of Berio's *sequenzas*) by Ensemble InterContemporain, (Hamburg: Deutsche Grammaphon, 1998). Also, a recording of my performance is located at www.bryanharderaudio.com/berio.cpauls/.

[19] A musical event here is not a social gathering, but a focused entity within a piece of music. An event may be identifiable as a single note, an accented position, a melodic motive, and so forth; an event names not only a particular entity but also the factors that enable its focus.

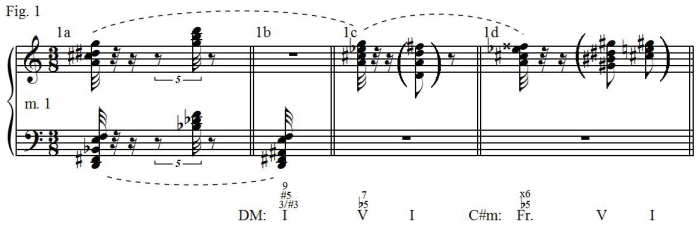
each harmonic partial agency to differentiate and re-combine with any sound that is or has been in ever becoming new timbral gems and rhyming motions? As heard in performance, the inflections of these gestures in this—or any—music cannot be reduced definitively through translation into binaries of gathering and dispersing, expansion and closure, or progression and recession,[20] since the practice of musical form as a performative, analytical act rarely identifies a mere singularity of inference to any located event.[21] And yet, the failure to practice music through motions that permit the completion of a gesture, that follow through to an in or an out of release,[22] results in playing that is at best perfunctory, and at worst a clutching back, a negative assertion of a self who prohibits musicality in a faulty guise of humility.

At least, it is extremely unlikely that a pianist with the facility to realise this score at the keyboard does not experience a frustration of gesture upon an initial read, a network overload on muscles and nerves picking up on an overabundance of signals and expressions that have been pursued many times before for the sake of musical form. How does she wade through the flood of associations that tingle through the hand with any given simultaneity, that is, any entity that feels like a chord? (See Fig. 1a) Is the bottom note of the first

[20] These are not equivalent binary categories. Wallace Berry proposes musical processes of progression and recession; these more closely approach the flux of significances ofthe church gathered or dispersed than the more definitively focused common musical terms, expansion and closure. See *Structural Functions in Music* (New York: Dover, 1987), 84-87, 186-190, 377-388.

[21] For a theological read on a multiplicity of accent in tonal expression see Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 71-127.

[22] In articulating correspondences between human gesture and sound, musicians often rely on athletic analogy since the trajectory of a follow-through in sport can be seen literally in an object. Within Western culture we tend to be reluctant to find evidence of the ears credible. With high-speed imaging, Stephen Birkett has shown that the mode of approach and release to a piano key, that is, the velocity and angle of the physical gesture, influences the quality or timbre of sound in accordance with how the damper retakes the string, hence supporting what pianists have intuited but was not believed until seen, that pianists influence quality, not merely volume of sound. Reported in lecture presented at the *Canadian University Music Symposium* (London, ON: June 2005).



"chord" of m.1, D, a root of a two-handed quasi-tertian sonority, or the fifth of a second inversion chord with a blurred interior? After all, who listens to more than the soprano and bass shapes anyway? Or, does each hand grab an independent entity recalling jazz forms, the left hand a D-rooted major/minor triadic blend with a sharp 5 (see Fig. 1b), and the right hand the dominant seventh of D with a flat 5 (see Fig. 1c)? With a different spin of the right hand the music wafts towards another tonal orientation in the form of a French augmented sixth, a name many players recall only as a dismissal of music theory, yet an event they respond to with certain nuance (see Fig. 1d). As any two such discrete chords the downbeat moment would express a compressed temporal space, forming two layers out of metric sync. In distinct contrast to the range of quasi-plausible readings of chord one, the second simultaneity of m.1 is likely to be drawn with an ease of expression, for it's difficult for each hand to do anything other than grasp a triad, a transaction hands make in a pianist's sleep if there's no good reason for them to do anything else.

Further, the abundant rests in the score give questions of pacing acute practical and aesthetic relevance amidst an elusive proliferation of pitch relations. In mm.1-2, for example, the pianist's hands express sound for less than four 32nd-notes within a temporal span of seven eighth-note beats; for the remainder of the time, just over 6/7 of it, they express rest. Are the pianist's hands to apprehend a slur anywhere, inviting a particular motive and obscuring other possibilities? Is the second chord to be played like a big band shot, an off-beat articulation whose gesture renders present the absent, that is, non-articulated, pulse of beat two? Or is pulse to be heard only by what is sounded, forming a phenomenology of accent without any

assumptions of metric structure or tradition lurking behind? These questions are critical, for hands do not simply disappear when not in physical contact with the keys. Instead, they hover and thereby shape not only the character or quality, but also the very material forms of the sounds they frame.

In *sequenza IV,* the pianist might assume the hands can do little but tremble in the search for musical expressions in which to express themselves; for, the notion of a "given musical expression" seems to have no true ring, at least not when trying to read the piece as a score, tallying resonances and rhymes while searching for a playing strategy. Even if the pianist does not hold to a singular conception of form as an organic whole, she needs to determine which energies to direct beyond what might be obvious, and which ones to resist as she reaches for another music. For in performance either the option of an anxiety played out in a panicked dramatic freeze over some deconstructed chaos, or that of a celebration flaunting the end of belief in any form of transcendent order, simply fails to convince. At present the pianist is burdened, her reading of the score offers but fleeting moments of presence through which to harmonise the weight and weightlessness of memories, expressions, and traditions through which she has acquired the capacity to be musical. This burden lacks the opportunistic optimism that rendered the surfeit of integral serialism's order and aleatoricism's disorder indistinguishable in effect in the 1950s, even if she is inclined to retell that account through performance and via players who listen with their hands as they reach into their more speculative heritage.[23] As the pianist struggles to connect with the music she finds one event that seems to assert a definitive motivic presence. Here the sacred devil, the emancipated tritone that was to mark the end of all tonal oppression, emerges from the texture in ho-hum mockery of the scads of tritones that flaunt

[23] The order vs. disorder (chance) debate of the 1950s generally is located between Pierre Boulez and John Cage. For a theological account of this, see Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 179-203. John Rahn presents the relation of mathematically oriented music theory and phenomenology as speculative theoretical work, especially in relation to the work of David Lewin in "The Swerve and the Flow: Music's Relationship to Mathematics," *Perspectives of New Music* 42, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 130-148.

non-conformity and freedom of expression in many a contemporaneous work.[24] And she almost laughs out loud as its down-up play parodies Beethoven's resignation to the up-down, "Muss es sein? Es muss sein," God-ordained will of tones. Or, is the joke on her and the presence of a tritone inversion far too simplistic a read? [25] For, a short listen around solicits not jarring tritones but the compelling ring of dominant seventh sonorities.

In the real time of performance the plethora of the pianist's, or anyone else's equally plausible hearing, cannot be sound. What the pianist intuitively grasps in the "ear"[26] as musically relevant is more than she can at once nuance and express, and its texture more multifaceted than those for which the discipline of music theory currently can give rigorous account.[27] The piece hints at, but does not focus,

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[24] In the early twentieth century the tritone became both a compositional fetish and an analytical obsession; in medieval music theory it was known as the diabolus in musica. Arnold Schoenberg articulated the emancipation of the tritone, and hence of an acoustical category of dissonance as a necessarily dependent construct. This he did, according to Carl Dahlhaus, with a sense of regretful inevitability, not iconoclasm. See "Harmony," in *The New Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2d ed., vol. 10, ed., Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Pub. Ltd., 2001), 866.

[25] Mm. 129-134 of score, 6:33-6:58 on InterContemporain recording, 6:16-6:34 on mine. The referenced German text comes from the opening of the last movement of Beethoven's *String Quartet,* opus 135. I further invoke our naturalised tendency to hear musical events resolve (usually, down) into a tonic pitch of a scale and triad. The theological reference involves correlations of the lowest integer ratios of the harmonic series and the trinity, with the three-in-one sung by the perfect partials, the p8, p5 & p4 in the pU, followed by the imperfect consonances and subsequently the dissonances.

[26] Appeals to "the ear" appear in theoretical writings from the Renaissance to present times when measures of effective practice cannot be defended rationally (visually, acoustically). The shifting scientific data and the "ear" throughout the history of music theory in Western culture substantiates a continuous straddling of the arts and sciences divide within musical discipline.

[27] Richard Hermann states that set theoretical relations do not support all perceived similarity. See "Theories of Chordal Shape, Aspects of Linguistics and Their Roles in an Analysis of Pitch Structure in Berio's *sequenza IV* for Piano," in *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz since 1945*, eds. Elizabeth West Marvin and Richard Hermann (Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press, 1995), 364-398. Hermann's analyses involve extensive statistical modelling for which hand

multiple irregular, unordered sequences of variously related pitch collections, suggesting a plurality of expression without much tangible presence or identity, and without effective measures of variation and transformation. Further, as localised events members of these sequences carry vestigial traces of musical narratives based in constructs common to both "functional" tonality[28]—scales and chords and keys and such—and post-tonal idioms—complementation within twelve-tone aggregates and the like—thereby rendering a "mere gesture" status to any recognizable expression regardless of origin.

In remarkably tangible ways *sequenza IV* can be heard to be about the undoing of harmonic order at the piano through the undoing of the correlation between the pitch content and the performative gestures that form and house harmony. Two features offer a large-scale delineation of its form: a linear sequence of gestural types, that is, ways of playing and conceptualising harmonic events, and a layered sequence of resonance types based in the use of pedals. Both of these features suggest few entries to credible musical expression; rather they make tangible the constructed nature of mere gestures. The linear sequence narrates, with considerable overlap, processes of fragmentation and recombination of the piano's most idiomatic harmonic expression, chords. These transform from vertical simultaneities to broken chords, (some flowing in arpeggiated figures, others splatting as clusters flung wildly across registral space), to "pitch dust," notes brushed by fingertips and suggesting that not only particular means of pitch ordering, but pitch itself as the central content of musical expression has become a vestige of human expression and culture in sound. Towards the end of the piece chords begin to resurface, offering a nod towards the cyclic in form. In contrast, though not directly, the layered sequence nudges a polyphonic hearing through the differentiating of slowly paced materials held in the piano's sostenuto pedal and more quickly paced ones with a dry articulation. These layers thus turn the common music theoretic metaphors of harmonic

position is a factor, but do not extend beyond simultaneities ("chordal" gestures).

[28] Functional tonality implies a certain logic of chord progression as well as the projection of linear continuity over long spans of time; in *sequenza IV,* wisps of voice-leading threads hint at but do not satisfy such large-scale models of form.

foreground and background, and of surface and depth of structure into sounding musical content.

Perhaps with greater intensity than most works of music, *sequenza IV* engages the pianist within the limits of its own—and her own—capacity to participate in a narrative of musical time. Its score was formed in the 1960s, a time when the ontological and epistemological status of all arts and disciplines as practiced in cultures of Western heritage pursued radical scrutinizing. To speak of the content of the piece—its musical materials, its form, its means of practice and expression—is to speak less of pitches, rhythms, counterpoint, and contours as such than of a conglomerate of commentaries on the historiography of musical style. Its accents might reasonably be assessed through densities and qualities of simultaneous relation; this would tell more the story of the listener's previous musical experience than that of the piece as a formal object. The notion of form itself inclines towards a mere gesture, a relic of an idealized past, and its taunt to the pianist seems to witness to a musicality that is unreachable, irrelevant.[29] Further, the presence of the pianist seems initially to have been taken out of the equation of the expression of the piece;[30] the pedalling, lengths of fermatas, and dynamic inflections, as well as the tracing, animating, and resisting of musical motives, traditionally the expressive properties of the player, have become compositional material,[31] properties of the

[29] My use of the expression "witness to a musicality" draws on Luciano Berio's statement that "Musical form is . . . an evidence, a testimony, not a mood to be felt, nor a schema to be analysed." Quoted in *The Modern Composer and His World*, eds. John Beckwith & Udo Kasemets (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 140. Here and in apologetic writings Berio argues against the bifurcation of the societal value of the performance act and the intellectual value of musical research, but rather for listening to their combination in musical tradition.

[30] The twentieth century inclination towards dispensing with performers and their inconsistencies often is traced to Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music: In the Form of Six Lessons,* trans. Arthur Knodell and Ingolf Dahl (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 161-181; and Milton Babbitt, "The Composer as Specialist," commonly known as "Who Cares if you Listen?," in *Classic Essays on Twentieth-Century Music*, eds. Richard Kostelanetz and Joseph Darby (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), 161-167.

[31] A gradual increase in the number of parameters attended to through notation can be seen from the Baroque era to the mid-twentieth century. Note the

composer and the score, with the performer seemingly left with no role but to articulate digitally as directed. And yet, the pianist is still there. Her hands draw and release sound from and into rest, and what they remember in the time of rest places a spin on what precedes and follows, determining the timbral detail of the music, and rendering, if not musically recognizable events, at least musically relevant inclinations as present in performance.[32]

The musicality through which the pianist's playing has been learned can be gleaned from the legendary words of the nineteenth-century virtuoso, Arthur Schnabel, who proclaims: "The notes I handle no better than many pianists. But the pauses between the notes—ah, that is where the art resides."[33] Schnabel's poignant "ah" is critical; its reflexive turn back allows the listener to form and savour a place of rest, and to hear what follows in relation to a remembered entity, to that which the gap affords. Further, this "ah" disrupts what the listener expects and already knows musically, enabling him to catch further waves of rhythm and timbral resonance, and permitting musicality to be ever made present anew. For musicality is both the

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contemporaneity of intensively marked scores with the imperative of heeding to historical practice of non-notated elements in earlier repertoire. Also, note that in Berio's *sequenza III* (1963) for voice typical performative side effects are notated, such as "tense, nervous laughter, apprehensive, joyful." Also, the compositional interest (including Berio's) in the timbral spectrum can be linked to the interface of computer technology, rendering timbral nuancing not only a performance element, but also a compositional one.

[32] Umberto Eco has described this type of form as "literally unfinished" and "gratuitously different." See "Poetics of the Open Work" in *Source Readings in Music History*, vol. 7, ed. Robert P. Morgan (New York: Norton, 1998), 231, 234. I'm not convinced that performances of "open works" are any more incomplete than any other music if measured by variation in tonal nuance. Note that empirical research on this repertoire has not been developed, but instead focuses on the likes of performances of Chopin, for which most players are well-acquainted with a diverse range of theoretical literature and are not grappling with basic issues of intelligibility and competence. See Eric Clarke, "Expression in Performance: Generativity, Perception and Semiosis," in *The Practice of Performance*, ed. J. Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 21-54.

[33] Arthur Schnabel, quoted in Christopher R. Campling, *The Food of Love: Reflections on Music and Faith* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1997), 96, and often displayed in music teaching studios.

creation and the disruption of flow, the gauging of the risk of chaos and comprehensibility for the sake of presentness of persuasion, and the release of the givenness of musical expression.

Music theorist Robert Fink describes Berio's *Sinfonia*[34] as a constructed, historical, flat space "completely without temporal perspective . . . a 'barrage of immediacy,' . . . a despairing-exhilarating confession that there is no believable hierarchy of musical styles left."[35] Does such a confession have anything to do with the potential for musicality in how the pianist plays the rests in *sequenza IV*? And further, precisely what do musicians do with confessions?

Or, in a post-foundationalist culture, have we been left without a musical space in which to play, and in its wake become cultural theorists and performance analysts? [36] Is there a diminishing capacity to be musicians, with the imperative to be persuasive and the moral will to make (us) believe that there is no believable hierarchy of musical styles left?

So it might seem to those who do not hear the chart in a score.

Music: A Theological Claim?

In the introduction to the collection of essays entitled, *Radical Orthodoxy,* John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward propose theological truth as similar to but a better story[37] than contemporary secular nihilism on account of theology's "proposal of the rational possibility, and the faithfully perceived actuality, of an indeterminacy that is not impersonal chaos but infinite interpersonal harmonious order, in which time participates."[38] Radical Orthodoxy's

[34] Berio's *Sinfonia* (1968) is contemporaneous to *sequenza IV* and composed of identifiably musical quotations.

[35] Robert Fink, "Going Flat: Post-Hierarchical Music Theory and the Musical Surface," in *Rethinking Music*, eds. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 129.

[36] Again, a paraphrase of Horton. See n. 12 above.

[37] John Milbank argues that Christianity cannot disprove, only outnarrate secular nihilism. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason***,** 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 259.

[38] John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, "Introduction," in *Radical Orthodoxy,* 1-2.

urge to the Christian world to reclaim and practice its ancient truths draws significantly on the writings of Augustine and other early Christian writers, whose articulations of world harmony, ever reaching from and into music,[39] confess a triune God within whom an infinite measure of plenitude and grace gifts the world without limit or foundation, ever singing the peace of a well-tuned creation. Given the anxieties that the congregational voice and the pianist experience in their music making, the stakes of a theological truth rendered intelligible, desirable, and faithful to the revelation of God via the invocation of a musical order might seem precarious at best for today's readers. And yet, such a precarious articulation just may be a most theologically credible witness within an Anabaptist-Mennonite theological tradition, with anxiety laden expressions seeking service to a God who rejects as noise a song bereft of the waters of justice.[40] Such anxieties are not to be celebrated, but listened to, carefully, for in their wake lies fledgling practices whose hope is nourished through the commitment to share in God's ongoing gifts of reconciliation.[41] It is in response to the call of such gifts that I pursue a conversation engaging music with Radical Orthodoxy.

I'm intrigued by Radical Orthodoxy's theological proposal, which is not to say I find it musically resonant. The statement is flawed in the idealism of its musical word, and strikes the chord of my skepticism towards the common linking of music, mystery, ineffability, and God without disciplinary accountability.[42] However, my evaluation of the proposal's idealism shifts when I place it within contemporary

[39] Spitzer states that this vision had a constant musical connotation. *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony,* 6. Note that these terms would be pursued differently through their mathematical currency.

[40] This emphasis links the biblical texts, 1 Corinthians 1:18; 13:1 and Amos 5:23-24.

[41] For example, CMU's mission statement calls for "lives of service, leadership, and reconciliation in church and society."

[42] This is not to suggest undisciplined work, just inadequate conversation across disciplines. For liturgical theologians making these links see Webber, *Worship Old and New,* 195; and Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 296; and for a cognitive psychologist, see John Sloboda, *Exploring the Musical Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 352-355.

musical aesthetics, for it aptly describes how I relate to the formation of form in Berio's *sequenza IV*. Indeed, the proposal expresses well not only the anxiety but more importantly, the hope of my practice of *sequenza IV*. This hope witnesses to the persuasions that the democratizing project of neutral terms of musical engagement is fated, that musical expression is formed of materials and in bodies that resonate with particular histories, and that the performer has the privilege and the responsibility of attending to and listening for the range of musical styles practiced within these histories as she pursues musicality in the plurality of their concurrent presence.

How, though, might this hope interact with, or even substantiate the theological? How is this hope a reconciling practice? To consider these, I propose that we forego the congregational voice's commonly invoked indifference to matters of musical style and expression when assessing its service to liturgical work. Instead of evaluating how particular musics fit—or do not fit—the purposes of liturgical gathering, let's consider how acts of liturgy offer ways of practising a credible musicality today. Thereby we place Fink's musical confession in a body that practices acts of confession and offering in worship, and that understands its cultural work to witness to the presence of God's reconciling work in the world.

Before returning to *sequenza IV* we need to consider theological associations of some musical terms and trends. Radical Orthodoxy's interactions with music range from loosely referenced metaphors in Milbank[43] to a comprehensive essay by Pickstock urging that the discipline of music theory re-engage its early Christian heritage for more credible accounts of ontology, psychology, and political order than those offered by secular philosophy. Milbank's musical metaphors suggest a sustainable practice of a theology of gift, offering

[43] Milbank construes Christianity as an infinite harmonic differentiation, an irreducible plurality more compelling than nihilistic indifference. His articulations are influenced by Gilles Deleuze and are framed through a "Baroque risk," with which Milbank claims that a theology of transcendent creation and of analogous relationality is more persuasively true than Deleuze's philosophy of immanent expression. Milbank claims an unqualified furtherance of Baroque risk in a rather odd collection of composers: Berlioz, Messiaen, and Gubaidulina. See *Theology and Social Theory,* 5, 422, 434-438.

at once both difference and resonance, a mutuality of health and wholeness within an irreducible plurality. What I have identified in *sequenza IV* as a concurrent plurality of musical style could be heard as an extension of the principle of infinite differentiation and resonance through which *harmony,* and specifically the spectrum of the harmonic series has served as metaphor in musico-theological articulations for millennia. However, I present *sequenza IV* not as a contemporary demonstration of the agency of infinite resonance, but rather to interrogate how *harmony* might have theological agency in the midst of a crisis in its musical use. Pickstock interacts with musical discourse more comprehensively than Milbank; however, she too builds on a healthy and congruent concept of harmony,[44] albeit one whose instantiation comes up short in her three frames of comparison. Relying exclusively on Augustine, she defines harmony as a redeemed binarity, the impossible reconciliation of present moments and flow, and then demonstrates its missing dimensions in music of the East as heard in Indian music, musical modernism as exemplified in an opposition of harmonic and melodic impulses, and musical postmodernism, which she considers to approach Augustinian concepts but then ultimately to recant and deny music.[45] My speaking out of and in response to anxieties seemingly caught in impasses of both irreconcilable difference and imploding indifference of musical style in contemporary musical practice, thereby linking the pianist with the congregational voice, may well be heard to support Pickstock's conclusion regarding postmodern musical expression. However, I wonder if this assessment might be redeemed by engaging not only musico-philosophical theory but also contemporary musical practice. For, there seems an incongruity between Pickstock's urgings towards an exclusively imagined music, articulated by Augustine and elsewhere denied, and the means of their perusasion. Her support is what she claims "we *hear*" in music, which is that "to believe *the evidence of our ears* is . . . to deny nihilism . . . [and] to believe in transcendence."[46]

[44] Pickstock, "Music," 245.

[45] Ibid., 244-254. Pickstock reads musical postmodernism through philosophers who engage musical constructs, specifically Jacques Attali (who espouses Girardian violence as musically fundamental) and Philippe Lacoue-Laberthe.

[46] Ibid., 269. Italics added.

Such evidence begs the question of how music—what music?—can transcend musical traditions that fail and persuade us of Augustinian claims.

I refuse the ultimacy of Pickstock's critique of postmodern musical expression by making musically imperative the release of the legacy of harmony in the Western art music tradition, which is, the unfolding of multiple linear narratives, counterpoint, in a transcendent whole. I rely on several concepts Pickstock attributes to Augustine. These include the centrality of the silent caesura or rest(s) in the articulation and flow of musicality, an approach to music as a song (carmen)—a performance in time—rather than a single note or sounding system, and "music as offering, music as worship."[47] Herein I present a musical-theological relation that is more hopeful, because made present as pursued in practice, and yet more precarious than Pickstock's and Milbank's, for it lacks conceptual agency without ongoing acts of reconciliation amidst the grit and the grain of a community at a particular time and place.

In apprehending the musical through confession and offering, the liturgical acts in which music often participates in Anabaptist worship today,[48] I urge reconciling practices that do not assume we naturally grasp musical expression sufficiently to carry the congregational—or any other—voice to God. For this reason, in what follows I do not engage the urgings of an Anabaptist commitment to reconciliation through lives of worship and service by means of the congregational voice; the ongoing call for indifference to musical style for the sake of liturgical credibility precludes that possibility. Rather I insist that the congregational voice's anxiety be reconciled in a musical practice that understands musicality as credible in and as liturgical acts. I move now to a discussion of the term "harmony" in recent music discourse

[47] Ibid., 249, 264, and 247 respectively. Pickstock points to the Augustinian stress on the love of one's neighbour as an inseparable aspect of music as worship. Note that this approach also draws on Pickstock's work on liturgy as surpassing philosophy epistemologically in *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), esp. 170-178.

[48] Note the distinction from the nineteenth-century substitution of music for religion, or the work of art as the prophetic word; I wish to practice music in, not instead of liturgy.

and then shift our focus to musicality. Thereafter, I first engage the practice of counterpoint as the confession of musical expression, and lastly, pursue the performance of musicality as offering, imbued with grace and risking improvisation, as gleaned from practising *sequenza IV* and contemporaneous writings of Berio.

Harmony in Exile: The Pursuit of Musicality

What permits the analogue of the liturgical act of doxology, a dispossession of self wherein the human creature is made present in God and the musical gesture? Pickstock's presentation of *harmony* as a redeemed binarity of present moments and flow, and thereby of space and time, is supported by Augustine's equal stress upon the measurement of the absence of sound (in rests) as sound's presence.[49] This way of listening remains closer to how not harmony but *musicality* is understood today in traditions of Western culture, even if the pianist experiences a disconnect between her pursuit of this musicality and the credibility of its follow through. Definitions of *musicality* or *musical* tend to be both self-referential, "of or relating to music," and qualitative, "melodious, harmonious" and, presumably, "rhythmic."[50] *Musicality* communicates the perceiving, or drawing together, of music as an entity, as well as the evaluation of that entity through disciplinary measure. Thereby, musicality is not considered to be intrinsic to music outside of the individuation of performance, but made present through it. Commonly the assessment of musicality is reserved precisely for what is named as ineffable, for what transcends the notated and reaches for that which can only be "caught" with persuasion, care, and wisdom, through listening more than directing, and through attunement to particular conditions of score, tradition, instrument, room, and listeners' experience.[51] It is a drawing out and

[49] Pickstock links this to a theology of creation *ex nihilo.* See "Music," 245-247.

[50] I've taken these definitions from the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) to highlight that music dictionaries such as *The New Grove's* include no entry on musicality. Note that expressions such as "it strikes a chord," "it sings," "it rocks," or "it rings" draw on musicality as a measure of quality and persuasiveness in both musical and extra-musical activities.

[51] The musical as metaphor in theological scholarship rarely engages the

letting go of the music it forms, a gesture more through than of the playing body, a fusion of musician or music so convincing that neither the playing nor the audient listener can determine which is leading. Musicality plays (from and into) the rests through remembering and naming its objects, and by completing its gestures. It is also the revelation of the "not yet heard," unique and resistant to what is already known.[52]

In a chapter entitled, "Performing Faith," Stanley Hauerwas and James Fodor critique Milbank's articulation of theology's infinite harmonic differentiation as risking a timeless model and redirect its pursuit through ethics to how the church acquires its musical, peaceable, interested, Christlike character over time.[53] They look to musical performance, linking musicality and improvisation as analogous models to how the church embodies its calling. By considering musicality as not only similar to, but with agency in liturgical form, I would like to nudge further the analogical dimension of their project through *sequenza IV*.[54] Specifically, I consider musicality to be a less

musicological shift from a primary emphasis on score study and preservation in performance, to music as a performative, ethically and aesthetically engaged act. See, for example, *Music/Ideology: Resisting the Aesthetic*, ed. Adam Krims (Amsterdam: G + B Arts International, 1998). Herein I question Hughes' presumption that the prayerful differs from performance elsewhere in aim and effect. See Hughes, *Worship as Meaning,* 115.

[52] For musicological resonances, see Evens, *Sound Ideas*, n. 14 above. For a discussion of dispossession and memory by an Anabaptist-Mennonite theologian, see Harry Huebner, *Echoes of the Word* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005), especially "The Politics of Memory and Hope," 153-166.

[53] Stanley Hauerwas and James Fodor, "Performing Faith: The Peaceable Rhetoric of God's Church," in Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 75-109.

[54] "Analogy" here requries further nuancing by bringing into dialogue, for example, Tia DeNora's critique of the Adorno-inspired structural comparison of music and society as homologous, David Bentley Hart's exposé of analogy as the only intelligible means of knowing God or created presence, and Evens' search for a music-technological other with the capacity of the hand, that is, both a subjective and objective relation to what is measured. See DeNora, "Musical Practice and Social Structure," in *Empirical Musicology*, eds. Erick Clarke and Nicholas Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 35-56; David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapid, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 305-312; and Evens, *Sound Ideas,* 63-82.

stable construct than that inferred by these authors; for the pianist, musicality's highly fluid but working agency is more intensely threatened than usual,[55] and improvisation potentially untenable. Before pursuing musicality in practice, though, we need to consider some theological resonances in shifting from Radical Orthodoxy's qualified "harmonious order" to "musicality" through music discourse.

What strikes me as odd about the musical metaphors in contemporary theology is that forms of the term *harmony* creep in far more frequently than in contemporary music theory. Indeed, *harmony* is conspicuous for its relative absence in recent music theoretical literature, and Leo Spitzer's story tracing the gradual dissipation of a metaphoric world harmony and of scarcely indistinguishable uses of the terms harmony and music, as persisted within culture in the West from ancient Greece through early Christianity and until the Enlightenment,[56] requires a further chapter tracing the gradual omission of *harmony*—might we say, its move to exile[57]—from musicological discourse during the twentieth century. Alongside, account needs be given of the significantly increased scope of forms of the term *music*. In much recent discourse "music" suggests a field of activities and is inclusive of any form of engagement in which music has agency, thereby redressing any privileged authority of score and composer.[58]

Music theory's reticence to engage in harmony is easily linked to the destabilising of a particular tonal imagination. Likely the strongest musical accent of the twentieth century is heard in the breaking of the hegemony of the major triad. Thrown into question is its identity as the chord of nature, as a nameable abstraction that symbolises harmony,

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[55] Evens expresses this risk in stating: music "lives perpetually under the threat of its own death." *Sound Ideas,* 141.

[56] Spitzer states that "the history of the disappearance of . . . world harmony . . . is simply that of . . . the dechristianisation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [after which] . . . *Stimmung* . . . crystallized . . . robbed of its blossoming life." *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony,* 75.

[57] "Exile" recalls the biblical account at Mount Sinai, whence began the Israelite practice of worship.

[58] See Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

as the key to a coherent whole in musical time, and as the impetus for discourses of unity, comprehensive relationality, and closure, which persisted even after harmony's particular triadic form lost ground.[59] Carl Dahlhaus refers to the limited and waning scope in harmony's currency, and directs us to ancient frameworks. He writes, "There is a widespread tendency, probably too deep-rooted to be corrected, to take harmony as meaning no more than the vertical aspect of music. . . ." and later, "Twentieth-century harmony *(if harmony is still the appropriate term . . .)"* Further, he highlights the legacy of Heinrich Schenker[60] as a recent reclaiming of the Greek *harmonia's* " . . . combining or juxtaposing of disparate or contrasting elements—a higher and a lower note" and its " . . . joining together or adjustment of parts . . . .which Plato and Pythagoras invested with ethical meaning."[61] Schenker, the most referenced music theorist of the past century, opened up the entity of the chord or triad into linear processes over time, rendering the possibility of harmony as knowable in a single moment as an impossible abstraction. Schenker's music-theoretic speculations espoused explicit analogous relation to a God lying and working behind the taut multi-valent networks that comprise musical wholes with limitless differentiation. Much of the success of Schenker's

[59] While some musicologists have conceived of music as something "beyond unity," this frame is not proving satisfactory; rather, performative pluralism is the new order. See Joseph Kerman, "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out," in *Write All These Down*, 12-32 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994) and Fred Everett Maus, "Concepts of Musical Unity," in *Rethinking Music*, 171-192.

[60] The theories of Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935, of German Jewish heritage) were developed for German high art music with a nod to Scarlatti and Chopin; this music he considered to embody more persuasively the genius of God than any other. His most significant publication is *Der freie Satz* (1935). Schenkerian studies became popular in North America before Europe for political reasons; nevertheless, Pickstock's failure to mention Schenker in "Music" puzzles me.

[61] Carl Dahlhaus, "Harmony," in *The New Grove's Dictionary,* 2d ed., vol. 10, 851, 859. Italics added. Note that in ancient and early medieval music, two notes occurred in relation only in succession, separated in time and evaluated through memory. In music theory today, harmony generally is the historical study of chords and chord progressions. Further note that while in the mid-twentieth century "harmony" was the name of many music courses and textbooks, this is no longer the case.

theory resides in its "musical" appeal, such as the release of the closure of vertical moments and named harmonies into a higher music, and the rendering of any musical accent or structure as malleable at a deeper background level, or more transcendent order. Schenker demonstrated that a complex networking of linear counterpoint in musical texture did not die with Bach (as often assumed) but persisted through to Brahms. Schenker's project provided the impetus for a radical revisioning of how harmony and design in common practice tonal music continue to be heard today, and tenets of his work currently inform music-theoretic approaches to a vast array of musical traditions.

Nevertheless, many music theorists now refuse the particularity of a Schenkerian voice-leading structure, as a hierarchical, organically whole model of a polyphony of voices, as well as the pursuit of structural listening as key to musical experience and expression.[62] A strong disciplinary urge towards a plurality of musical approaches resists the Schenkerian imagination and does not explicitly direct us back to *harmonia*.[63] For instance, Nicholas Cook appraises the ancient scheme of the "harmony of the spheres" as "picturesque or whimsical" with a tone of dismissal,[64] thereby rendering both planetary orbits and the acts of God as particularly quaint within a discipline that engages the present as, for the most part, severed from the harmonious order of early Christian writings. Yet, Cook's terms call for mutuality and well-being amidst musical approaches, and pose a resistance to Radical Orthodoxy's charge of immanent indifference.[65] He expresses

[62] See Rose Rosengard Subotnik, "Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening: A Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno and Stravinsky," in *Exploration of Music, the Arts and Ideas*, eds. Eugene Narmour and Ruth Solie (New York: Pendragon, 1988), 87-122.

[63] For example, a new journal, *Radical Musicology*, intends a link of the musical and political under the premise of extending the permissible, and with no particular ideological identity. Its emergence in part points to the current musicological debate over insularity in music theory versus substitute forms of representation.

[64] Nicholas Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 75. Cook's writings include several analogies between musical and Christian fundamentalism; he neither dismisses nor engages Christianity in any other form.

[65] Pickstock pursues music as a postmodern ontology of illusion and despair. "Music," 260-267.

a commitment to plurality as if it were a "field of performances" with the metaphorical condition, "if today we're content to allow a thousand epistemological flowers bloom . . . then performativity is the foundation of pluralism."[66] Metaphors of ecological flourishing also are present in close readings of musical works. Through reference to harmonic fields (unordered collections of pitch not denying the presence of the harmonic series in sound but imagined without particular evaluative measures of resonance in abstraction) and musical streams (multiple simultaneous linear entities, neither requiring identarian uniqueness nor preserving individual registral space), theorists have moved from assumptions of *a priori* essences from which sonorous activities demand a root, time a grid, and the musical event a positioned and identifiable voice. Through fields and streams they posit a flourishing of what needs be musically sound.[67] Indeed, Aden Evens identifies a recent shift from a mid-twentieth century ontological crises of "What is music?" to evaluations of "What is musical?,"[68] thereby purporting disciplinary measure as a best fit for a performative music that is necessarily measured aesthetically and ethically. Radical Orthodoxy's (re)claiming of music theory and musicology's (re)claiming of the musical do not pursue similar sources or terms of engagement. However, we would do well to acknowledge common urgings towards wellness and goodness in the gatherings of irreducible pluralities of musical interaction and differentiation in discourses that are theologically directed and those theologically disengaged.

Still, there is no immediate reconciliation between the harmony that a Radical Orthodoxy appropriates and that which musicology, for the most part, obliterates. To address this gap, I would like to push the ecological metaphor further and consider how we might rest within harmony's embers and practice its musical expressions, conventions, and metaphoric imaginings as if harmony were in exile. From this place we pursue harmony as capable of learning sustainable practices

[66] Cook, "Analysing Performance, Performing Analysis," 261.

[67] Note that under the guise of harmonic fields, triadic sonorities have re-entered the art music tradition in recent decades, operating without a perceived depth of score, without a given harmony to which they must submit.

[68] Evens, *Sound Ideas,* xiii.

of musical plurality that are credible andhopeful today. For some, this may hearken patriarchal, oppressive expressions of Christian faith. Heidi Epstein hears a masculine rage for order in Pickstock's re-invoking of the ancient schema of world harmony, and advocates an honest hearing of the world as best surmised in "a limping jig of grace."[69] However, I find a certain congruity between Epstein and Pickstock. Indeed, I consider the beauty of Radical Orthodoxy's proposal of "an indeterminacy that is not impersonal chaos but infinite, interpersonal harmonious order, in which time participates" to lie in the bedraggled musicality of its expression, for it sounds like a burdened summation with a trailing addendum. As such it aptly describes the ways I relate to and practice *sequenza IV*. The proposal longs to sing; instead it is overwhelmed by the scope of its musical ear. Its hearing ranges from the infinity of musical expression promised in centuries of discourse on harmony in Western tradition,[70] to the harmonious or periodic order of the harmonic series (adherence and resistance to particular tenets of which continue to plague and permit cultural distinction via differentiated tuning systems),[71] to the indeterminacy of both serialist and aleatoric permutations wherein the ear attunes to ever further reaches of differentiation and sympathetic resonance,[72] and to recent imperatives to heed the interpersonal dimensions of music making, the living bodies in the timbres of differentiated performance.[73] Amidst this range I consider the musical constructs most imbued with a Christian

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[69] Heidi Epstein, *Melting the Venusberg: A Feminist Theology of Music* (New York: Continuum International Pub. Co., 2004), 97. Epstein attributes this image to Kathleen Sands.

[70] Prominent sources include Zarlino, *Le istitutioni harmoniche* (1558); Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Traité de l'harmonie*; (1722), and Schenker, *Der freie Satz* (1935).

[71] Consider that the evaluation of equal temperament, the democratising musical compromise of Western that solidified with the rise of Enlightenment rationality, currently is back on the table.

[72] James Wright suggests this as Schoenberg's intent, not the evacuation of acoustic resonance as commonly understood. See *Schoenberg, Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005).

[73] For example, in Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Simon Frith, *Performing Rites* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996) consider this by linking music and sociology.

imagination to be neither rejected nor singularly adequate for today's musicianship. These constructs are, firstly, the acoustic properties of the harmonic series, with its infinite periodicity and differentiation and its history of privileging the most easily audible, lowest integer ratios;[74] and, secondly, form as polyphony,[75] a practice of counterpoint presuming sufficient registral and temporal space for each voice, along with certain conventions of tonal and accentual concordance, at least in the polyphony most celebrated in theological writing: that of Bach. Perhaps most tellingly, the proposal confesses a continuing over-indulgence in pitch as music's primary content, and the final clause evinces a dearth of experience in its call for attention to time.

It is common to regard musical time as a property of a musical work that is pursued through rhythm and metre and that permits a linear musical narrative to be a meaningful whole, regardless of how multiple its tenets or resistant to univocity its particular expression. To enable persuasive performance of *sequenza IV*, in which each act of listening takes an object, I turn elsewhere; specifically, to differentiated times and acts of musical activity. One time leans towards an infinite plurality of musical gestures, ever expanding what is resonant and permissible. The other time leans towards constraints, making the play and particularity of musical persuasion possible by permitting musical truth and attuned relation to stand in a particular time and place. These times align, respectively, with practice and performance, whose common ordering can be challenged through two forms of analogy with liturgical form. The first analogy forms with the differentiated times of the church dispersed and gathered, through

[74] Much of the theological intrigue with the harmonic series can be traced to its simultaneous measure of resonance and diversity, that is, its incapacity to close in on itself. This can be demonstrated with the inequivalency of 8 perfect fifths and 5 perfect octaves, that is, of $(3:2)^8$ to $(2:1)^5$. However, such eternal diversity can truly emanate only as a singular entity since its plurality can be located only as sourced from one particular fundamental tone at a time. Hence, the harmonic series cannot account for different starting places.

[75] Hart as much as claims "Bach's is the ultimate Christian music; it reflects as no other human artefact ever has or could the Christian vision of creation." His discussion of Bach's music helpfully correlates tonal, motivic and formal features as graspable yet ever opening in differentiated newness; he would do well to learn to hear something similar in other musics. *The Beauty of the Infinite,* 272-273.

which the inclinations above can be distinguished in role but not by succession since neither is categorically preliminary to the other. Note that the discrete yet interchangeable times of liturgical expression constrast sharply with the common understanding of musical practice as a private act that is prerequisite to public performance. The second analogy forms with similarly gesturedacts of liturgical service, confession and offering, as necessarily sdiscrete in performance. Acts of confession follow through with the release of all that human actors know and do, celebrate and grieve, claim and repent, into what they do not know, into the rest of God and God's time, enabling them to perform the truths they hear but do not possess or perfect. Acts of offering release and receive God's gifts, and embody both the real presence of particular gifts, and the symbolic presence of habits practiced elsewhere. An offering's form is both completed and never complete in its performed presence.

Pickstock's appraisal of a postmodern musical expression as ultimately nihilistic would have to accept Fink's confession of a despairing/exhilarating indifference to musical style as a completed, graspable truth. However, to play *sequenza IV* in a heightened and frenzied panic would be to take the pianist's anxiety as persuasive and desirable, and to read Fink's confession of indifference to musical order as performatively directive. If instead this essentialized confession is considered as musically untenable, and as plausible only if deprived of the differentiated times and continuing exchange between performance and practice of liturgical form, then its musical credibility can be challenged and musicality's grace can resound.

The Practice of Confession: Counterpointing Musical Expression

The notion of musical expression draws on multiple mediations. It takes shape in factors of musical texts, the named events or objects of structure through which accents of style and discrete entities flowing within and as musical form are known. Expression also forms in factors of persuasion, with subjects resisting and transcending what is notated or already collectively known.[76] Musicological inquiry does

[76] The anxiety in the musical understanding of expression is reflected in the

not support a direct congruence of the somatic, textual (score), emotional and persuasive aspects of gestural expression, that is, a synthesis of movement, object, intention, and reception in precise verbal translation.[77] Yet, musical expression needs to be practiced by the musician through rendering musical momentum as discernible and acts of listening as transitive, requiring objects to listen for.[78] Renaming the practice of musical expression as confession permits the player to remember, to make audible, and to follow through in isolation on any and every trace of a musical entity that sounds musically relevant without concern for how these combine in the whole of the piece. Thereby her acquisition of gestural expression forms as a counterpointing virtual polyphony of musical memory in the flow of her arms, nuanced differently each time depending on what she listens for or confesses as a musical object.[79]

Three statements by Berio encourage this approach to musical form. Firstly, he writes of a hope

> . . . to reach the point where we use gesture for *what it may eventually become,* thus resisting the "natural" tendency of languages to codify, to crystallize into symbols, to transform itself into a "catalogue of gestures," fragments of a still life. . . ."[80]

withdrawal of both the old adage, "put expression in," that is, get beyond the perfunctory and insert yourself, and the more recent "draw the expression out of the piece," that is, submit yourself and trace the music.

[77] David Lidov, *Is Language a Music?: Writings on Musical Form and Signification* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 8, 133.

[78] Herein I address the problem identified by Cook of an analyst speaking for what the player expresses, instead of what the analyst projects, which might but needn't bear strong resemblance to what the player has performed and practiced. See "Analysing Performance, Performing Analysis," in *Rethinking Music,* 258-261.

[79] Berio writes of a virtual polyphony of elements that need be remembered or realised in practice. Quoted in Philippe Albera, "Introduction aux neuf sequenzas" in *Contrechamps,* 92. Further, he speaks of a qualitative control of densities of musical relations, which pertains to formations the pianist has learned to listen for and make audible. See Rossana Dalmonte, *Luciano Berio: Two Interviews,* (London: Boyars, 1985), 97. Herein I question David Bentley Hart's summary dismissal of contemporary musics "varying only in degrees of intensity." See Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 208-9, 279.

[80] Berio, from "Du Geste et de Piazza Carita," quoted in David Osmond Smith, *Berio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 40-41.

As such a musical gesture resists the measure of a preserved, identically repeated form. Secondly, against the grain of the 1960s avant-garde, Berio advocates virtuosity, reclaiming performance as critical to the apprehenshion of musical form rather than as an imperfect realization of what is graspable in the composer's score. He refers to the performer as a "collaborator with the composer," suggests that the composer supplies the performer with "hints and nudges" rather than a completed product, and measures contemporary virtuosity by the player's memory of and versatility with already known musical styles, on which she draws in ever new combinations of musical form.[81] Thirdly, Berio dares invoke *harmony*, and speaks of acting musically as "making complementary or harmonizing the terms of an opposition . . . making them concrete," a process through which some quality of reception becomes possible. He writes of this as

> . . . a very dangerous and complex operation . . . [b]ecause between those distant points (between an African hetrophony and myself, for example, or between one harmonic dimension and another) you may find the whole history of music and, unless you're going to pretend that there's nothing there and stick your head in the sand, this implies a continual shifting of perspective.[82]

Certainly Berio's view of musical gesture through the consciousness of history could be understood to incline towards the absolute historicism through which Milbank favours Christian theology over Foucault's genealogy, Deleuze's deterritorialism, and secular nihilism,[83] and whereby Pickstock claims that the postmodern denies music. However, while Berio's remarks speak of performance without directly addressing practice, I consider his intent to require the differentiated presences of practice and performance as I've engaged them in liturgical form. With this interest let's rename Fink's despairing/exhilarating confessional terms with ones that are more commonly practiced, firstly in musial discourse, and secondly in liturgical confession.

The most common musical meta-narrative traces a path from suffering to joy, signifying access to emotional states and to a process

[81] Berio, quoted in Albera, "Introduction aux neuf sequenzas," 91.

[82] Berio, quoted in *Two Interviews,* 135-136.

[83] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory,* 278.

of transformation that music is taken to mean or express.[84] Fink's confession of despairing/exhilarating offers terms that are similar to, but less embodied than those of suffering and joy. Further, Fink's terms do not permit a linear narrative; they proceed not in succession but instead as coexistent, unordered expressive gestures. David Metzer considers those works of the 1960s (including Berio's) whose materials quote known repertoire under similar rubrics, madness, and promise. Metzer surmises that the quotation pieces of the '60s

> . . . reveal dynamic spaces shaped by the forces of constant expansion and connection, realms that reach out into endless horizons of time and hope. On the other hand, those spaces ultimately collapse in on themselves, creating scenes of emptiness and rubble. . . . [R]arely do compositions offer more than one chronological scene, especially such dissimilar ones. That contrast speaks to how much those compositions had opened themselves up to the realm of time, experiencing both the bounty and the dangers of that realm.[85]

Metzer further describes this compositional aesthetic as exhausted within a decade.

Let's consider *sequenza IV,* whose materials hint at identifiable musical styles but do not explicitly recall particular works as not so quickly dated as Metzer's referenced worksand more significantly, as intensifying musicality's ancient and ongoing agency. By retaining the unordered inclinations of a despairing/exhilarating confession, and the more embodied expressions of suffering and joy, we can rename these as confessional acts of lament and hope. The pianist does not practice musical expressions that lament and hope in musically definable ways; rather, she laments that the demands of harmony's reconciliation and plurality within a relatively short musical time do not allow her to honour all, or even most, of the relationships that she confesses in practice in any given performance. Yet, she finds hope in the conviction that such comprehensive balancing is not her responsibility, for she has released a concept of form wherein she must

[84] Cook presents this as a myth constructed from the nineteenth and twentieth century reception of Beethoven's music. See *Music: A Very Short Introduction,* 19-24.

[85] David Metzer, *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-century Music* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 158-159.

narrate the whole. Further, she laments that she must neglect most of the nuance on which any given style depends within the constraints of the score's time; yet she is hopeful that these will not be forgotten, precisely because acts of listening practice gestural formation and require that remembered presences be savoured. Still further, she notes that lament and hope can mingle and coexist in practice without frenzy or debilitation, for a successively ordered musical narrative obtains not in the practice of the score but through its irreducible complementarity with the performance of a musical offering.

The Performance of a Musical Offering: Musicality's Grace

If the confessions of virtual polyphony in *sequenza IV* are permitted and expected to extend into infinity as the expression of performance, the musicality of the player and piece alike will fail in the panic and the tedium of absolute historicism. If, instead, *sequenza IV* is performed liturgically as the symbolic yet present public act of offering, then form is permitted through gestures that follow through on a finite spectrum of gestures, which are chosen from what the pianist confesses in practice habitually. Herein, each performance is pursued with a different set of constraints. Thereby, musicality can approach the limit of the boundary between practice as an endless challenge to faultless musical communication,[86] whereby musically reified gestures are remembered in acts of dispossession, and performance as an enabling agent of musical presence and resilience, a forum that makes communal participation possible.

Two comments by Berio support this direction. Firstly, he told David Burge "just play it [*sequenza IV*] like Chopin,"[87] indicating, I

[86] Luciano Berio, "The Composer and His Work: Meditation on a Twelve-Tone Horse" (1968), in *Classic Essays on Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), 167-171.

[87] Comments to David Burge, recorded in Hermann, "Theories of Chordal Shape, 387. Hermann speculates that this might be in reference to a certain gesture of an arpeggiation. Alternatively, I read it as a play on nineteenth-century organicism, a cue that the pianist needs to make believable and desirable not a musical form as an essentialised whole, but as if it were. To support this many theoretical articulations could be cited; I turn rather to the stage. I have heard in-

conjecture, that the pianist take the quirky bits of this and that of the score and make the most persuasively beautiful and variously nuanced music he could imagine. Secondly, Berio suggests that musical performance be an enactment of a ". . . transformation . . . like in a fairy tale."[88] These hints at narrative transcendence urge a musicality not bereft of the discipline's subjunctive mythology, offering music *as if it were* altogether worthy of one's time and attention, and *as if the musician were* capable of believing in a musical future from within the constraints and opportunities of any cultural moment. With the grace of musicality so defined might we now hear harmony revived?[89]

At the risk of inviting music's deliverance from exile too soon, let's consider its relation to another musical entity, one that has gained significant agency within recent musico-theological reflection: improvisation.[90] Improvisatory metaphors serve to unbind God from proper forms, as often are assumed as inherent to traditions of harmony, and offer the musicality of a world still being created by God. In those improvised traditions with which I am familiar, players practice by rehearsing the riffs and forms of their stylistic histories. From the habits of their hands these players offer in performance a process that starts somewhere, lets some things hold and propositions others, and that continually allows music to be made new by players

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ternally acclaimed pianists proclaim that the music of Chopin *is* the most beautiful music in the world; to my ears Chopin is much more compelling when played *as if it were* such.

[88] Berio, *Two Interviews,* 123. Similarly, John Rink urges us to a nineteenth-century performance rhetoric to persuade listeners today "if 'resonance' is to occur . . . .tracing a *grande ligne* to mediate between the poetic and the structural . . . [P]erformers *must* commit themselves to a particular inferred 'meaning' in a given performance if the playing is to have any sense of conviction. Weighing up options on the concert platform is simply not viable." See Rink, "Translating Musical Meaning: The Nineteenth-Century Performer as Narrator," in *Rethinking Music,* 217, 238.

[89] Here I rely on Hughes' invoking of Paul Ricoeur's second naiveté to suggest that the Christian world can resonate with the truths of Christianity only as mediated through the modernity of which it is part, and from there daring faith at the edge of what is known and not known. See *Worship as Meaning,* 287-294.

[90] Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time,* 204-270; Hauerwas and Fodor, "Performing Meaning, 53.

who listen together as they hear and respond with some critical difference. I propose that if harmony, an impossible reconciliation of musicality's irreducible times, is to be released of its exile in contemporary expression, it needs to approach the boundary of the intersection of a score and a chart, in counterpoint with improvisation.[91] The carefully constructed forms of largely written, score based traditions, and the short-hand notes of largely orally, chart based traditions are not mutually exclusive. Yet characteristics more typical of one often can helpfully redirect stasis and dysfunction in the other. The realigning of musico-theological inquiry through improvisation begins to do just that; it also risks suggesting that improvised styles are more musically true than notated ones. Further, improvisation alone risks insufficient practice of the range of stylistic harmonising, and hence hierarchic indifference that formed a musical imperative in the 1960s, for the freedom and creativity offered through improvisation depend on more tightly constrained musical conventions than those of harmony in notational practice.

In approaching harmony at the boundary of score and chart, the performance of *sequenza IV* is significantly informed by, but does not become improvisation in any reasonably coherent way, that is, beyond certain tangible constraints in the play of the score. Yet it points to an irreducible reconciliation of tendencies of written and oral based traditions that need to embody the characteristics of the other without reduction to an indistinguishable whole. The counterpointing of harmony and improvisation, or of score and chart, requires an irreducible play of their forms. Such play is precisely that which can be learned in the individuated yet interchangeable acts of liturgical community. Indeed, we might even hear Berio ringing the hope of the improvisatory reconciling with harmony in community through his disparagement towards engaging one of harmony's musical partners, melody,

[91] This projects further than Berio speculates in the 1960s, even if his articulations of form can be aligned with the practice habits of improvising musicians. He describes improvisatory experiments within the avant-garde of the western art music tradition at that time as ignoring constraints of style and accent and therefore tedious, and distinguishes these from established forms of improvisation such as standard jazz and Baroque music. Berio, *Two Interviews,* 83.

at a place and a time that is bereft of confession's rest and offering's grace. He writes,

> Among current tendencies, what strikes me as curious and pathetic is the reconquest of melody. The processes that generate melody cannot be manufactured from one day to the next—melodies are born spontaneously within collective groups or in a stylistic frame when all the "parameters" of music are at peace, and start "singing" together. . . . It seems to me there is a political error within a preconceived search for "popular" melody, conceived as something to make and use rather than as the result, and not necessarily a spontaneous one, of a process of collective sedimentation.[92]

Addendum

I suggested earlier that my hearing of music was more precarious and more hopeful than Pickstock's by situating this conversation within a musical hearing. However, I too rely on what is imagined, not an imagined music, but an imagined analogical measure of liturgical form. I do not measure confession and offering within the whole of liturgical form, nor do I know of any liturgical setting where *sequenza IV* would be present other than as the confession I offer. Radical Orthodoxy purports to re-envision orthodox theology beyond its early expressions through participation, whereby disciplinary segregation is unintelligible and disciplinary engagement critical. For this the writers insist that "every discipline must be framed by a theological perspective."[93] As the forms of such framing continue to be heard in our writing and in the voice of the congregation, might we also insist they be musical, so that neither theology nor music are mistaken for God, but interact as God's creatures, analogically present, irreducibly plural, and, on occasion, so fused in character that we might believe in the counterpoint of a collaborative whole?

[92] Berio, *Two Interviews,* 79. Also, discovered heterophonic melodic possibilities.

[93] Milbank et al., "Introduction," in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 3.

NINE

Harry J. Huebner

PARTICIPATION, PEACE, AND FORGIVENESS: MILBANK AND YODER IN DIALOGUE

> "*The word of God is not bound*" (2 Timothy 2:9b).[1]

> *Jesus said, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*" (Matthew 16:19b).

> *Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing*" (Luke 23:34a).

Perhaps we are permitted to say with Timothy that just as the word of God is not bound, so the act of God is not bound, meaning that with God there is always a way of getting there from anywhere. And this thought cannot be consistently narrated without the theological notion of forgiveness. It is common knowledge that the sustenance of our world depends upon fresh beginnings, not from scratch, but through new turns from whence redemption can flow. This is but another way of saying that there is no last human act, just as there is no generic first act; or there is no last human word or original human word. All acts are representations, "ways of putting it" or ways of being in "dialogue" with the words and acts of others. We do what we do (or leave undone) in the context of what has gone before. Not that past acts determine current ones, but they are there, they are real and they matter, and they find their true meaning within the sometimes illusive dynamics of God's word and acts.

[1] All scriptural references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

Precisely because the act of God is not bound we can see that there is no final determination of our acts by those that have gone before. Thus it is not *necessary* for us to lie or kill because we can see no other way out, or to be justified in saying that we had to do such and such because there was no other choice. Forgiveness names that other choice. Forgiveness is an act not only of doing but of having something done to us, which essentially binds us to a stance of openness to a beyond we cannot see. For forgiveness to be theological it must both reach back to the possibilities of new pasts and forward in the hope of new futures. For forgiveness—God's and ours—without reconciliation and atonement is theologically empty. In this way it becomes possible to believe that not knowing what to do does not mean that there is nothing that can be done. Or, and as important, just because there is nothing that we can see happening does not mean that there is nothing taking place.

To say that forgiveness is the precondition of human existence is to make an ontological claim; especially if we claim, as we must, that theology precedes ontology. This means that how we understand the world is through the embodied word of Trinitarian God. This does not make forgiveness, or peace, or justice, independently fundamental—as the starting point for conceiving the universe—but rather all are themselves only theologically intelligible; all only have meaning within the story of the incarnation of God. For there are no givens in terms of which theology makes sense; theology itself is the gift!

In the West we are used to seeing forgiveness unpacked through the imagination of secular psychology. For both John Milbank and John Howard Yoder it is not so. Both theologians see the incarnation as the fundamental reality through which all of life, including the cosmos, is made intelligible. Forgiveness is of the very structure of God's creation, and hence the presupposition of reconciliation and peace.

This paper brings Milbank and Yoder into dialogue. Each presents a way of understanding theology that makes sense of a life within the web of theological language named by such terms as forgiveness, peace, reconciliation, atonement, cross, and resurrection. Neither has

any interest in a pre-theological understanding of peace and reconciliation that accommodates to the secular. Yet their views show interesting convergences and divergences. It is the assumption of this exercise that reflecting on the similarities and differences will tease out important matters of Christian theology and life.

Milbank on Forgiveness

At the centre of Milbank's work is the call for theology to reclaim its voice. As such theology gives up the claim to comprehensiveness because it holds that truth is not based on universally available secular reason. It comes to us as a revelatory moment in contingent time and not on the basis of the necessity of thought. This is so because theology is grounded on a belief that God created the world *ex nihilo*, meaning that what exists does so because God gave it existence. Thus, ontologically speaking, the world is at peace and violence is its distortion, not its essence. Or, as Augustine has taught us, evil is privation.

My comments here will focus primarily on Milbank's work in *Being Reconciled*,[1] which appeared ten years after *Theology and Social Theory*.[2] In the latter work Milbank seeks to locate his project by giving theology special status, apart from the other disciplines of study. He does this because of the recognition of theology's timidity amid modernity's quest for knowledge in general, which has the effect of permitting other disciplines to define the terms in which theology can speak. In response, he argues for a theological autonomy that sounds arrogant to modern ears only because theology is thought of as saying something profound whenever it says something that can be said just as well by psychology, sociology, or philosophy. This is the very thing that Milbank rejects since it implies the wholly unnecessary role for theology. Yet it is not as though theology has its own subject matter, for the subject of theology is everything. Hence theology's task is to teach us to see the world from the standpoint of our participation in Trinitarian God.

[1] John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[2] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

Milbank's reading of forgiveness is enmeshed in his entire theological enterprise. The few representative themes chosen here hardly suffice to give the subject the treatment it deserves, but the hope is that they may serve as fruitful possibilities for interaction with Yoder's views on similar themes in the ongoing pursuit for faithful Christian living.

Participation: Milbank's project throughout, as is characteristic of Radical Orthodoxy generally, sees "participation in the Trinity" as a way of viewing the Christian life generally and human agency particularly. This is similar to classical/medieval Christianity and differs from modern views like Kant's categorical imperative, Mill's utilitarianism, and Heidegger's concept of the relation of finite beings to Being. Rather than conceiving of the good as embodied in a universal law or in a final end, or in an abstract relationship to Being, Milbank sees the good life as an invitation into the very being and activity of the divine. Admittedly, this also sounds abstract, but on the contrary, its concreteness is made visible, at least in part, in the incarnation—the trinitarian embodiment in human life and society. Milbank believes that it is precisely this reach back to orthodoxy that helps to make sense of the Christian life for those of us stuck in a society that compels us to see ethics in terms of universal moral norms. And this move entirely transforms ethics as we understand it in contemporary thought.

Milbank finds it necessary to broaden the notion of participation from its classical narrow view concerned with sharing primarily knowledge and being in the Divine. He extends participation to include language, history, and even culture; "the whole realm of human making"[3] is participation in the divine. So when we make things, change the created order, even ourselves, we are thereby, when done authentically, participating in Trinitarian God. For all that is, insofar as it is, is divine gift. Participation in the created order is participation in the divine.

This notion of participation has its source in neo-Platonism (even Platonism before this), and it comes to clearest Christian expression in Augustine, especially his notion of will as the tension between the

[3] John Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, ix.

"infinitely general and the finitely particular."[4] Milbank identifies this to be in contrast to the modern Kantian notion of the will as suspended in the tension between good and evil. For Kant the Good is narrated as a good will, which is good insofar as it is free. But Milbank points out that this leads Kant to inescapable problems.

One such problem surfaces at the meeting of the moral and the political. On the basis of his categorical imperative, Kant claims that it cannot be universally willed to oppose the sovereign power, since the sovereign is the absolute source of all legality and, by implication, liberal morality whose highest good is the protection of the free will. So just as in the case of lying, willing that opposes the sovereign undermines the very possibility of trust and free association. Moreover, since Kant's commitment to the bounds of human reason prevents any mediation of the infinite, he could not conceive of a moral sovereign who was not an earthly sovereign; hence to contest the political sovereign is absolutely immoral. This absolutetization of human sovereign authority is so total that Kant, according to Milbank, describes "regicide as the supreme instance of radical evil and of sublime horror, almost replacing the crucifixion of the Son of God."[5] Milbank concludes, "Kantian morality, deconstructed, says, you know your will is good when you obey the law of the State without exception and beyond the call of duty. Eichmann had it more right than he appears to have known."[6]

Kant's rendering of morality has so fundamentally underwritten the collusion between liberalism and totalitarianism, that to envision another model—participation in the divine—seems altogether counter-intuitive. For virtually no argument is required; only the assumption of threatened freedoms needs to be stated by the sovereign, for an endless self-sacrifice of individuals to be accepted as the price to be paid. But Kant's presentation of liberal morality can be seen as grounded on nothing but the human mind spinning into itself and finding necessities distilled from the principle of universalization. From the standpoints of evil as privation and participation in the Trinity

[4] Ibid., 11.
[5] Ibid., 24.
[6] Ibid.

as the mode of human agency, this is radically deficient. And this opens the door to "new" possibilities, new not because they are novel, but because they re-envision a "forgotten" paradigm—participation in the Trinity instead of following dictates derived from secular reason.

Peace and Violence: Milbank's passion is to exploit a view of peace and violence that emerges out of explicit theological investigations and to resist giving in to an account that assumes self-evidence in the tradition of Kantian liberalism. He takes great pains to expose the inconsistencies of views of pacifism not theologically formed. He unveils a common threefold onlooker stance to violence—passively watching endless streams of violence on screen as a mode of entertainment; "doing violence" to a past filled with accounts of savage acts with an air of moral superiority and detachment; and seeking ways to refuse participation in violence by penal reform, by opting out of society through forming alternative communities, or through promoting unworkable nonviolent alternative structures in a violent society. Milbank sees these forms of pacifism as a non-participation or, better, as spectator pacifism, ways of merely "gazing at violence." Hence he makes critical comments, such as:

> The pacifist outlook seems to assume that where one is presented with acts of violence in real life—either towards others or to oneself—then to retain the stance of onlooker is morally superior to undertaking a defensive counter-violence. The pacifist elects to gaze at violence, and he maintains this stance, even if he turns his face away from a violent spectacle, since it persists in his memory.[7]

Milbank helpfully points out two problems: first, that in our society there is no escape from the violence we are all part of. Hence that form of pacifism which does not acknowledge this is self-deceptive and collapses in internal contradiction. Second, even if it were possible, the stance of onlooker cannot be nonviolent since it displays a callous

[7] Ibid., 29 (emphasis his). It is interesting that Milbank, the master of nuance, does not consider a view of pacifism that is participatory. For example, he assumes that the disjunction between "onlooker" and "defensive counter-violence" is absolute with no shades of mediation. Whether this is an acceptable disjunction would be a fruitful further debate although this is not the place for that discussion. Yet, however that discussion might go, clearly Milbank's critique is one that every Christian pacifist must take seriously.

disregard to those caught in the grasp of violence. The incarnation is the very act of God's rejection of spectatorship by becoming present in a violent world.

Those who have thought carefully about pacifism within our violent culture might be tempted to suggest that Milbank is missing the mark here, but his savage push to expose the *aporias* of secular pacifism is important and necessary in order to force a deeper understanding of both the Christian teaching and our current political reality where some say, "War is becoming a general phenomenon, global and interminable."[8] The point is well made that pacifism as a mere "gaze at violence" is unchristian and itself violent. Clearly non-involvement in violent situations is at best an interest in self-purity and can hardly communicate love for the other. Yet the point may also be made that this is different from the ethic of a martyrdom people who participate in the suffering of Christ instead of responding to violence with counter-violence. This might in fact be seen as a form of radical gift exchange and, with some careful theological reflection, might be made consistent with Milbank's own project. And even this may, in the end, remain "counter-intuitive," "aporetic," and "impossible for humanity as ordinarily understood."[9] Yet as an emulation of the stance of Jesus it cannot simply be said to flow from enlightened liberalism.[10]

Milbank's critique of the pacifism that is a form of spectatorship is rooted in his Augustinian view of evil. Since God creates *ex nihilo* a world that is good and peaceful, evil has no positive existence and exists only as privation. So evil, even in its extreme forms like the Nazi death camps, is perpetrated because someone sees in it a path

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[8] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 3.

[9] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 29.

[10] Jesus praying in Gethsemane is the prime example here. Jesus was not non-involved in violence, and yet he rejected violence. Ultimately such a response to violence is not irresponsible because of resurrection. God's resurrection is a gift which we must remain open to as redemption from violence in the face of our own impotence. This is but to confess that when we can think of nothing redemptive to do, it does not mean that nothing redemptive is being done. Like Christ, the gaze of suffering love is the stance of openness to God's resurrection.

to good. And the perversion of this view of goodness is perversion precisely insofar as it is detached from the good found in trinitarian participation. It is in the seeking of a theological counter-participation that we see the calling of all who wish to be faithful. And for that, incarnation, atonement, and forgiveness are the answers.

Forgiveness: As Milbank sees it, forgiveness is the Christian response to evil and violence. But he makes the point that the "waters of forgiveness" divide near the top between forgetting and remembering. Milbank rejects Søren Kierkegaard's notion of forgiveness as a "counterpart of creation" in which forgiveness becomes an act of de-creation; literally causing what is, not to be. Kierkegaard saw this way of saying it as rooted in early Christianity where the positivity of forgiveness was the counterpart to evil. Yet the problem with this way of putting it is that it assumes the posititivty of evil that privation theory forbids. Although evil must be dealt with, there is nothing to de-create; it is rather what it prevents that must be made possible in new ways.

Throughout the high Middle Ages, forgiveness was mediated through the sacrament of penance. Penance is more than an attitude because it is a public sign, a gesture that opens up new vistas closed off by past error. For Thomas Aquinas human forgiveness could be offered without repentance but Divine forgiveness could not be so offered. On this model, where forgiveness is realized through repentance, not only is restitution made through justice, but restitution is so complete that one is utterly reconciled with the one being wronged, namely, God. So there is a future that can flow forth so smoothly, perhaps in a sense Kierkegaard's words apply: it is "as if evil no longer existed."

The Christian notion of forgiveness relates to the idea of atonement. Through the incarnation, God offers us forgiveness even for original sin where God's forgiveness takes the form of suffering in our stead. This means literally a for-giving; that is, giving the gift on behalf of the other.[11] This is really a "return" which humanity should make, but since the fall we can no longer make it. Our guilt and our sins so incapacitate us that only an innocent other can show us the

[11] Ibid., 46.

way of penitence. And only thereafter does it become imitable even by the guilty.

The exchange which Milbank here talks about is not a capitalist exchange where purchasing on the basis of merit and value takes place. But rather it is grounded in infinite free gift.

> It has a remedy only by the incalculable mystery of God himself. What we are offered through Christ's atonement is without measure and without price and the only penance demanded of us in return for this forgiveness is the non-price of acceptance—even if such acceptance must be shown, manifested, and realized in this or that appropriate action according to time and place.[12]

That is, forgiveness cannot be built on a calculable economy; it is without price.

Milbank concludes from this brief analysis of the medieval notion of forgiveness, that we have inherited a kind of positive notion of forgiveness compared to seeing it as a negative gesture which came out of antiquity. Here the notion of overlooking of fault tended to be based on self-interested reason. Hence arbitrary acts of mercy were viewed with suspicion. And out of this notion comes a view of forgiveness as an act of mere sovereign whim which is a gesture of cancellation that is quite prepared to violate justice. And modernity and even postmodernity have inherited much of this concept of forgiveness. Often it is this view of forgiveness that gets connected with how we read the Bible. On the contrary, the Hebraic view of God is not seen as a will to pure forgetfulness of fault. Rather there is a need for ritual purification and acts of atonement. One might say that we have here a view of forgiveness that is mixed with two notions: that of a monarchic component and a democratic sense of restitution from within. And it is this double-pronged view of forgiveness that gets realized in the incarnation "where the estranged and alien sovereign is restored to rule through the consensual self-legitimation of humanity (in Christ and his body the church) under norms of taught and received objective measure."[13] After the Christ event there is then believed to "begin not a reign of realized forgiveness but a time when divine forgiveness can

[12] Ibid., 47.

[13] Ibid., 49.

be somewhat mediated by human beings: a time for which justice is infinitized as forgiveness."[14]

Not only is there a tension between forgiveness as negative gesture and as positive gift, but there is another tension that Milbank identifies; that is between forgiveness as human and as divine. Milbank raises the question of whether purely interhuman forgiveness is possible. And in considering this question he raises five major *aporias*, that is, irresolvable internal tensions in the argument.

The first *aporia* pertains to the question, "Who is to forgive?" In this way he tests the logical consistency of purely human forgiveness. Milbank shows that the tension between the victim and the sovereign authority makes this a serious issue. The common assumption is that only the victim can forgive; that is, it is the victim who has suffered the wrong and hence only she can be reconciled. But this is impossible on several levels. First of all, victims are far too numerous because evil is itself contagious; hence it is hard to know how far the consequences of even a simple act of evil extends. And you can't simply summon an infinite number of victims. Not only this but often the victim does not survive and dead victims can hardly forgive.

There is also an additional problem here and that is the problem of the single victim. What right does a woman have to forgive her rapist because, by so doing, she is in effect forgiving on behalf of all raped women since the crime is an attack on the whole community of women. It would seem, therefore, that only the sovereign representative of the community would have the power to forgive. But how can a sovereign forgive on behalf of all when individual hatred and bitterness might well persist by a damaged victim? On this logic Milbank concludes that "neither the victim nor the sovereign power may forgive and there is no human forgiveness."[15]

The second *aporia* deals with forgiveness in time. Relying on the work of Vladimir Jankelevitch, Milbank points out the tension between forgiveness and time. Past events cannot simply be wiped off the map. We need only to look at events like the Holocaust to see that they perpetuate in time, and the concrete effects of an evil cannot be

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 51.

eradicated through the process of forgiveness. For example, victims cannot be brought back. We do not have control over recreating the past. Not only that, victims themselves are "corrupted, weakened and poisoned" by that which they have in the first instance suffered and these effects cannot simply be expunged from memory.

Milbank explores whether Augustine's inseparability of time and memory can help us here. Summarizing Augustine he says: "The past on [his] understanding, only *is* through memory, and while this does not abolish the ontological inviolability and irreversibility of pastness, it does mean that the event in its originality is open to alteration and mutation."[16] This makes it possible that re-narration can alter the past even when it cannot be obliterated entirely. For Augustine, as for Milbank, time as memory and evil as privation are crucial for the notion of forgiveness since only then can evil actually lose its power. But this is necessarily a theological vision since time as memory is only ontologically real when it participates in "infinite eternal memory."[17] And so the *aporia* of forgiveness and time in purely human terms stands.

The third *aporia* concerns the relation of forgiveness and forgetting. If past events remain marooned in the past, then forgetting is the only option available. But of course once successfully forgotten there is no need to forgive. The problem here stems from an immanentist view of time, which commits one to a view of forgiveness only as negation and as such becomes impossible to perform; thus, again the *aporia* remains.

The fourth *aporia* pertains to the purity of motives. An important question is whether forgiveness can be given freely or whether it is a trade exchange, that is, whether one forgives in order to be forgiven. For example, scholars like Kierkegaard have argued that forgiving and being forgiven are inseparable, which seems more like trade language than gift language. Milbank argues that, while this trade logic cannot be entirely escaped even in the Christian imagination, it nevertheless can be ameliorated. He grounds this notion in charity which emanates from an ontological bond between God and creatures and the act of return giving is but an aspect of the very act of receiving. Because

[16] Ibid., 53.

[17] Ibid., 55.

this bond is the basis of the intended harmonious relation between creatures, the return is made possible in accord with the divine spirit of generosity. Yet because we are sinners, "we must re-receive this harmony in order to be able to forgive."[18] On this ground therefore forgiveness can be spared its corruption from impure motives, but not so from an immanentist perspective, for here forgiveness can only be seen as a negation of the past. Not only this, here the trade in pardon has the potential to increase injustice. Such "cheap forgiveness" hence is theologically at one with Bonhoeffer's notion of cheap grace. Milbank invokes Aquinas who reminds us of forgiveness being merely an initial and incomplete stage in attaining reconciliation; if you like, the creation of space for an eventual greater act of pardon and reconciliation. But such also cannot be received in purely human terms; and hence the *aporia*.

The last *aporia* Milbank identifies relates to forgiveness and finality. Does forgiveness have the last word over fault and just indignation? A negative view of forgiveness would suggest that the only kind of forgiveness that can be real would require utter forgetting, yet in forgetting one is blinding oneself to an absence of reconciliation, for reconciliation requires the memory of the one who is forgiven. In other words, a secular notion of forgiveness poses an illusory *eschaton* because its end is chimera.[19] To simply forget gains no reconciliation. So forgetting is impossible and forgiving, while remembering, is also impossible. Hence human forgiveness remains impossible. This is why, in the Christian tradition, the notion of penance is so important, since repentance can indicate an improvement of character upon which forgiveness can become reconciliation. Finality can only be offered through participation in a divine eschatology. As the biblical notion suggests, forgiveness arrives with the *eschaton*, or, if you like, it participates in an event far bigger than is simply apparent.

Concluding his comments on forgiveness, Milbank makes the point that the double aspects of forgiveness—positive and negative—make positive forgiveness on a purely secular account impossible and the negative account, focused on divine fiat, theologically untenable.

[18] Ibid., 57.

[19] Ibid., 59.

The latter needs both the incarnation and atonement. Given the problems developed by the *aporias* showing that human forgiveness is impossible, he considers the suggestion that only God can forgive. And in part this is correct, yet it raises the issue of how we can be forgiven by God if we cannot be forgiven by human victims. But that is not all. It seems that God is so far above all victimage that God cannot suffer and hence has nothing to forgive. So it raises the question of how we can be drawn into (participate in) what God is doing. And to address these further difficulties in giving an account of forgiveness, Milbank turns to the incarnation and atonement.

To develop what's at stake here Milbank presents Christ as the sovereign victim. The Western view of forgiveness is rooted in the notion that, since forgiveness is impossible if lodged only in either the human or the divine, it must be the work of divine humanity—that is, the incarnation. The sovereign victim was alone able to inaugurate forgiveness. In the sovereign victim we see the single sufferer becoming the one capable of representing all suffering and capable of forgiving on behalf of all victims: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34a). That is, the sin of humanity, driven not so much by evil as by ignorance, believing to be good action by those conceived in blinded desire, are offered forgiveness, in Christ. Hence the suffering Christ is essentially the forgiving Christ. Yet more than this, in the divine-human union of Christ not only is God forgiving us but humanity is forgiving humanity.[20] As Milbank puts it, "divine redemption is not God's forgiving us, but rather his giving us the gift of the capacity of forgiveness. And this can only be given in the first instance by the Trinity of Christ's humanity. . . ."[21] But still, "by what right do you forgive sins?" Milbank's answer is "by right of sovereign victimhood."[22] What he means by this is that as embodied humanity Christ represents all humans; as embodied divinity he represents God. In addition, Christ as Holy Spirit is present among us in all time. Incarnation therefore offers us the possibility of forgiveness not only from God but from each other as human beings.

[20] Ibid., 62.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

In the sovereign victim these two forgivenesses become fused as one so that when we forgive one another, God forgives, and, since God forgives, we are able to and charged with forgiving one another.

Milbank presents the virtues of Thomas Aquinas' view on forgiveness over Duns Scotus'. Aquinas' positive conception of forgiveness is able to effect reconciliation precisely because it keeps the link strong between forgiveness and incarnation, while Scotus severed that vital link. So for Scotus, while God can forgive us, nevertheless forgiveness remains ontologically separated from human participation since it is done to us and for us and not by us. There is no empowerment of human agency. However, for Aquinas, the subordination of ontology to theology permits him to ground forgiveness in ultimate reality, making participation in it possible for all of reality, whereas for Scotus forgiveness is secondary because it flows from the arbitrary actions of divine goodness.

The foregoing deals somewhat narrowly with Milbank's comments on forgiveness. And in this it has its limitations, for it is but a beginning. Clearly his treatment of forgiveness has important implications for a host of other matters like incarnation, atonement, ecclesiology, politics, and so on, which space does not permit us to treat here. The point to remember, however, is that for Milbank "being reconciled" is not a matter of healing broken relations only between individuals, but ultimately names the Christocentric logic of ontology itself. Hence the importance of beginning with forgiveness cannot be overstated; for as he says, "The choice then to begin with forgiveness is a choice for a radically Christocentric theology and equally for a theology centred upon the hypostatic descent of the Spirit of the Church. It is a choice for a theology of God-Manhood and deification, as the more radically Christian option."[23]

Yoder on Forgiveness

Like Milbank, Yoder is concerned with permitting theology to speak. Both scholars wish to let theology be theology,[24] and not define it in

[23] Ibid., xii.

[24] Yoder would also add the dictum "let the church be the church," and, as

terms of other language or thought patterns. Admittedly, Yoder is less preoccupied with re-empowering the language of the orthodox tradition, and more immediately concerned with unpacking the biblical imagination and its teaching about being faithful, which he learns from the Radical Reformation. Yet this makes him every bit as guarded against the influences of modernity and equally interested in Christian theology as theology beyond secular reasoning. Both are radicalizers, one of orthodox theology and the other of the Reformation.

Participation/Discipleship: In his book, *The Priestly Kingdom*, Yoder rejects as unviable the Enlightenment-generated options of narrating the Christian life with the categories of teleology, deontology, situation ethics, and even character ethics which reaches back to more classical roots.[25] Why? Because these approaches in their pure form are grounded in something like reason, or nature, whereas Christian faithfulness proceeds from revelation of God in Christ and a participation in Christ through discipleship.[26] Yoder is more christological in his treatment of participation than Milbank, but structurally they

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Stanley Hauerwas has suggested, "let God be God." Both are theologically important additions and could well be used to nuance the differences between Yoder and Milbank. Yet they cannot deter us here. The latter is especially related to the extent to which we are called to be "in charge" and divides the two on the issue of Constantinianism. Echoes of this difference will be noticed throughout this essay.

[25] See John H. Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 113-114. Referring to these approaches, he says, "As an ethicist, I am not convinced that the categories are helpful in any tradition. They almost necessarily suggest that it would be possible to do ethics with one of these dimensions at the cost of all the others. I doubt that this is true in logic or in real human moral experience anywhere" (114).

[26] The concern here is same as that of Milbank, even though the language is somewhat different. Milbank speaks of "participation in Trinitarian God" and Yoder speaks of "participation in Christ." It is hard to know how important, if at all, this difference is. It might well be that this is related to Milbank's emphasis on a more mystical eucharistic experience and Yoder's greater social and relational account of the Christian life. Yet for Milbank it is clearly the incarnation that makes participation a meaningful category, and for Yoder the Trinity makes Christ worthy of being followed. My inclination therefore is to minimize this apparent difference.

are similar. Moreover, Yoder self-consciously reaches back to orthodoxy in his reflections. He makes a point, reiterated later in his writings, that "the view of Jesus in my *Politics of Jesus* claimed to be 'more radically Nicene and Chalcedonian than other views.' I claimed not to 'advocate an unheard-of modern understanding of Jesus.' I asked rather 'that the implication of what the church has always said about Jesus . . . be taken more seriously, as relevant to our social problems, than ever before."[27] In other words, Yoder sees himself as explicating orthodoxy in general ways, not that different from Milbank, even though his sources are more explicitly biblical.

Yoder expounds a model of participation in direct reference to the Pauline texts rather than in dialogue with medieval theologians. He gleans from these the theme of "participation or "correspondence," in which the believer's behaviour or attitude is said to "correspond to" or reflect or "partake of" the same quality or nature as that of his lord."[28] Two metaphors that accompany, and hence expand the meaning of "participation" in the biblical text are "discipleship" and "imitation." Discipleship comes from the noun "disciple" and refers to the special notion of following after and learning; literally, training oneself in the ways of the master. "Imitation" is perhaps a more inner quality whereby the participant seeks to become like the master, reflecting his very nature. Yoder suggests that this concept reaches back to the early biblical theme of humanity being created in the "image of God;" hence through imitation/participation we can become holy as God is holy.

Doing as Jesus did, that is, sharing in his divine nature, is the mark of participation, for ". . . as he is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). This means that we are to forgive as God has forgiven us, love as God loves us, suffer as Christ suffered, serve as he served, die with Christ and be raised with him, practice servanthood rather than dominion. And above all, as Luke admonishes, we are to take up the cross and follow Christ daily (Luke 9:23). As Yoder sees it, in these

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[27] Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 8-9. In the quote, he is referring to John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus:* Vicit Agnus Noster (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 102.

[28] Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 113.

very acts we participate in Christ (and thereby in God) and through them we come to see "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 New Testament thought to "'like Jesus.'"[29] Participation in Christ is not only a mystical/spiritual union of ecstatic experience in prayer, eucharist, and worship, but one that finds expression in being in the world like Jesus was in this world, which of course includes worship. And while the language for Yoder may be more biblical than it is for Milbank, there is nevertheless significant overlap, especially since Milbank wishes to broaden the traditional notion which emphasizes only knowing and being to include "the whole realm of human making."

Peace and Violence: As it does for Milbank, the concept of participation determines how, for Yoder, the language of peace and pacifism gets cast. He writes much about this issue especially in response to his antagonists, the Niebuhr brothers and their Constantinian disciples. He is particularly interested in stating the matter in ways that derive directly from Christian theology. He is at least as careful as Milbank to not make peace the starting point for his theology. Unless peace flows out of consideration of the incarnation, cross-resurrection, and trinity, it is not Christian peace. Both scholars agree on this.

Yet Yoder is more determined than Milbank in deriving both his account of violence and his view of peace explicitly from christology; therefore he does so in a participation-discipleship mode. His understanding of violence focuses on Paul's view of the powers, and then broadens to include what he calls Constantianism.[30] But always he gets

[29] Ibid., 131.

[30] Perhaps the most significant difference between Yoder and Milbank pertains to Constantinianism. For Milbank this is not the issue it is for Yoder. The reasons for this are clear. Yoder is more fearful than Milbank of the collusion between empire and *ecclesia*. (Although it should be pointed out that there are other scholars within the Radical Orthodoxy movement, like William T. Cavanaugh, whose writings perhaps demonstrate how Yoder and Milbank can be more closely harmonized on this theme. See for example his *Theopolitical Imagination* [London: T & T Clark 2002].) If Yoder has the tendency to draw the line too fine, and leave unanswered the question of how the state is to function under the sovereignty of God, Milbank has the tendency of not drawing it clearly enough and leaving unanswered the question of how the church can be faithful in a context where

back to the words and actions of Jesus and, even more particularly, the way of the cross and the gift of resurrection. Hence he, like Milbank, is critical of errant pacifisms and differentiates a pacifism that emerges from theological considerations from those not so biblically enlightened. He says, speaking of "biblical pacifism":

> This is significantly different from that kind of "pacifism" which would say that it is wrong to kill but that with proper nonviolent techniques you can obtain without killing everything you really want or have the right to ask for. . . . [W]hat Jesus renounced is not first of all violence, but rather the compulsiveness of purpose that leads the strong to violate the dignity of others. . . . [The point is] that our willingness to renounce our legitimate ends whenever they cannot be obtained by legitimate means itself constitutes our participation in the triumphant suffering of the lamb. . . . The key to the ultimate relevance and to the triumph of the good is not any calculation at all, paradoxical or otherwise, of efficacy, but rather simple obedience. . . . That Christian pacifism which has a theological basis in the character of God and the work of Jesus Christ is one in which the calculating link between our obedience and ultimate efficacy has been broken, since the triumph of God comes through resurrection and not through effective sovereignty or assured survival.[31]

In other words, biblical pacifism, as Yoder sees it, is not properly viewed as an onlooker/spectator pacifism, but neither is it a take-charge pacifism. Sometimes it calls us to stand by and behold the salvation of God "without needing to act," and sometimes it calls us to a radical agential involvement in real conflict. But always it proceeds from a posture of discernment and coming to see what God is doing, and always it entails an embrace of a nonviolent cross-like stance open to resurrection. To say it differently, it focuses on presence; a presence given meaning by the incarnation itself and hence by the love of God embodied in concrete social life. It proceeds from the conviction that

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the state is pushing for universal control. This is an important difference of both nuance and substance and could be pursued in some depth, but it is tangential to the focus in this paper.

[31] *The Politics of Jesus*, 236-239 (emphasis mine).

God is at work in this world and our task is to be drawn into God's activity by a faithfulness witnessed to/in the being of Jesus Christ, a faithfulness that led him to the cross.

Because of the believer's imitation/participation in Jesus Christ, it is inconceivable to Yoder that Christians could be engaged in the business of killing on behalf of the state. That places another agenda ahead of the body of Christ, for the church teaches its members to love enemies. Once a people or nation is declared enemy two assumptions need to be challenged: first the declaration itself, and second that it implies that we should be willing to sacrifice our lives, and those of the enemy, for it. Yoder finds questionable the broader assumption that social problems can be solved by deciding which ideologies are morally justified "to use the power of society from the top so as to lead the whole system in their direction."[32] This process fails to discern the will of God. This is not to question the church's obligation to work with the state towards social justice, but it does question the notion of moral agency; how good is brought about and sustained—in other words, the use of power. Hence how one works with the state becomes the issue. Here Milbank is much more open than Yoder to choosing from among the available options. Yoder rejects the options when all of them are violent. For Yoder the way through should not exclude the option of resurrection—miracle—which God gives and in the presence of which we may stand still in awe. If Milbank includes this stance in his spectatorship critique, which seems to be the case, failing any qualifiers to the contrary, then there is clear divergence between the two on this point.

Forgiveness: Yoder's reading of Christian forgiveness, like Milbank's, flows from his views of participation and political theology. Perhaps more particularly, it flows from his ecclesiology and eschatology. The church is polis and as such "the people of God is called to be today what the world is called to be ultimately."[33] Yoder's hermeneutic leads him to see forgiveness in the interaction of incarnation, atonement, and ecclesiology. The concrete social meaning of the cross

[32] Ibid., 238.

[33] John H. Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), ix.

and resurrection shows us how sin and its redemption are related, and in this nexus the church finds its social identity. In all of this, including forgiveness, Jesus is our example. So when Jesus, just before dying, requested that his executioners be forgiven, he gave expression to the enemy love of which he had spoken and practiced from the beginning; enemy love which we know to be the godly way of overcoming evil because it characterizes the entire life and death of Jesus Christ. In this proclamation Jesus exposes a double agency in the forgiving act; God forgives sin and we are to forgive as God forgives. In our forgiving we participate in God's forgiving.

In the cross-resurrection Yoder sees Christ's renunciation to manage the world while participating in it. This does not mean that Jesus was an unconcerned onlooker to the problems of the world; quite the opposite. It means rather that the redeeming power came from a power beyond what is readily available in this immanent world. After all, Jesus could not raise himself from the dead. Hence, the cross cannot become a repeatable recipe for resurrection as if it were the handle for bringing about peace and justice; resurrection must remain a blessing from God. Yoder sees in the relationship of cross and resurrection a model for how to move from our own faithfulness, and indeed our foibles, to God's glory.

Forgiveness then is not a mechanism for human right-making that can be reduced to words uttered or acts performed; rather it names the non-causal link between our sins and their overcoming. As with Milbank, it is a "non-capitalistic exchange." Forgiveness is an act into which we are invited and, when we participate, we act in God's drama. That is, forgiveness is possible because of what God has done and continues to do; it is possible because of what we do *in Christ*. In other words, things can be made right in Christ hat we have made wrong. Yet forgiveness is an act of concrete social exchange, both between people and between people and God. It is the church's way of modelling to the world how to make relationships right; how to live without having to resort to violence to settle the score; how to live without succumbing to the destructive powers of evil. Forgiveness is what, theologically speaking, makes peace and justice possible within the human family; it is the way of the entire cosmos. For Yoder agrees

with Milbank, although he does not say in precisely these terms that theology precedes ontology.

Yoder makes the point that the biblical practice of the Year of Jubilee, central to the teachings of Jesus, is a practice of socially embedding forgiveness.[34] The four provisions—leaving the soil fallow, liberation of slavery, remission of debts, and returning the families' property—are all practices that prevent the ongoing enslavement of people to unfair and oppressive conventions. The argument can be made that the sabbatical structure of creation is itself jubilary. That is, doxology and grace get routinized in the creation account and hence underwrite the very structure of the cosmos. Since we live by the hand and protection of God, we live by what is given and by what we receive. So in receiving again and again, and in giving again and again, life has its meaning, and thus history moves forward.

In his book, *Body Politics*, Yoder explicates the passage from Matthew 18 where Jesus uses the rabbinic language of binding and loosing to describe the practice of discernment and reconciliation in human relationships. Jesus makes explicit the intimate connection between human and divine agency (Matthew 16:19). Yoder takes the practice, surprising in its pastoral and ethical detail, to be a model for Christians.

Three graduated efforts are to be made with the offender. And the person taking the initiative is the person offended, not a clergyman or any other representative. That is, the offence is personal and so the one who knows about the offence does the confronting ("if your brother or sister sins *against you* . . ."). The intention of the encounter is restorative and not punitive. Moreover, there is no distinction made between major and minor offences. All are forgivable; each is to be forgiven. And always the goal of the process is to restore the offender to wholesome relationship within the community.[35]

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[34] Jesus "proclaimed" the Year of Jubilee in the synagogue reading in Nazareth (Luke 4:19). This is taken to be the practice referred to in Leviticus 25 in which slaves, the land, and those in debt, were to be set free every seven years, and the land was to be returned to its original owner every fiftieth year. These provisions served as socially structured insurance that redemption would not be forgotten.

[35] See Yoder, *Body Politics*, 2-3.

Matthew follows the account of how to reconcile with two stories. When Peter inquires about the frequency of forgiveness, Jesus answers in the superlative, and then tells the parable of the Merciless Servant. The emphasis here is unequivocal: there is no forgiveness for one who does not forgive.

Yoder summarizes the components of forgiveness in Matthew 18 as follows:

1. Believing men and women are empowered to act in God's name.
2. What the believers do, God is doing in and through human action.
3. God will not normally do this without human action.
4. If we receive forgiveness, we must give it.
5. This dialogical reconciling process must come first. Only then must we turn to talk of the set of standards that this process enforces. Much Christian debate about moral issues makes the mistake of concentrating on what the standards ought to be rather than on how they are to be discerned and implemented.[36]

For Yoder the apostolic witness of Matthew 18 is a window to much of Christian theology. Not only does it teach us about forgiveness, but in understanding the invitation to forgiveness and reconciliation one comes to see the manner in which theology is properly cast—participation, atonement, ecclesiology, discipleship, peacemaking, and even pneumatology—all come together in the concrete encounter of this person and that person being made whole in relationship and in the community called the body of Christ. Yoder makes the point that this account gives greater authority to the church than does Rome, greater importance to the spirit than does pentecostalism;[37] it roots participation in the imitation of Jesus' way, and right-making in non-retaliatory redemption.

Clearly, for Yoder, forgiveness is possible, and, as for Milbank, it is so because the act is much more than merely a human act. Rooted in the notion of gift, forgiveness ("giving once again" or "living by grace") characterizes the way to clear the obstacles which sin casts to thwart good relations and thereby make room for abundant living.

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[36] Ibid., 6.

[37] Ibid.

It is an act of redemption and made concrete in the incarnation and atonement—Creator God became gift to creation again and lived forgivingly among us, inviting us to participate with him in life-giving existence.[38] Hence we are called to forgive as God forgives and through the spirit we are empowered to do so, while through Christ we see concretely how it is done. And, we request that we be forgiven as we forgive others. The mutuality of forgiveness derives from a two-way participation—the divine in the human (incarnation), the human in the divine (participation/imitation).

Conclusion

In bringing these two "radical theologians" into dialogue on the topic of forgiveness and related theological concerns, I have sought to show the substantive similarities as well as some differences. I conclude with some observations.

First, for both theologians the theme of participation figures as a formative topic, as a way of critique of the modern reliance on principles, rules, ends, and other modes of being generated from pure rational thought. For both see the need to root theology and the Christian life in God. Yoder is clearly more christological than Milbank, which has the effect of being able to give more explicit content to participation in ways that Milbank does not. Milbank, on the other hand, is more medieval in his references and perhaps mystical in his explication, which has the effect of reminding us of the potential danger of misreading Yoder as reducing participation to a discipleship that is a simple "following after" from a distance. For where is the empowerment in following without participation, and wherein lies the guidance for the embodiment of Spirit?

Second, Milbank helpfully makes explicit the Christian assumptions of an "ontology of peace" and "evil as privation" which, while implicit in Yoder, is nevertheless not visible enough. These doctrines

[38] Yoder does not explicitly speak of evil as privation, but implicitly it appears in many forms. Evil is the absence of good generated by powers that are self-serving, rather than God-serving. Hence, for Yoder, like for Milbank, forgiveness is not the destruction of positive evil, but the opening up to new redemptive possibilities that have been marred by the absence of good.

can enhance Yoder's peace theology without altering its content. Yet Milbank's unequivocal critique of spectator pacifism is in tension with Yoder's view of the cross-resurrection and his view of history. For his somewhat unnuanced critique of pacifism leaves Milbank open to an "in charge" view of history, which Yoder sees as incompatible with the way of the cross. This lies at the root of the unresolved tension between the two around the issue of Constantinianism.

Third, on forgiveness, the two reach amazingly similar conclusions, although they get there differently. For both, forgiveness is possible because of the incarnation, atonement, and the human invitation to participate in God. While they nuance participation differently, for both scholars humans can forgive because we have been forgiven, and we are to forgive as God in Christ forgives. Forgiveness is possible because we are invited into an act of forgiveness-atonement that far transcends normal human activity. In the act of God's forgiveness, we are given the gift of the capacity of forgiveness. For both scholars, the strong linkage between incarnation and forgiveness makes reconciliation possible. God's forgiveness is made humanly concrete in Jesus Christ. Hence we come to know God's forgiveness of us and we come to know how we can participate in divine forgiveness as we forgive each other. For both, how the world—yea, the entire cosmos—is, is to be read through the subordination of ontology to theology.

Many North Americans, Christians among them, were surprised when the grieving Amish community offered forgiveness to the killer and his family following the multiple murder at the West Nickel Mines Amish School on October 2, 2006.[39] It suggests that forgiveness is largely a foreign language in our day. We see this same foreignness of forgiveness at the end of the movie, *The Mission*.[40] Slave owners confront the Cardinal from Rome who has been sent to the South American Spanish-Portuguese colonies to render a verdict on whether to permit the Jesuit mission to continue liberating/Christianizing slaves against the wishes of those whose economic interests and politically protected rights were threatened by such acts.

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[39] For an engaging account of this tragic event, see John L. Ruth, *Forgiveness: A Legacy of the West Nickel Mines Amish School* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007).

[40] Released in 1986, directed by Roland Joffé.

A slave trader says to the Cardinal, "You have no alternative, your Eminence. The world is thus." The Cardinal replies, "No, thus have we made the world."

Neither Yoder nor Milbank accept the world thus and both seek to expose what lies veiled by human sin. Yet neither are naïve about the power of sin and the possibility of forgiveness-redemption. Both are committed to an account of the world that is thoroughly theological. Both see as inadequate any account of forgiveness that does not draw on participation, incarnation, ecclesiology, and atonement. Although different in detail and at times in substance, the tension is richly informative.

TEN

Chris K. Huebner

RADICAL ORTHODOXY, RADICAL REFORMATION: WHAT MIGHT MENNONITES AND MILBANK LEARN FROM EACH OTHER?

The Project of Radical Orthodoxy

The movement known as Radical Orthodoxy springs from a recognition that much contemporary theological reflection, let alone first order Christian speech, is theologically vacuous. In particular, it suggests that theology ceases to be theological when it becomes an attempt to make the world safe for theology and theology safe for the world. In doing so, it seeks to diagnose the sense of "false humility" characteristic of such an approach as but another violent attempt to identify an appropriate realm for the possession of power in a secular landscape of barren positivities. By contrast, Radical Orthodoxy presents itself as an audacious attempt to reclaim the world for theology and to reclaim theology for the world. Breaking out of the narrow confines that theology imposes on itself in its characteristically modern moments, it seeks to recover nothing less than the entire world as the appropriate subject of theological investigation, and in so doing to articulate a new vision of hope for the world. The scope of its vision is daunting, as it seeks a comprehensiveness—"a commitment to all or nothing"[1]—that passes beyond the universal, since it reads the universal as but a moment inscribed within a larger dance with particularity, a duality that is only meaningful against

[1] John Milbank, "Violence: Double Passivity," in *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 38.

the background of an economy of scarcity, mastery, and control. Describing itself as an attempt to "read the signs of the times . . . in terms of the grammar of the Christian faith," Radical Orthodoxy is nothing if not unashamedly bold and daringly ambitious.[2]

As it flies in the face of any liberal "safe-making" techniques, this is said to be a decidedly risky endeavour. It is risky because it refuses the temptation to anchor theology to a self-legitimating ground of some sort. But this is not a "reactive" riskiness, which assumes conflict to be ontologically basic and seeks mastery and control in an attempt to gain security in the face of a dangerous situation that always threatens to overwhelm us. Rather, it is a riskiness understood on grounds internal to theology itself. It follows from the logic of creation *ex nihilo* that theology, to be theology, must unhook itself from any external non-theological vehicle designed to guarantee its successful arrival upon some pre-given scene. The theology of Radical Orthodoxy is one that radically refuses all positivities, all strategic and regulative reductions, whether rationalistic or fideistic, ecclesial or psychological. Any such attempt to ground theology on a neutral footing is finally the expression of a possessive, territorial drive to secure power which contradicts the gratuitous exchange of gift-giving and receiving that is the logic of creation. It is this attempt to refuse the temptation to tame or domesticate the essential contingency and riskiness of theology by grounding it in some way that makes the work of Radical Orthodoxy bold. Its purported radicalism is thus perhaps best seen in the sense in which the comprehensiveness and the essential riskiness of theology are brought together, as a master discourse which is at the same time a discourse of non-mastery.[3]

How, then, might Mennonites engage this project? Boldness and audacity are not the sorts of words one usually associates with Mennonites. And yet Mennonite theology also grows out of a vision of theological radicalism that resists the temptation to absolutize itself in some given conception of space and/or time. In the discussion that

[2] Graham Ward, "Radical Orthodoxy and/as Cultural Politics" in *Radical Orthodoxy?: A Catholic Enquiry*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 103.

[3] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 6.

follows I shall reflect on what it is that Mennonite theology—to the extent that it is meaningful to speak of something called Mennonite theology—might have to learn from Radical Orthodoxy. How can Mennonites receive the gifts that John Milbank and others associated with the Radical Orthodoxy movement have to give? In asking this question I shall suggest that Milbank can be used to identify certain problematic tendencies associated with contemporary Mennonite theology. At the same time, however, I shall identify a few critical counter-gifts to be offered in return. In doing so, I shall suggest that a Mennonite theology which has properly learned what Radical Orthodoxy has to teach can in turn offer resources from which to mount a criticism of certain aspects of Milbank's work. Not only is it instructive to read the Radical Reformation against the background of Radical Orthodoxy; it is equally important to read Radical Orthodoxy against the background of the Radical Reformation. In setting up the discussion this way, I mean to suggest that the conception of theological radicalism claimed by both Radical Orthodoxy and the Radical Reformation is best understood only when each of them properly receives and returns the critical gifts of the other.

What Might Mennonites Learn from Milbank?

Perhaps the most striking feature of contemporary Mennonite theology when it is read against the background of Radical Orthodoxy is its almost systematic evasion of theology. While defenders of Radical Orthodoxy, along with Stanley Hauerwas and others, have warned against the dangers of distinguishing between theology and ethics, so-called Mennonite theology often appears as if it is based largely on a choice of ethics over against theology. Theology is reduced to an ethic of pacifism that is all too often appropriately described in the terms used by the political philosopher John Rawls to summarize his theory of justice, namely, that it is political, not metaphysical. The category of peace is abstracted from its larger theological home, idealized, and turned into a criterion through which to adjudicate all subsequent reflection, theological or otherwise. But this is to do to peace what Scotus and the late medieval nominalists, on the Radical

Orthodoxy reading, have done in elevating being to a higher station over God. Mennonite theological reflection is developed as though it is secondary to a prior non-theological concept—in this case, peace—and therefore ceases to be theological in any meaningful sense. Peace is reinterpreted as a univocal concept, as Mennonites seemingly latch on to any reference to peace, with little or no apparent appreciation of the sense in which the very meaning of peace differs markedly from one variety of pacifism to another. From this perspective, it might be suggested that Mennonite theology goes wrong when it focuses too exclusively on the question of peace and violence, as it often does, and that in doing so its discourse on peace is evacuated of any theological content whatsoever.[4]

At the same time, one often gets the impression that peace is reified and treated statically, as a kind of possession, which we Mennonites somehow have privileged access to, such that we are charged with the task of distributing it effectively to others. In Milbank's terms, this is to understand peace as if it exists in an economy of scarcity, assuming that it is "in short supply," such that peace becomes interpreted as a more secure investment or insurance against a prior danger.[5] But this is to miss the sense in which Christian theology presumes an economy of generous plentitude and excess. To assert the ontological priority of peace is to see it as an excessive and freely given charitable donation. Christians are thereby called to "cease to be self-sufficient in the face of scarcity" and instead to embody an exchange of gift-giving and receiving which flows out of the excessively gracious self-giving of God. Put differently, Mennonite theology often seems to operate under a conception of peacemaking that names a process of bringing order to what is disordered according to the logic of *this* world, whereas for Milbank peace names a fundamentally different ontology. Christian worship, and in particular the forgiveness of sins, thus constitutes the interruption of a new order—simultaneously a

[4] See, e.g., John Howard Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics," in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiologial and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael Cartwright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 109.

[5] John Milbank, "Can Morality Be Christian?" in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (London: Blackwell, 1997), 224-225.

counter-politics and counter-ontology—into the world of the secular.[6] Most importantly, this means that a theological conception of peace is not reactive. It is not primarily understood as a response to a prior situation of conflict, and so we should not speak as if violence is something to be "overcome." Instead of understanding peace as a reaction to a pre-existing situation of violence, Milbank reads the story of creation *ex nihilo* as an alternative vision of the world, a vision which turns on the idea of originary peace. Peace is thus ontologically prior to violence. It cannot be secured, and thus cannot flourish in a capitalist economy of self-interest, debt, scarcity, and contract. Rather, it is at home in an economy of charitable donation and thus exists only as unnecessarily given and received. To participate in Christian worship is to be inscribed within a logic of gift-giving and receiving, and a conception of generosity understood as participation in the gracious self-given and excessive reality of God.

Closely related to this, it might be suggested that Mennonite theology has much to learn from Radical Orthodoxy's re-reading of the so-called "tradition." Milbank notes that "Radical Orthodoxy, if catholic, is not a specifically Roman Catholic theology; although it can be espoused by Roman Catholics, it can equally be espoused by those who are formally 'protestant,' yet whose theory and practice essentially accords with the catholic vision of the Patristic period through to the high Middle Ages."[7] And yet Mennonite theology all too often skips directly from the New Testament to the sixteenth century. Or when it does engage this catholic vision, it is all too often categorically rejected as involving nothing more than an elaborate legitimation of violence. But we do well to remember that patristic and medieval sources are part of our tradition—if there is such a thing—too. In doing so, we might further learn from Milbank and others that we do not have to read patristic and medieval theology as it has been read against the background of the Reformation, or perhaps more accurately against the background of the Enlightenment invention of the distinction between natural and revealed religion or

[6] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 411.

[7] Milbank, "The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry*, 35.

between reason and tradition. In particular, it is not to be read in a way that projects onto it a series of dualities, such as faith and reason, nature and grace, or the spiritual and the political. Milbank suggests that before the Enlightenment, faith and reason were not the names of essentially distinct realms, but rather differing degrees of intensity of participation in the mind of God.[8] In a similar vein, he shows that the common interpretation that attributes to Aquinas a two-tiered account of nature and grace as distinct stages must give way to an appreciation of the sense in which Aquinas saw nature as always already graced. More generally, the medieval metaphysics of participation and analogy might help resist the tendency to overemphasize peace to the extent that it becomes non-theological, an object or possession to be secured and distributed, as noted above. Discipleship could then be understood not as a simple copying of Jesus' acts, but rather a participation in the very body of Christ itself, a body that is simultaneously metaphysical and political.

The third lesson that Mennonites might learn from Radical Orthodoxy draws on Catherine Pickstock's suggestion that Radical Orthodoxy is not to be regarded as "a discrete edifice which purports to be a stronghold" but "a hermeneutic disposition and a style of metaphysical vision; and it is not so much a 'thing' or 'place' as a task."[9] In particular, it is a hermeneutic of doxological dispossession or theological deterritorialization, resisting any strategy of "spatialization" that might reduce the gifts of knowledge understood as divine illumination to an objectified given to be secured and protected through a kind of policing of borders.[10] In a similar vein, I want to suggest that it is equally important to understand Radical Reformation as naming a hermeneutic or style rather than a distinct entity or thing. This point has, of course, already been made by John Howard Yoder, but its significance is all too often missed. In particular, Yoder suggests that Radical Reformation names a certain habit of thinking, a

[8] See John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 19-59.

[9] Catherine Pickstock, "Radical Orthodoxy and the Mediations of Time," in *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry*, 63.

[10] Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (London: Blackwell, 1998), 62-64.

kind of dialogical vulnerability that cultivates a "constant potential for reformation and in the more dramatic situations a readiness for the reformation even to be 'radical.'"[11] This is equally a style of metaphysical vision that is perhaps best described as apocalyptic, as Stanley Hauerwas has attempted to show by building on Yoder's claim that "people who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe."[12] Though in different ways, both Radical Orthodoxy and the Radical Reformation name a theological style that refuses the rhetoric of spatialization or self-absolutization, and ceases to think of theology as an entity or territory that must be policed through the erection and protection of boundaries. One of the implications of this is that it becomes rather odd to speak in terms of there being such a thing as Mennonite theology at all. The characteristic styles of Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation call into question the assumption of Mennonite theological distinctiveness as resting on concentric habits of thinking, or as grounded in an underlying territorial conception of theological enquiry.[13]

What Might Milbank Learn from Mennonites?

Having just called into question the assumption that there might be such a thing as a distinctively Mennonite theology, I turn now to identify three critical counter-gifts that Mennonites might give to Milbank, each of which might be interpreted as a way of suggesting that Mennonites might be equipped to learn from Milbank in a way that surpasses what Milbank appears to have learned from himself.

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[11] John H. Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 5.

[12] Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001). The Yoder passage is from "Armaments and Eschatology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 1, no. 1 (1988): 58. See also John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*: Vicit Agnus Noster, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 246; and, programmatically, "To Serve Our God and to Rule the World," in *The Royal Priesthood*, 128-140.

[13] I have developed this argument at greater length with respect to the work of J. Denny Weaver in a review essay of his *Anabaptist Theology in the Face of Postmodernity: A Proposal for the Third Millenium* in *Preservings: Journal of the Steinbach Historical Society*, no. 18 (June 2001): 145-148.

The first such gift centres on the question of the voice of the theologian. Despite his call to recast theology as an ecclesial Christian practice, Milbank also privileges the voice of the theologian in a way that suggests a residual commitment to specialization and professionalism and a kind of reactive heroism he otherwise calls into question as one more instance of a secular economy of security and possession. Let me develop this suggestion by contrasting two quotes by Milbank. First, in one of my favourite passages from *Theology and Social Theory*, he writes: "In a rhetorical perspective, the story of the development of the tradition—for example, in the case of Christianity, a story of preachings, journeyings, miracles, martyrdoms, intrigues, sin and warfare—really *is* the argument for the tradition."[14] Second, from the opening lines of *The Word Made Strange*, Milbank suggests that "today, theology is tragically too important," such that "the theologian feels almost that the entire ecclesial task falls on his own head: in the meagre mode of reflective words he must seek to imagine what a true practical repetition would look like."[15] I want to suggest that this second claim strikingly cancels out the insights of the first. It gives the impression that theology is brought *to* Christian practice and not found anywhere within it, despite whatever flaws it may have. For all his talk of ecclesial practice, Milbank finally suggests that theology is an intellectual exercise overseen by the theologian. He gives the impression that authority is not internal to practices themselves, but is rather imposed externally from the perspective of an authority figure of some sort who inhabits a theoretical space that transcends the practice in question. By contrast, the Radical Reformation can be read as an attempt to understand theology in a way that resists such a basic privileging of the voice of the theologian or any such turn to theory, emphasizing rather the many members that make up the body of Christ. To quote from Yoder once again, "The agent of moral discernment in the doxological community is not a theologian, a bishop, or a pollster, but the Holy Spirit, discerned as the unity of the entire body."[16]

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[14] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 347 (Milbank's emphasis).

[15] Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 1. I thank Peter Dula for drawing the significance of this to my attention.

[16] Yoder, "To Serve Our God and to Rule the World," 139.

This conception of the unified body turns crucially on the practice of patience, and it is here that I want to locate a second lesson Milbank might learn from Mennonites. This is a vision of the church as a counter-epistemology that is not preoccupied with epistemic justification, but practices the epistemological virtue of patience required for genuine engagement with the other in a process of open conversation, often referred to as the Rule of Paul. It is a mode of knowledge that proceeds in fragments and ad hoc alliances, slowly proceeding through the hard work of an open conversation whose parameters cannot be defined prior to a concrete encounter of some sort. It seeks to hear all the relevant voices in a conversation and resists the violent tendency to silence anyone by virtue of the way the debate is constructed in advance of actual engagement. It is an epistemology that resists closure, refusing the lie of the total perspective and the search for a purified idiom of speech, and recognizing that language about God is not finally limited to our current vocabularies.[17] Moreover, it encourages the active pursuit of dialogical conflict in the sense of being willing to engage in self-criticism. In short, it is a conception of theological enquiry that lingers timefully and patiently, as a way of resisting the temptation to self-absolutization. Milbank sometimes suggests something similar, as when he writes that "consensus happens, unpredictably, through the blending of differences, and by means of these differences, not despite them."[18] But at the same time his work exhibits a rhetorical preoccupation with speed of delivery that suggests, if only implicitly, the overcoming of patience. This is perhaps best exemplified in the way he differentiates a Christian counter-ontology of peace from a secular ontology of violence by means of the sharp, almost over-general, contrasts he draws between their competing logics. It is also exemplified in his tendency to trace everything to the one basic mistake of the Scotist elevation of being over God. I do not mean to suggest that in so doing Milbank does not identify theologically problematic claims. But what is important to recognize is that the way Milbank develops his interpretation as a kind of unrestrained rhetorical hypernarrative reveals a

[17] I owe this way of putting it to Rowan Williams. See, in particular, his essay "Theological Integrity," in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 3-15.

[18] John Milbank, "The Name of Jesus," in *The Word Made Strange*, 155.

preoccupation with speed, efficiency, and possessive mastery that he otherwise calls into question. At the same time, it is possible to read his understanding of pedagogically justified violence from the standpoint of speed. Milbank defends the possible necessity of recourse to violence in "bringing a defaulter to his senses" rather than risk the possibility that this will not happen in ongoing, timeful "open conversation." The value of Mennonite theology—if it can be said that there is such a thing—is that it proceeds patiently, entering vulnerably into the world of another, rather than employing an accelerated and possessive hermeneutics of mastery and control.

These lessons might be combined to suggest that there is a lingering commitment to instrumental causality that appears in Milbank's work despite his thoroughgoing rejection of instrumentalism as one of the defining features of secular reason. What is particularly interesting from the perspective of Mennonite theology is how this appeal to instrumental causality tends to appear at precisely those moments where Milbank argues that an ontology of peace does not entail a commitment to pacifism. For example, he writes, "the *purpose* of ecclesial coercion is peace" and suggests that violence can be justified insofar as it "contribute[s] to the *final goal* of peace."[19] Claims such as these suggest that pedagogical coercion is justified because it is effective in bringing about an independently specifiable end. Accordingly, there is a sense in which Milbank's rhetoric underwrites a securing of ecclesial agreement or consensus that conflicts with his account of consensus arising through an exchange of difference. It is equally striking that at these crucial points in his argument Milbank is rather silent about the activity of God. As noted above, much of his theology turns on an account of *poeisis* as human participation in the creative activity of God. But when discussing the possibility of ecclesial violence and the "cultivation" of peace, it sounds curiously as if the "fate of the counter-kingdom" falls squarely on human shoulders. Milbank argues that "one way to secure peace is to draw boundaries around 'the same,' and exclude 'the other;' to promote some practices and disallow alternatives. Most polities and most religions, characteristically do this. But

[19] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 418 (emphasis added).

the Church has misunderstood itself when it does likewise."[20] In this he is exactly right. But my concern is that his discussion of pedagogical coercion and other forms of "legitimate violence" sounds too much like just this kind of ecclesial failure. A commitment to nonviolence need not be to "fetishize freedom," as Milbank appropriately worries it might.[21] Rather, it is best read as an attempt to take more seriously the possibility of participating, however imperfectly, in God's gratuitous economy of peaceable plentitude and excess. It is one thing to recognize retrospectively that we are always already implicated in some form of violence, and to struggle collectively to disentangle ourselves—or rather, open ourselves to the possibility of being disentangled—from it. It is quite another thing, however, to justify prospectively the forward looking enactment of violence as bringing about a certain desired effect, even one as important as the truth about God. For the most profound truth about God—and that which Christian nonviolence most significantly turns on—is that God's continued survival is not dependent on us. So the Mennonite commitment to nonviolence might serve as a third lesson, despite the fact that it has so often been interpreted in a manifestly untheological way. It represents an ongoing commitment to just the kind of ecclesial practice that might itself be seen as the most profound argument for the tradition, an argument that is significant precisely in that it does not seek to secure itself by invoking the heroic voice of the theologian.

The Risk of Mennonite Theology

In conclusion, I return to the question of comprehensiveness and risk with which this discussion began. Mennonites have often understood themselves to be somehow necessarily at odds with boldness and comprehensiveness, but we have misunderstood ourselves when we have done so. On the contrary, it might be suggested that a Mennonite commitment to practising nonviolence exemplifies an even more thoroughgoing commitment to the comprehensiveness of all or

[20] Milbank, "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism': A Short *Summa* in Forty-Two Responses to Unasked Questions," *Modern Theology* 7, no. 3 (1991): 229.

[21] Milbank, "Violence: Double Passivity," 38.

nothing, since it does not have the safety net of an appeal to coercive violence to fall back on when consensus does not happen through the unpredictable blending of differences. In a similar vein, it more appropriately embodies the essential riskiness of a theological vision. Its appreciation of theological riskiness can be seen in its refusal of the temptation to make Christianity necessary, and its corresponding embodiment of an ethos of dialogical vulnerability that cultivates a readiness for the Radical Reformation. Thus there is a sense in which the Radical Reformation turns out to display just the kind of radicalism called for by Radical Orthodoxy, sometimes more consistently than the defenders of Radical Orthodoxy themselves. But it is important to recognize that the apparent sense of accomplishment captured in such claims comes at a price. For such a reading of the Radical Reformation can only be sustained when it stops focusing too exclusively on violence and peace *as such* and understands peace in more substantively theological and ontological terms. Among other things, this calls into question the very idea of a distinctive Mennonite theology to be articulated and defended in the first place.

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