THE SUBVERSIVE KERNEL:
ANARCHISM AND THE POLITICS OF JESUS IN POSTSECULAR THEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

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The relationship between religion and politics has been a tenuous one in Western culture. Related to this tension is the growing interest in what we might call the "postsecular." Postsecularity describes the sense in which what we think of as the secular is not something left over when religion is abolished but rather a way of thinking that was constructed in response to and on the heels of developments in Christian theology. This dissertation examines the work of John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and John Milbank, three theologians whose work is not only postsecular in the way just described, but also politically radical. In particular, it explores the extent to which these theologians might contribute to conversations surrounding emerging forms of anarchism – sometimes called "postanarchism" – in response to neoliberalism. The theological means by which the three thinkers arrive at a radical politics are relevant to anarchist theory and conversations about radical resistance, but it is Yoder's comprehensively nonviolent politics that has the most to offer postanarchist theory.

This project is dedicated to my grandfather, William Deane Steiner.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Introduction: Finding the Subversive Kernel

There has always been a radical element in Christianity that has remained courageously loyal to the vision of Jesus. You find these radical disciples everywhere – in African shanty towns and South American barrios, American ghettoes and British sump housing estates – identifying themselves cheerfully with the dispossessed, and courageously challenging the systems that oppress them. Poor in spirit and heart, they keep alive the challenge of Jesus to the thoughtless excesses of the powers that rule the world, proving that the Sermon on the Mount is still one of the most subversive utterances in history.

-Richard Holloway*, How to Read the Bible,* pp. 88-89.

The relationship between religion and politics – particularly with regard to Christianity, but more generally as well – has been a tenuous one in Western culture. If not exactly an arena of endless struggle, it is certainly a site of constant negotiation. Mark Lilla, in *The Stillborn God*, traces this negotiation in the West, beginning with what he calls "political theology…a primordial form of human thought [that] for millennia has provided a deep well of ideas and symbols for organizing society and inspiring action for good or ill" (4) and continuing through Augustine's "two cities," Boniface's "two swords," and Luther's "two kingdoms" to the development of modern liberalism as an attempt to gain distance from political theology and construct a political philosophy without recourse to divine revelation or metaphysical constructs. This attempt, Lilla points out, is very recent, even though it forms the basis for how most Western thinkers conceptualize the relationship between religion and politics.

In American history, Winthrop's "city on a hill" is countered by Jefferson's "wall of separation" between church and state – an idea that has its own history and literature[1] – and the

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[1] See Philip Hamburger's *Separation of Church and State* for a history of how disestablishment became separation. Hamburger both chronicles this conversation and participates in it in certain ways; see also Kent Greenwalt's "History and Ideology," which both challenges and seeks to nuance Hamburger's thesis.

tension has hardly abated since. Today the creation/evolution debate, brought to the world stage in the 1925 Scopes trial, still rages in some places and the battle for same-sex marriage is both politically and religiously charged. In *A Secular Age* Charles Taylor finds the American political/religious experience exceptional inasmuch as it not marked by the same kind of decline in religious observance as seen in Europe (526). Lilla finds the American state of affairs lamentable, suggesting that "The Anglo-American liberal tradition lacks a vocabulary for describing the full psychological complexity of its own religious life, let alone for understanding the relation between faith and politics in other parts of the world" (304). He challenges the assumption that liberal democracy has solved the "problem of religion" and calls for us to "revisit the tension between political theology and modern political philosophy" (9).

Related to this tension is the growing interest in what we might call the "postsecular." This can refer to the "religious turn" in continental philosophy – Derrida's interest in messianic structures, for instance – and also to the growing interest among atheist thinkers like Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou in the apostle Paul.[2] Postsecularity also describes the sense in which we are realizing – at least in some areas of thought – that what we think of as the secular is not something that was revealed when we finally pulled back the veil of religion but rather a way of thinking that was constructed in response to and on the heels of developments in Christian theology. This is, in fact, the central thesis of *A Secular Age*, though rather than declare our time "postsecular" Taylor sees us faced with a new kind of secularity.

Taylor's work is an important contribution to a growing body of literature on secularism and postsecularism. William Connoly's 1999 *Why I Am Not a Secularist* and Talal Asad's 2003 *Formations of the Secular* are considered seminal works in the critical study of secularism,

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[2] See, for instance, *Paul's New Moment*, to which Milbank is also a contributor and which he and Žižek edited along with Creston Davis.

though John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*, which offers a genealogical challenge to secularism, appeared in 1991, and Marcel Gauchet's *The Disenchantment of the World*, a similar (though more sympathetic) genealogy of secularism appeared in French in 1989. The basic premise of postsecularity is that there is no neutral sphere in which we can negotiate the common good without influence from religion or ideology. Moreover, the idea that there is such a sphere is itself a claim about the "way things are" that is already at odds with religious formulations.

It is difficult, for instance, to say that liberal democracy is a religion *per se* (though some theologians, such as William Cavanaugh, make such claims, as do Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank to some extent) but Western liberalism does make defacto religious (or meta-religious) claims and assumptions and cannot avoid doing so. A claim that religion and state should remain separate is still a claim *about religion*, and suggests that the state should exclusively be called upon to do things that might otherwise fall under the purview of religious authority. Questions about the common good or how we might best live together, questions that we assume to be political, are not questions about which religion has been silent. Even the idea that there is a genus "religion" of which a given person's way of constructing the world can be seen a species is problematic – especially for those ways of seeing the world we tend to call religions. What lies at the core of many constructions of identity is precisely the thing that liberal democracy says should be bracketed.

One response to this is to re-invigorate theology as an explicitly political discourse. It is in this sense that John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and John Milbank can be seen as postsecular theologians. This is not, however, a conservative screed against the separation of church and state or a jeremiad about "family values" or "faith-based politics." In challenging secularity in this way, they also end up challenging liberal democracy itself, and these three

theologians are of particular interest to Christians whose conceptualization of the kingdom of God has radical and even anarchistic implications *vis-à-vis* the claims of the state.

The challenge to secularism is itself of interest to anarchist theory. Erica Lagalisse argues, in "'Marginalizing Magdalena': Intersections of Gender and the Secular in Anarchoindigenist Solidarity Activism," that the presumption of secularity as the background for anarchist resistance is a threat to solidarity and erects false barriers to cooperation in resistance efforts. She considers secularism "a form of racism that functions to uphold the logic of neoliberal political economy, even among some very committed anticapitalist activists" (654). Thus there is a connection between growing postsecular thought and radical politics. While the religious right has been explored in academic research and frequently makes the news, Christians on the left – particularly Christian socialists and anarchists – have not received the same kind of attention.

I want to explore the contribution Yoder, Hauerwas, and Milbank might make to anarchist theory, even though none of them identifies as such (Hauerwas comes close) and Milbank particularly cannot be read as an anarchist. They are nevertheless significant figures in political theology and might have something to contribute to larger conversations concerning radical politics and resistance to neoliberalism. Moreover, because this kind of Christianity is explicitly political, often challenging mainstream assumptions about the relationship of religion and politics in Western democracy, it makes for a useful lens through which to examine that relationship. We are unlikely to find a 1:1 correspondence between any given theological precept and a particular politics, but the respective theological heirs of Hal Lindsey and John Howard Yoder do not accidentally find themselves on opposite ends of the political spectrum.

Anarchism has not historically been friendly to Christianity; as Lagalisse notes, atheism

is *de rigeur* among anarchists generally. Bakunin's *God and the State* makes this abundantly

clear, and "No gods, no masters" is a classic anarchist slogan. For a good bit of its history in the

West, mainstream Christianity has been the target of resistance more than its impetus – but not

always. Throughout that history there are also figures and movements that can be considered

radical, even anarchist. That witness is varied: the voluntary poverty of the early Franciscans, the

uncompromising witness of the Radical Reformation, the labor resistance of the Catholic Worker

movement, the social criticism of Thomas Merton, the revolutionary fervor of liberation

theology, the peace protests of the Berrigan brothers – not to mention the role of Christian

theology in the Civil Rights Movement. This suggests that there is a pervasive radical element in

Christian theology that surfaces from time to, an element that Slavoj Žižek, in *The Puppet and*

the Dwarf, calls the "subversive kernel" (6).[3] In spite of the legacy of Christendom, there have

been Christians who found and continue to find theological reasons to be part of the resistance to

empire.

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[3]For Žižek, this kernel is Marxist: "to become a true dialectical materialist, one should go
through the Christian experience" (6).

Defining the Subversive Kernel

When asked to explain what Christian anarchism is, I sometimes say (depending on the audience), "If you want to burn the motherfucker down, you're an anarchist. If you think Jesus is going to come back and do it, you're a Christian anarchist." That is crude (and an oversimplification) but it introduces the idea that Christian anarchism is an anarchism in which revolution is (usually) deferred eschatologically. The Christian calling is not one of overthrowing the reigning powers but of living out an alternative that prefigures the more just and peaceful world that will be realized in the eschaton. God is the expected agent of deliverance. Connected to this deferral is a commitment to Christian pacifism that is informed by but not limited to the Anabaptist tradition. Theologian-turned-social worker Daniel Liechty argues in *Reflecting on Faith in a Post-Christian Time* that pacifism is ultimately anarchistic in its rejection of force and forms of authority based on force (21). That nonviolence and anarchism are connected is something Ira Chernus addresses in *American Nonviolence*:

> One of the issues anarchists have disagreed about is violence. Some have espoused principled nonviolence; most have not. But anarchism has an important place in the history of nonviolence because its views on authority, social change, and direct action for change exerted a sizeable influence on the principled nonviolence tradition in the United States" (56).

Not all Christian pacifists would be comfortable identifying as anarchists or radicals or leftists, but most seem to recognize that pacifism implies, at the very least, a comprehensive conscientious objection to the seemingly unavoidable violence of the state, as we will see in our various examples.

It is difficult to pinpoint the precise origins of Christian anarchism as such. Anarchism as we know it has only really been around as long as the Enlightenment. Kropotkin credited William Godwin with being the first; it is Proudhon who later coined the term "anarchist."

Generally, Christian anarchists claim that their position goes back at least to the early church, with their anarchism (as we might understand it) being an outcome of their theological position.[4] The Anabaptist tradition, sometimes called the Radical Reformation, is a theological source for some, especially for those, such as Yoder or Vernard Eller, who themselves come from that tradition. But this does not apply to all, especially not to the considerable contribution of Catholic thinkers – the Catholic Worker, of course, as well the Berrigan brothers and liberation theology. This latter movement is more Marxist but bears affinities to anarchism, as Linda Damico argues in *The Anarchist Dimensions of Liberation Theology,*.

There is not much by way of an unbroken line of influence within these voices, no "black thread"[5] running through the history of Christianity or American intellectual history. In fact, these voices come from all denominational stripes even though they often have more in common with one another than with other members of their respective denominations. Leo Tolstoy, whom some consider a seminal figure in Christian anarchism, was delighted to find in abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison a kindred spirit, but the two never met and arrived at their conclusions quite independently. Ammon Hennacy was a disciple of Day's and converted to Catholicism with Day as a sponsor, but neither show any evidence of having been influenced by the nineteenth century non-resistors such as Garrison or Ballou – though they drew to some extent on the work of Tolstoy. Vernard Eller, throughout his life a member of the Church of the Brethren, is candid about his debt to the French Reformed Jacques Ellul.

This "subversive kernel," then, is not so much a coherent, self-identifying movement as a

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[4] Some, however, might suggest the opposite, that their theology was in large part a means of articulating what we might consider primarily a political position. See Liechty, *Reflecting on Faith*, also Crossan, *Excavating Jesus*.

[5] Alluding to the black flag sometimes associated with anarchism.

kind of trend or gesture toward an ideal that is sometimes made explicit and other times merely hinted at or left dormant. In *Theosophia*, Arthur Versluis describes what he calls an "ahistorical continuity" of contemplative thought. There is a similar recurrence of radical thought within Christianity; this mode of thought pops up from time to time in movements and trends that are otherwise theologically disparate (57). It is also possible, however, that this "kernel" in being passed on has taken forms that are at times not specifically Christian and at other times not overtly politicized. Tracing it authoritatively is probably an impossible task given the dialectical relationship between politics and religion, but perhaps we can see this anarchical spark changing hands over time, with Christianity's "subversive kernel" influencing Western thought in ways that do not seem terribly Christian, then being picked up by some new manifestation of Christianity in ways that may or may not look overtly political but nevertheless influence some form of radicalism, and so on. Wherever this kernel comes from, it is part of Christianity and – thanks to the pervasive legacy of Christendom – Western culture as well, meaning that similar ideas and structures are available to various forms of resistance that might emerge.

Alexandre Christoyannopoulos

We will embark on a more detailed survey of the history and literature on Christian anarchism in the next chapter, but a helpful overview can be found in Alexandre Christoyannopoulos's *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel*, which Christoyannopoulos describes as a "synthesis and a reference" (vii). In it he attempts to distill the thinking of a number of Christian anarchists – as well as some who are not necessarily anarchists but whose work contributes to Christian anarchist thought in some way – into a coherent anarchist theology. Part of this project is to construct a commentary on several passages of the

Bible (especially the New Testament) that are important to Christian anarchists. It is the first

attempt of its kind, and as such plays an interesting and important role in the study of the

intersection between radical politics and Christian theology. It makes it easier, for instance, to

refer to Christian anarchism as a body of thought. Christoyannopoulos writes, "In a way,

Christian anarchism as a tradition is both assumed and proposed in this book. It is presented as if

it already exists as a tradition, but doing so thereby constitutes it as a tradition" (11). He contrasts

this tradition quite starkly with both a more general Christian pacifism and with liberation

theology:

> Christian anarchism does share a lot with pacifism, but it goes further, especially by
> carrying this pacifism forward as implying a critique of the violent state. Christian
> anarchism also shares a lot with liberation theology, especially in its insistence that
> Christianity does have very real political implications. But Christian anarchism is critical
> of liberation theology's emphasis on human agency, of its compromise with violence, and
> of its lack of New Testament references compared to Christian anarchism. In short, while
> related to at least two important trends within Christian political thinking, Christian
> anarchism is more radical than both, and thus provides a unique contribution to Christian
> political thought. (294)

Thus Christoyannopoulos makes a claim that Christian anarchism offers a way to both take

pacifist ethics to its logical conclusion and maintain that ethics in the face of adversity or

oppression. The way this works out in Christoyannopoulos's synthesis is grounded, most

importantly, in Christian anarchism's eschatology, but cannot be divorced from its ecclesiology.

Christoyannopoulos offers a brief history of Christian anarchism as well as some

discussion of important figures and thinkers. Christian anarchists, he tells us, cite "several

Church Fathers, such as Origen, Tertullian, Clement, and Lactanius, as men whose writings

suggest that the early church interpreted Jesus's teaching in a way that strongly resonates with

their own" (243). He points to some comments by Peter Maurin in which the latter claims

elements of anarchism in medieval Irish monasticism, but notes that for "all other Christian

anarchists, bar the odd heretical movement, the centuries that followed the fall of Rome were by and large devoid of Christian anarchist witness" (246). This witness shows up again in the Waldenses, who refused to take oaths and opposed war and the death penalty, and also the Albigenses. Both groups, Christoyannopoulos offers, were virtually exterminated by the Catholic Church (247). He mentions the Franciscans as a source as well as the fifteenth century's Petr Chelčický. (247) English movements such as the Diggers are listed, as are the Quakers, but the preeminent example is the Anabaptist movement (249).

Christoyannopoulos refers to abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison but claims that Garrison can only be described as anarchist for the few years before he acquiesced both to the state (in the form of supporting a presidential candidate) and the justification of violence: "The example provided by him and his followers, therefore, is not one of Christian anarchism, but one of radical and indeed successful campaigning on one particular cause – the abolition of slavery" (251). Fellow abolitionist Aidin Ballou's track record is better as far as Christoyannopoulos is concerned but writes that Hopedale, Ballou's attempt at an intentional Christian community, is nevertheless just "another example of a radical Christian community but without a professed or otherwise explicit anarchist identity" (252). In fact, Christoyannopoulos does not really find any *bona fide* Christian anarchists until, unsurprisingly, right around the time that secular anarchism makes its way onto the world scene.

Christoyannopoulos describes Tolstoy as "the most frequently cited example of Christian anarchism," but points out that Tolstoy did not self-identify as such (17). He also notes that Tolstoy had a rationalist, non-supernatural view of Jesus as a revolutionary teacher and singularly rational thinker (19). He contrasts Tolstoy with Jacques Ellul, who used the "anarchist" moniker but did not really believe in the possibility of an anarchist society:

> What Ellul adds to Tolstoy is his anarchist exegesis of many more passages from the Bible, including the Old Testament. His work therefore complements Tolstoy's narrower focus on the Sermon on the Mount. Besides, Ellul's approach to Christianity was not as unusual as Tolstoy's, being grounded in traditional Protestant (especially Calvinist) theology. (21)[6]

Christoyannopoulos also suggests that while Ballou and Tolstoy were gradualists, anticipating a slow march toward a stateless society, Ellul and others had a more apocalyptic bent, anticipating a stark and even violent rupture in human history and often seeing moral and cultural decline as a prelude to the inevitable end (274). Interestingly, when it comes to Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, Christoyannopoulos determines that their contribution to anarchist *thought* is relatively minor (and does not figure prominently in Christoyannopoulos's commentaries), even though they are important figures in the movement more generally (27).

It is in Christoyannopoulos's reference to thinkers outside Christian anarchism that we can see some significant connections. He mentions William Cavanaugh and states that Cavanaugh's "ongoing work on the questionable origins of the secular state and on how Christians ought to respond to the state's assumed omnipotence is relevant to a generic outline of Christian anarchism." (34). He also introduces Ched Myers as being close to Christian anarchism:

> His work is esteemed by several Christian anarchists – especially those with an activist inclination. His study of Mark certainly resonates strongly with Christian anarchist thought, yet he stays clear from reaching explicitly anarchist conclusions, locating himself instead in Marxist liberation theology. Apart from his criticism of "leaderless groups," however, there is little in his book that separates him from Christian anarchism. (40)

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[6] "What separates me, then, from the true anarchist? Apart from the religious problem, which we shall take up again at length, I think that the point of division is as follows. The true anarchist thinks that an anarchist society—with no state, no organization, no hierarchy, and no authorities—is possible, livable, and practicable. But I do not. In other words, I believe that the anarchist fight, the struggle for an anarchist society, is essential, but I also think that the realizing of such a society is impossible" (Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity,* 19).

What Christoyannopoulos does not point out is Myers's work connecting Christian theology and anarcho-primitivism – a significant subtheme in Christian radicalism more generally. Christoyannopoulos is also favorably disposed to John Howard Yoder – he describes Yoder's *Politics of Jesus* as an "eminent example" of a "growing body of scholars [who have] made the case for the direct and indirect political implications of Jesus's teaching" (2) – despite his insistence that Yoder is not truly a Christian anarchist because he defended the police function of the state (41).

Christoyannopoulos emphasizes the ethics of violence as it relates to Christian anarchism, particularly in reference to the state:

> Christian anarchists take seriously the political implications of Jesus's instructions, especially non-resistance of evil…. Jesus is calling his disciples to transcend *lex talionis*, to love and forgive evildoers in order for the cycle of violence which has blighted humanity to be overcome. For Christian anarchists, this cannot but require a rejection of state theory and practice. Moreover, they argue that the state also contravenes – or through it obliges its citizens to contravene – the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. For Christian anarchists, therefore, the Sermon on the Mount contains "the most revolutionary teaching in the world" [Ammon Hennacy]. It calls for revolution by its implied criticism of the state, but it also instructs Christians on how to behave in order for them to lead that revolution – a revolution which…Jesus further taught and practiced throughout the rest of his life. (82)

Indeed, Christoyannopoulos's work illustrates the centrality of this ethics in Christian anarchism; if Christian anarchists disagree with one another and with thinkers who are close to anarchism, it is in the precise *application* of this ethics in personal and communal practice.

Christoyannopoulos argues that Christian anarchism might seem new only because, as they Christian anarchists see it, the church has abandoned the radical teachings of Jesus. Thus part of the Christian anarchists' understanding of history is one in which the church's beginnings as a proto-anarchist collective were betrayed by the later church's compromise with the state. This is an etiological apology as to why the true Christian calling is anarchist even though most

expressions of Christianity do not reflect this. Later, Christoyannopoulos tells us that it is common for Christian anarchists to regard the modern church as a corruption of Jesus's original teaching (177). Most locate this corruption with Constantine (or see Constantine as decisive evidence of a corruption already underway) although Tolstoy and others blame Paul for betraying the original teachings of Jesus (182).

Christoyannopoulos tells us that Christian anarchists "accuse the state not only of waging war to exploit foreign lands and peoples, and to thereby enrich its well-to-do classes, but also of deploying its full arsenal domestically to protect what the wealthy classes have stolen from the masses" (148). By collecting taxes to finance protection from theft and criminal behavior, the state, Christoyannopoulos argues, "thereby behaves precisely like the evil it claims to guard against" (148).[7] Here, then, the discussion turns decidedly economic. Christoyannopoulos mentions that, for many Christian anarchists, ownership of land is particularly problematic (149) and that Tolstoy was suspicious of money as well as economics more generally (152). He identifies Jesus's warning that we "cannot serve two masters" as a passage critical in the economics of Christian anarchism (152) and argues that Jesus's teaching implies economic sharing (219).

In addition to articulating economic problems posed by the state, Christoyannopoulos also points out the ethical dilemmas posed by allegiance to the state. Since the state is violent, willingness to sacrifice Christ's injunction to love neighbor and enemy to serve or support the state is essentially a form of idolatry (152). "In sum," he illustrates,

for Christian anarchists like Tolstoy, the state is a violent, deceptive, exploitative human

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[7] This runs remarkably close to Charles Tilley's argument in "War Making and State Making As Organized Crime" in *Bringing the State Back In*, edited by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), though Tilley is not an anarchist.

creation. To follow it is to deify it. One can either place the Christian God above the state, and thus follow Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, or the state above God, and thus follow human laws. The former is truly Christian, the latter, idolatry. (155)

This is not necessarily a universal ethics for all people. Christoyannopoulos argues that the typical Christian anarchist reading of Romans 13 means that "Christian anarchist theory is only prescribing anarchism for Christians" (188). The state, a fallen institution governing a fallen people, cannot truly be expected to eschew violence, nor can those who are not committed to Jesus as Lord be expected to follow his teachings. The Christian, however, is ethically bound: "The spectrum of possible responses to evil ranges quite narrowly from non-resistance to non-violent resistance – but also, in the latter case, submission to any consequent penalty for this resistance. Anything outside this narrow range, however, would seem to amount to a disobedience of Jesus's law of love" (202). This is a strong articulation of the pacifist ethics of Christian anarchism.

The Christian anarchist vision, in Christoyannopoulos's synthesis, does not call for overthrowing existing systems so much as subverting them, usually in the form of alternative communities (more specifically, seeing the church as a collection of such communities) that embody the values of the world to come:

> [H]owever much they criticize the state, Christian anarchists do not favor any overthrow of the government. Methods of this kind, for them, follow "the spirit of retaliation, violence, and murder," and end up causing more harm than good.[8] Their response to the state is therefore more compassionate, more forgiving, more patient than that of many other revolutionaries – yet they still believe that theirs is the only truly revolutionary method. (207)

This vision connects the ecclesiological and eschatological streams and brings to mind the old Wobbly slogan, "building the new in the shell of the old," a phrase Christoyannopoulos uses as a subheading (216). This is one of the mechanisms by which Christian radicals can maintain what

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[8]Christoyannopoulos cites Garrison here.

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is usually a pacifistic stance while at the same time recognizing that change may not happen quickly or by nonviolent means; it is a theologically coded way of critiquing the present system in light of an ideal. The political implications are obvious. But Christoyannopoulos adds this caveat: "from the pure Christian anarchist perspective …there is a great danger in trying to precipitate the advent of the kingdom of God: the temptation to adopt violent means toward that end" (271). This temptation, for Christoyannopoulos, threatens the integrity of the Christian anarchist witness.

Christoyannopoulos goes on to contrast this with his understanding of liberation theology: "Where liberation theology seeks to overthrow oppressive governments and empower the oppressed through the state, Christian anarchism preaches patient love and forgiveness, despite very real oppression, and points out that this is the only revolutionary method grounded in the New Testament" (209). We might question whether liberation theology is devoid of "patient love and forgiveness," but Christoyannopoulos's rhetoric is clearly intended to distinguish between Christian anarchism and liberation theology precisely on ethical grounds regarding the role of violence.

Christoyannopoulos still speaks, however, in terms of revolution, suggesting that it comes about by example and not force (211), requires repentance (216), and cultivates communities characterized by love, patience and forgiveness – not just for one another but also for outcasts (219). Christian anarchists, he argues, focus less on tearing down the system and more on the construction of such alternatives, pointing out that the Greek word used in the New Testament to describe the church, *ekklesia*, is itself a political term and that the gathered body is inherently a political one: "According to Christian anarchists, simply living in…a decentralized community is a political statement in itself. That is, the very existence of the church is, in itself, a political

statement" (225). This is the essence of the Christian anarchist ecclesiology as

Christoyannopoulos understands it. This essence is not just pacifist but also non-coercive, in

contrast to more activist movements (and especially liberation theology):

> The important difference is between anticipating and precipitating the kingdom:
> Christians are to anticipate it in their own lives and communities, but not seek to
> precipitate it – lest they become impatient and step upon the slippery slope to
> increasingly confrontational activism. What is important is not future but the here and
> now, not the eventual dawning of the Christian anarchist utopia but witnessing to its
> potential today. Therefore, even if their witness does not seem efficacious in hastening
> God's kingdom, Christians must continue to strive to follow Jesus in their own life and
> community, and not be tempted to force others to do the same as well. Their witness
> *might* move others to convert to Jesus's way – but, equally, it might not. It might
> precipitate the kingdom – but, equally, it might not. They must assess their own actions
> not against the extent to which they have succeeded in hastening the kingdom, but solely
> on the extent to which they have strived to anticipate and represent the kingdom by
> following Jesus's teaching and example in their own lives. (279)

The apocalyptic eschatology that Christoyannopoulos associates with Christian anarchism serves

a divine guarantee that those who eschew violence, even if that disavowal leads to their own

death, will ultimately be vindicated in the end. Ultimate effectiveness is pushed into an expected

end times that will see justice done and all wrongs righted. Ultimately, pacifism is a viable

option for Christoyannopoulos and the kind of Christian anarchism he is describing because of a

fervent belief that God will vindicate the martyrs and justice will be restored.

Toward the end of *Christian Anarchism*, Christoyannopoulos gives a clear picture of the

postsecular nature of Christian anarchism:

> That church and state should be kept separate does not mean that religion and politics can
> or should be, too…. Christianity carries with it important political implications. Besides,
> in its quest for worship and power, the state has been said to be seeking quasi-divine or
> religious authority. This very contest between church and state illustrates the unavoidable
> overlap between religion and politics. Thus from a Christian anarchist perspective, while
> the true church must be separated from the state, religion cannot be separated from
> politics. (290)

We might extrapolate from Christoyannopoulos's comments that it is precisely *because* religion

and politics cannot be separated that, for the Christian anarchist, church and state must be separated – because the politics of the state stands in contrast to the politics of the kingdom and therefore constitutes a rival religious vision to which the Christian anarchist cannot accede without worshipping a false idol.

Christoyannopoulos argues that Christians can function as prophets to society, though it is unclear on this point how much he is drawing on the thinkers he cites in the commentary and how much is his own theological speculation: "as long as Christian anarchists are informed by Jesus's teaching and example," he writes, "they act as prophets to society …Moreover, Christian anarchists embody the role of the prophet both in their critique of society's violence and idolatry and in their attempts to live out their understanding of Christianity in community" (286). This comports with Christoyannopoulos's emphasis on moral suasion and revolution through example.

Jesus Radicals

One of the contemporary expressions of Christian anarchism is a website called *Jesus Radicals* (www.jesusradicals.com), self-described as "a resource for exploring the connections between anarchism and Christianity, and their meaning for faith and politics."[9] Christoyannopoulos describes Jesus Radicals as a "vibrant, mostly American Christian anarchist online community" (31). Their logo is the familiar raised fist of radical movements gone by, but this fist has a nail through it, juxtaposing the image of power and resistance with an image of crucifixion. It was begun by Andy and Nekeisha Alexis-Baker sometime around 2001 or 2002[10]

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[9] This appears at the bottom of every page of the Jesus Radicals website.

[10] This is extrapolated from a 2009 podcast interview with Nekeisha Alexis-Baker in which she

and serves as a repository of material related to Christianity and anarchism as well a discussion

forum for those wanting to explore this kind of Christian radicalism.

Though it seems a hair-splitting distinction, Alexis-Baker identifies as a Christian and as

an anarchist, but bristles at the designation "Christian anarchist." This is made clearer on the

site's page on anarchism, though the authorship is not specified: "Without claiming that

anarchism is Christian or that one has to be an anarchist to be Christian, we claim that if

Christians are to engage with the world, the best available option is anarchism because it opens

up space for Christians to engage without selling out their primary allegiances and core

commitments, especially to peacemaking and nonviolence" (2).

Under the "Anarchism" link on the Jesus Radicals homepage is another set of links, the

first of which is "Civilization," offering a brief explanation of anarcho-primitivism, or what is

sometimes called "green anarchism":

> Repeating much of what anthropology has known for years, green anarchism shows that
> agriculture was the first step in human exploitation of the earth and one another. It was
> out of this sedentary existence that patriarchy, war, and other forms of social domination
> arose. As such, we ought to be looking at what anthropologists have found out about
> nomadic bands. Though not completely free from all violence, many of these bands have
> never known warfare and are arranged in an egalitarian fashion. There are no kings and
> rulers amongst them who dominate. (1)
>
> Thus, civilization is a target of green anarchism because at its root, civilization is
> inherently violent and sets up various relationships of domination. As a way of life
> characterized by the growth of cities, civilization inevitably destroys its environmental
> surroundings. (2)

Here the site quotes Jared Diamond, author of *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, and also includes a video

of Diamond, with the disclaimer that Diamond "does not subscribe fully to green anarchism" (2).

It mentions John Zerzan in the opening sentence, and Zerzan has been a keynote speaker at the

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describes *Jesus Radicals* as having been in existence "seven or eight years." The podcast is not
currently available online due to website redesign but I have a copy of it and the transcript is
included as an appendix.

group's last two national conferences.[11]

Perhaps the best summary of the relationship between anarcho-primitivism and Christian theology is Ched Myers' entry on "Anarcho-primitivism and the Bible" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*. Myers offers what he calls eight "talking points" pursuant to anarcho-primitivism, and connects these to the Bible:

1) *"Civilization represents for AP [anarcho-primitivism] a pathological regression, rather than an ingenuous progression, of human consciousness" (56).*

Myers suggests that the Genesis creation narratives are, in fact, an early critique of civilization, culminating in the Babel story as a specific critique of the empires of the Ancient Near East. He also suggests that this thread runs through the Bible into the New Testament where Jesus articulates a vestigial version of this critique in Luke 12:27.

2) *"AP's perspective on 'pre-history' argues that the late Neolithic domestication of plants and animals led to the domestication of human beings" (56).*

Myers identifies in the Bible, particularly among the prophets but also in the Psalms and other places, what he calls an "urban antipathy"; walled cities are not portrayed sympathetically and hard held to symbolize domination, an observation he attributes to Ellul – Ellul, incidentally, being known for being both an anarchist Christian and a trenchant critic of technology if not civilization itself.

3) *"AP endorses revisionist anthropological studies that offer a more sympathetic assessment of hunter-gatherer social and economic organization, emphasizing what Marshal Sahlins called the 'original affluence' of stone-age cultures" (56).*

Here Myers points to the wilderness narratives in Exodus, wherein the newly liberated Israelites

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[11] See http://www.jesusradicals.com/conference/speakers/ for the 2011 roster of speakers.

experienced sustenance through nature and were not allowed to take more than was needed for a given day. This also, he argues, influences Sabbath-year provisions in the Old Testament in which slaves were freed and debts forgiven, and especially the Jubilee year in which all property was to revert to original ownership (thus disallowing the exploitation of the poor). He also finds this in the Gospels, Acts, and the letters of Paul in the New Testament (57).

4) *"For AP the ecological crisis necessitates a radical critique of advanced toolmaking and all forms of industrial technology, in the belief that when we use tools they use us back in a way that dehumanizes us and destroys our more natural competences" (57).*

This is one of the weaker connections. Myers points to the proscription against domestic fires on the Sabbath as well as the commandment to build altars out of unhewn stone. He quotes Exodus 20:25: "If you make an altar of stones for Me, do not construct it from hewn stone; if you use a tool on it you will defile it." He also invokes the prohibitions on the making of images, connecting this to Marx's idea of commodity fetishism, though the connection to technology and tools in this case is not entirely clear.

5) *"Work for wages and hierarchical divisions of labor, the sine qua non of toxic civilization, are inherently alienating" (57).*

Myers invokes again the Fall narrative as well as the Sabbath code, along with criticisms of the rich exploiting the poor for labor. He tells us that "Jesus spins stories that undermine the sanctity of wage-labor (Matt. 20:1-16), and that pit rebellious peasants against wealthy landowners (Mk. 12:1-10)" as well as advocating for the hungry to steal food from the rich. "Despite the captivity of modern Christianity to the Protestant work ethic, the Bible's Sabbath ethos (including Paul's theology of grace) privileges being over doing, celebration over work, and gift over possession – again resonating with indigenous wisdom concerning personal, social, and physical ecology"

(57).

6) *"For some AP theorists, symbolic representation (including language itself) lies at the heart of the "descent" into civilization, becoming a substitute for direct sensory experience of nature and engendering social differences" (57).*

This is another of the weaker connections. Myers points to passages that suggest a "suspicion" of representation, or at least a preference for the natural; Myers invokes a plethora of "wild and magical landscapes" as well as "tales of dangerous adventures with wild animals, from Jonah's whale to Daniel's lions" (57). Jesus seeks the "solitude of the wilderness" and "invites his disciples to learn from seeds" (58).

7) *"AP advocates a variety of individual and group strategies of 'going feral,' both skirmishing with the dominant system and 're-inhabiting' natural spaces for their protection and 'detoxification'" (58).*

Here Myers invokes a sense in which, in the Hebrew scriptures, God "inhabits the undomesticated spaces outside of civilization, and is encountered only by humans who journey into the wilderness" (58). He makes mention of John the Baptist's "feral" personage (eating locusts and honey and so forth) as well Jesus's entry into ministry with a retreat into the wilderness. Myers also argues that the portrayals of nature and civilization in the Bible are often oppositional – he cites the plagues in Exodus as one example – even up to St. Paul's call for "radical non-conformity to the dominant cultural codes of Roman civilization" (58).

8) *"The goal of AP is not to 'go back to the Neolithic,' which is recognized to be impossible, but rather to rediscover 'future primitivity'" (58).*

This is where Myers seems to turn particularly eschatological, pointing to the restoration of "original peaceableness," a vision that "empowers practices of both renewal and resistance," one

that awaits "humans who will cooperate with the divine plan for the liberation of every living thing (Rom. 8:20f.)" (58).

This peaceable vision is lived in the church. The Jesus Radicals would seem to agree with Christoyannopoulos that a properly Christian politics is one in which the church constitutes an alternative society that models the ethics and economics of the eschatological kingdom in the way that Jesus taught and the early church exemplified. For instance, Christoyannopoulos suggests the contribution Christian anarchism might make to political thinking in general:

> By spelling out…a critique of the state and response to it, the Christian anarchist contribution to political thought is original in several ways: it articulates an emphatically *Christian* political theory (in the broadest sense of a theory or perspective that is concerned with political issues), though an uncommon one at that; it enriches the anarchist tradition, though based on grounds which many anarchists are likely to be uncomfortable with; and it contributes to the debate on means and ends with a stubborn refusal to compromise with violence or coercion. (291)

Here we see again the emphasis on pacifist ethics: violence and coercion are not appropriate means, no matter how noble the ends. In *The New Inquisitions*, Arthur Versluis argues that there is a connection between the belief in what he calls "secular millennialism" – that is, belief that human effort and striving can bring about utopia – and totalitarianism. "Secular millennialism," he writes, "requires a rigid historicism – faith in history is necessary, a belief that one can remake this world and human society into a new historical model, even if the price is murder and torture" (58). Using the Inquisition as an archetype, Versluis compares the ideological structure of totalitarianism with the work of de Maistre, Schmitt, Voegelin, and others to trace the origins of totalitarian thinking (14). Belief that utopia can be achieved by human means can lead to the justification of any means necessary to realize that vision; note the similarity to Christoyannopoulos's critique of liberation theology. But instead of mysticism, which is

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Versluis' answer to this dilemma[12] (156), Christoyannopoulos and the Jesus Radicals tell us that the Christian anarchist answer is apocalypticism: revolution deferred.

Five *Topoi*

In order to effect a comparison of our subjects – Yoder, Hauerwas, and Milbank – with each other and also with Christian anarchism, let me suggest five *topoi* of political theology generally that seem to have relevance here. Many of these have been mentioned along the way. The first is *ethics*, which for our purposes is the way in which a group or thinker deals with violence, though of course ethics is broader than that. The rejection of violence altogether has certain ramifications. The justification of violence has ramifications of its own, as does the circumstances under which violence is considered justifiable.

The second is *ecclesiology* – how one conceptualizes the church, the church's political identity, and its relation to the state. Christian radicals differ in their ecclesiology and the emphasis placed on the church. They differ in the extent to which the church is to be seen as an alternative *polis* to the state. Parsing these differences will allow us a clearer picture of the specifics of a given writer's political thinking.

Third, there is *eschatology*, or the role that the millennium, apocalypse, and/or the "end times" plays in Christian radicalism. This often has a bearing on ethics (some pacifists believe that it is Christ's return to bring judgment that makes it possible for them to suspend judgment in the form of refusing to retaliate) as well as ecclesiology inasmuch as the church is sometimes

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[12]"Perhaps the question of how to heal humanity of its pathologies is to be answered not by outward imposition of any ideology or ideocracy but only by inward reflection and transformation" (156).

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seen as a herald or even an agent of the world to come. Most articulations of anarchism include some kind of expectation of, or hope for, revolution: a significant and sometimes violent "changing of the guard" that signals the beginning of a new era in keeping with the radical vision. For the most part – there are some exceptions – Christian radicalism defers revolution eschatologically; the necessary change is not going to take place through human agency or by natural processes, but by apocalyptic divine action.

Fourth, we might look in the other direction at *etiology*, or the study of origins. In Christian anarchism etiology has two layers. One pertains to what gets done with Jesus and/or the early church as the origin of a faith that is specifically Christian – that is, what differentiates Christianity from the Judaism of its founder(s). Almost every Christian theology justifies itself by arguing that its precepts, or the seeds thereof, go back to Jesus (and/or Paul, though some see Paul as a problem) and the witness of the early church. It is usually incumbent upon a theologian to demonstrate that his or her theology is faithful to the example of Jesus. The other important layer is how the ideas of creation and fall are employed. Assumptions about the nature of the Fall, and what (if anything) existed prior to the Fall, can frame what a given thinker is seeking to return to, or what they think is possible. This comes out, for instance, in Robert Craig's discussion of Reinhold Niebuhr in *Religion and Radical Politics*. Niebuhr, Craig explains, took humanity's fallenness so seriously as to significantly delimit the possibilities for political action prior to the teleological consummation of the world. In both of these instances we will be looking at how these etiologies, or origin stories, impact theopolitical thinking.

The fifth recurring theme is *economics*. In some cases, we will see a very explicit critique of capitalism; in others, we will note a concern for solidarity with the poor. We will also see calls for Jubilee (the Jewish law which demanded that all debts be cancelled, slaves manumitted, and

property returned to its original owners every fifty years), or the economic implications of Sabbath, or the sharing of property. In many cases Christian radicalism makes a connection between economics and the celebration of the Eucharist.

These five E's – ethics, ecclesiology, eschatology, etiology, and economics – can offer us not just a way of examining Christian anarchism, but it can help to differentiate Christian radicalism from other iterations of Christian theology and evaluate the extent to which a given theology is anarchistic. But precisely because Western political thinking is beholden to the structures of Christian theology, these can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to forms of political thinking beyond Christian radicalism. In fact, many of the arguments of our Christian radicals will operate by contrasting one or more of these *topoi* with their secular counterparts.

Method

The title of this dissertation (*The Subversive Kernel: Radicalism and the Politics of Jesus in Postsecular Theology*) is an homage to Lewis Perry's *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought*. Christian anarchists closely resemble these "radical abolitionists" and the social crusaders of the nineteenth century, and Perry's work, as we shall see, raises some important questions. There are differences: Perry is somewhat less interested in the relationship of theology *per se* to radical thought, and his work has the benefit of a larger movement – abolitionism – to which there is no direct corollary, though the "anti-globalism" movement comes close.[13] It is difficult, however, to see Yoder, Hauerwas, or Milbank as self-consciously a part of the "anti-globalization" movement, though their political theologies would certainly be at odds with neoliberalism. Because of the similarity of the subject matter and my

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[13] David Graeber describes the movement as one against neoliberalism in "The New Anarchists" (62).

comfort with texts, however, Perry's methodology – mining the written works of abolitionists for evidence of anarchist inclinations and analyzing these in light of their historical context – seems the most appropriate for my own work.

Focusing on texts allows me to include voices that have radical implications but may or may not come from people who are self-identified radicals. Mostly, I will focus on primary sources appropriate to an intellectual history – texts written by those who seem to exemplify Christian radicalism or employ radical rhetoric in some way, and any secondary sources that might be helpful in those cases where they exist. I will be looking for the ways in which their radical politics connects to and derives from their theology. I am interested in how radical rhetoric informs their theology and the ways in which radical ideology is theologically coded, or ways in which radical principles are narrated as something inherent to the Christian tradition. In particular, I am looking for ways in which Christian radicals address problems in radical thought from a theological perspective, and use radical politics as a tool for understanding their religious tradition.

This is not attempt to write "the book" on Christian radicalism or offer a comprehensive overview of any particular theologian or group. Rather, the goal is to examine representative texts that can then be contextualized in a broader conversation about religion, politics, and conceptions of the secular and postsecular in American discourse. The figures examined here are part of a much more specific and particular conversion; some might even resist the idea of being part of something more sweeping, and yet I contend that they cannot help but be so. These voices are some of those involved in Christian anarchism along with others whose work informs Christian radicalism more generally. For example, John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas are listed as helpful resources on the Christian anarchist site jesusradicals.com and Yoder is

mentioned in Alexandre Christoyannopoulos's *Christian Anarchism.* To be sure, there are voices left out. Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw's *Jesus for President* might have been fruitfully examined, as well as the work of Greg Boyd and others.

Moreover, with the exception of Nekeisha Alexis-Baker of the Jesus Radicals, all of the figures explored here are white men. This is not insignificant. I contend, however, that this accurately reflects the homogenous nature of the discourse community under consideration. With the exception of Dorothy Day, the thinkers listed as resources for theology on the Jesus Radicals site are white men, and the works listed as resources on anarchism show a similar tendency. The works of James Cone, Cornel West, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, Gustavo Guttierez, Miguel de la Torre, etc., represent projects that are markedly different from those of Yoder, Hauerwas, and Milbank.

Christian radicalism is not a coherent movement with identifiable practitioners or adherents, but a recurring idea, one that pops up from time to time in the history of Christianity, and has analogs outside that milieu. It is not limited to American political or religious thought, but speaks to important issues and questions in those areas of discourse. Christians like Dorothy Day, John Howard Yoder, and William Cavanaugh end up in radical political territory because they believe certain things about the message of Jesus and the meaning of their religion. In some cases, perhaps, Christian radicals interpret their religion in certain ways because of their radical inclinations – this would seem to be the case in some versions of liberation theology. Regardless, however, theology plays a role in the way Christian radicals articulate the relationship between religion and radical politics. Day never claimed that being Catholic necessitated an anarchist position, even though these were inseparable in her own life and thinking. Yoder, on the other hand, made ecumenical appeals for all Christians to embrace collective practices like consensus-

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based decision making and the complete rejection of coercive force – practices that have anarchist implications even if Yoder was reluctant to describe them as such.[14] Day and Yoder differed slightly in the way they negotiated the relationship between religion and politics, and this plays out in their writing.

Chapter 1: The Subversive Kernel in America

> [T]he making of a radical Christian tradition in the United States was part of a historic process whereby certain Christians discovered that God was present when people struggled for social and economic justice, affirmed the inherent worth and dignity of all persons, and committed themselves to the liberation of the oppressed.
> -Robert Craig, *Religion and Radical Politics*

If tracing the origins of Christian radicalism or anarchism is difficult in general, tracing it in America is no less so. We might look to the Puritans as a familiar and perhaps clichéd starting point. Inasmuch as they articulated and worked for a biblically-based vision of a new order that stood in opposition to and functioned as a critique of the existing order, the Puritans can be seen as an historical antecedent to Christian anarchism. They became the existing order against which the radicalism of others such as Anne Hutchinson or Roger Williams might be measured, but their initial relationship to the Anglican establishment certainly had radical implications. Recognized dissenting groups like the Quakers, Moravians, and early Baptists offer a more direct correlation to contemporary Christian anarchism, particularly in terms of Quaker pacifism and the Radical Reformation roots of the Moravians and Baptists. Ira Chernus begins *American Nonviolence* by discussing Anabaptists and Quakers before moving on to more specifically American examples.

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[14] Yoder often recognized the anarchist implications of Anabaptist thought and clarified that anarchism does not mean chaos or anomie, but constitutes a critique of the disorder of the status quo.

To some extent, however, it is the nineteenth century that presents itself as the headwaters of an American tradition of radical Christianity, especially the anarcho-pacifist stream. Social experiments like those of the Shakers, the Oneida Perfectionists, and the Latter Day Saints, as detailed by Lawrence Foster in *Religion and Sexuality*, carry much of the same ethos as contemporary anarchist groups, especially those whose ecclesiology leads toward the formation of intentional communities. Modern groups are not nearly as interested in rethinking human sexuality, nor are they particularly driven by prophetic visions and utterances. Most would be appalled by domineering patriarchal presence of Oneida leader John Humphrey Noyes, but the concern for the formation of a redeemed community is something they would share. Contemporary anarchists also do not share the Shaker emphasis on celibacy, but many share the Shaker concern with simplicity and frugality. Shane Claiborne – who makes his own clothes and does not own a car – particularly comes to mind. More important than these superficialities, however, is a shared suspicion of the market. The Shakers wanted to remain unsullied by the rough-and-tumble of a world rent asunder by the "market revolution," and contemporary anarchists take a similar stand against global capitalism.

In *All Things New*, Robert Fogarty catalogs a litany of social experiments and would-be utopias – Perfectionists, Shakers, various forms of Fourierism, Brook Farm, and others. Rather than suggest that any particular experiment stands as a prototype or precursor, we might point to similar social dynamics that make such projects attractive. Many of the questions that came bubbling to the surface in the nineteenth century are unique to those times, and so are the answers offered by the various and varied communal projects of the period. But some of the questions about religious identity in a complex world, about the effects of expanding markets, and about the future of America and of humanity itself are similar to those being addressed by

some contemporary anarchists, and their responses – a strong dichotomy between the blessed community (however conceived) and the world, an emphasis on moral fortitude and right conduct, and a localized subversion of the capitalist order – are remarkably similar.

This chapter seeks to survey some of the relevant secondary literature, as well as some primary sources, as a means of both establishing the historical background of this stream of Christian thought and getting a feel for the (rather sparse) literature on Christian anarchism in general. Lewis Perry's *Radical Abolitionism* looks at the mid-nineteenth century. Ira Chernus's *American Nonviolence* explores some related figures and movements, particularly in terms of the ethics of nonviolence. Robert Craig's *Religion and Radical Politics* discusses several varieties of Christian radicalism in the nineteenth into the twentieth centuries, and Tripp York's *Living on Hope While Living in Babylon* examines Christian anarchist figures in the twentieth century. Finally, Vernard Eller's *Christian Anarchy* is an attempt to define Christian anarchism that is somewhat at odds with Christoyannopoulos's synthesis.

Radical Abolitionists

Lewis Perry's *Radical Abolitionists* is an intellectual history that follows an anarchist thread in the Abolitionist movement. The title refers to the name given to a group of abolitionists under William Goodell, but the key figures for Perry are William Lloyd Garrison and Adin Ballou. Perry actually begins with Tolstoy, who at one point came across some of Garrison's writings and was pleased to discover a kindred spirit. Garrison, unfortunately, had already died, but Tolstoy was able to carry on some correspondence with Garrison's son, as well as with Ballou (4).

Perry sees a strong connection between anarchism and the idea of emancipation from

slavery. Tolstoy's most anarchistic work is *The Slavery of Our Times*, and Perry asserts that for

Tolstoy, "it seemed obvious that an anti-slavery movement should have been pacifistic and

anarchistic" (5). This is because Tolstoy believed that the eradication of sin from the world

would only come through the renunciation of violence and coercion. This puts Tolstoy in league

not only with abolitionists but also with nineteenth evangelical reformers whose eschatological

vision sought just such an eradication of sin. "Part of the romantic quest of American reform,"

Perry explains, "was to discover new styles of Christian life suitable to the coming regenerated

world" (16). This speaks to the importance of eschatology not only in Christian anarchism but

also in the nineteenth century reform movements more generally.

It also points to a salient feature of Perry's analysis: the abolitionists that Perry defines as

"radical" are the ones who recognized that when taken to its logical conclusions their opposition

to slavery, particularly the theological formulations of that opposition, did not allow for a

distinction between the force and coercion necessary to uphold the institution of slavery and the

force and coercion necessary for the function of the state, no matter how legitimatized the latter

might be. Some of the abolitionists began to see ways in which their theological objections to

slavery, rooted in a pacifist rendering of the Jesus' command not to resist an evil person but

rather "to turn the other cheek" also applied to the government. The state, they reasoned,

exercised precisely the same kind of coercive control that they decried in the institution of

slavery. "To some extent," Perry writes,

> there are links between the concepts of slavery and anarchy which help explain the
> emergence of anarchism in Northern movements to abolish slavery. There was no
> necessity, however, for abolitionists to venture into atheism, as Southerners predicted
> they would and as many European anarchists subsequently did. Northern Protestantism
> contained sufficient fuel to supply the fires of anarchism in antislavery. (32)

We can clearly see this as an ethical issue, but it is also eschatological: part of the fuel Perry

speaks of was the millennialism of the nineteenth-century reformers, the role of apocalyptic or eschatology being an important theological feature of many forms of Christian anarchism.[15] The significant connection here is the trope of the "government of God," which on one hand was the inbreaking of a divine order sometime in the proximate future,[16] and on the other hand constitutes a claim on the religious subject in the here and now that marginalizes other claims such as those of the state.

Perry finds the roots of this in 17th-century Calvinism, in which humans are so unworthy that they are powerless, and their institutions are impotent to rescue them from the wrath of God. Perry goes on to explain that it "was possible to derive from this tradition a radical outlook which, emphasizing the sovereignty of God and the worthlessness of intermediary institutions, raised the specter of anarchy" (36). The idea here is that the Christian's allegiance to the kingdom of God as a present (if incorporeal) reality displaces or marginalizes his or her identification as an American citizen, and the impotence of human institutions results in a critical stance that is not dissimilar to anarchism. The problem with slavery, from this perspective, is not that it is an affront to human rights but that the slaveholder is essentially taking the place of God, usurping God's rightful place as sovereign – an observation that was eventually extended to government itself (48).

Perry argues that this emerges out of a commitment to what was called "nonresistance," a nineteenth-century version of a comprehensive pacifist ethic explained in the greatest detail in Adin Ballou's *Christian Nonresistance in All of Its Important Bearings*. Ballou was an

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[15] It will, at times, be necessary to parse differences in the meaning of "millennial," "eschatological," and "apocalyptic," but for most of our purposes it will be helpful to emphasis their overlap and similarity, as well as the structural affinity to revolution in political terms.
[16] It would be interesting, but beyond the scope of this essay, to explore the connection here to Derrida's "democracy that is to come," particularly as it relates to Derrida's leftist politics.

abolitionist and eventually the founder of the Hopewell Community, a communal experiment

that ran from 1841 to 1856. Perry's discussion of nonresistance begins just prior to this, however,

with the formation of the New England Nonresistance Society in 1838 (55). The term

"nonresistance" can be a confusing one; it does not mean quietism or passive obedience (though

the nonresistants were met with these kinds of charges). Rather, it came from the injunction of

Christ: "Do not resist an evil person" (Matt 5:39), which directly precedes the more familiar

admonition to turn the other cheek. The nonresistants saw this to mean non-retaliation but they

also extrapolated a political position in which the rejection of violence necessarily implied a

renunciation of government, because human government relied on force to accomplish its

purposes (57). "In short," Perry tells us, "the nonresistants took Christ's opposition to violence,

even in response to injury, and extended it to oppose all institutions based on force. Armies were

one such system and so were slavery and human government" (59).

This was connected in several ways to the broader reform movements of the 1900s.

Violence and slavery were part of a constellation of vices that the true Christian was to "put

away" in light of the coming millennium. For this reason, abolition and nonresistance were

steeped in broader arguments about the nature and timing of reform. The New England

Nonresistance Society, Perry tells us, was formed out of a disagreement in the earlier American

Peace Society. Henry Wright was an ardent pacifist who preached an immediate renunciation of

all sin, including any complicity in coercion. William Ladd, on the other hand, advocated a more

gradual approach. Wright and other immediatists – including William Lloyd Garrison – would

eventually split off from the American Peace Society to form a separate group of nonresistants.

It will be helpful to take a direct look at the "Declaration of Sentiments" penned by

Garrison in 1838 for the newly formed New England Non-Resistance Society, reprinted in

volume two of the biography written by two of Garrison's children.[17] They note that the

Declaration was "struck off at a single setting on the forenoon of September 20" (230). This

document is important not only because it foreshadows at least one particular stream of Christian

anarchism, but also because it introduces some of the common rhetorical strategies in that

literature. After a perfunctory introduction, Garrison gets straight to the point:

> We cannot acknowledge allegiance to any human government; neither can we oppose any such government by a resort to physical force. We recognize but one KING and LAWGIVER, one JUDGE and RULER of mankind. We are bound by the laws of a kingdom which is not of this world; the subjects of which are forbidden to fight; in which MERCY and TRUTH are met together, and RIGHTEOUSNESS and PEACE have kissed each other; which has no state lines, no national partitions, no geographical boundaries; in which there is no distinction of rank, or divisions of caste, or inequality of sex; the officers of which are PEACE, its exactors RIGHTEOUSNESS, its walls SALVATION, and its gates PRAISE; and which is destined to break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms. (230)

This and the following paragraph demonstrate a remarkable cosmopolitanism, even if we cannot

expect Garrison to have avoided patriarchal language: "Our country is the world," he writes, "our

countrymen are all mankind" (230). The language here is also rife with biblical allusion, which is

not surprising.[18] The meeting of mercy and truth, and righteousness and peace kissing each other

is language from Psalm 85, while the odd phrase "destined to break in pieces and consume all

other kingdoms," popular in discourse about the end times, is from the book of Daniel. Both

references carry an eschatological import in keeping with Perry's observations about the role of

millennialism in Garrison's thought.

Garrison goes on to argue that the "POWERS THAT BE" – by which he means the

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[17]*William Lloyd Garrison 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children*. The Declaration of Sentiments is found on pp. 230-234.

[18] Garrison's use of scripture ranges from allusion to direct quotation, but he does not in any instance cite chapter and verse. This is not unusual for the time period, especially inasmuch as he is – probably safely – relying upon a significant biblical literacy on the part of his audience.

governments of the world – are not in accord with God's will, and will inevitably be overthrown by the "spiritual regeneration of their subjects" (231). They do not love their enemies, he argues, and therefore do not bear the light of Christ. While he does not mention the phrase, it would seem here that he is arguing against a reading of Romans 13:1-7 (verse 1 reads: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God"[19]) that would see the ordination of human government as a divine endorsement of any existing government.[20] This passage also employs the language of "powers," a rhetorical strategy that alludes to Ephesians 5:12 ("For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places") and imputes a demonic character to human government.

From there, Garrison states that the nonresistants were ethically opposed not only to war, but to all preparation for war. Members were forbidden to bear arms or hold military office. Also, because all human government is upheld by force, members could not participate in voting or legislative bodies (231). Neither could they sue or seek legal recrimination for wrongs – forgiveness was the mandate. Garrison invokes a new covenant in which "the penal code of the old covenant has been abrogated by Jesus Christ" (232). A new ethics for a new dispensation. He cites Romans 12:19 ("Vengeance is mine – I will repay, saith the Lord"), a passage that Christian pacifists take to be a call for Christians to embrace forgiveness and leave judgment to God. Garrison's invocation of this passage follows such a reading.

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[19] Garrison's language is reflective of that of the King James Bible; my own references will be from the New Revised Standard Version Bible unless otherwise indicated.

[20] This is a passage that comes up frequently in Christian radical literature, especially in its more fideistic streams. Christian anarchists with a strong theology of revelation must find a way to handle a passage that would seem to undermine their radical stance.

Moreover, Garrison continues, violence has been proven to be ineffective and therefore nonresistance is "sound policy" that "provides for all possible consequences," going on to suggest that it is "armed with omnipotent power, and must ultimately triumph over every assailing force" (232). Later in the Declaration Garrison seeks to allay fears that the nonresistants were a dangerous faction – and perhaps suggests his own approach to the Romans 13 issue by assuring his readers that they rejected "jacobinical doctrines":

> If we abide by our principles, it is impossible for us to be disorderly, or plot treason, or participate in any evil work; we shall submit to every ordinance of man, FOR THE LORD'S SAKE; obey all the requirements of Government, except such as we deem contrary to the commands of the gospel; and in no case resist the operation of law, except by meekly submitting to the penalty of disobedience. (233)

This would seem to temper the radicalism of Garrison's position, but not when we take into account his eschatological conviction that the millennium would come – and soon. The millennium functions in much the same way as revolution does in other forms of radicalism. Garrison believed it to be inevitable, and while direct overthrow was not available to them out of principle, they had other strategies at their disposal. Garrison writes in the Declaration that they would essentially speak truth to power ("we purpose...to speak and act boldly...to assail inequity...to apply our principles to all existing civil, political, legal, and ecclesiastical institutions") and use every available means to do so – preaching, the press, cooperation with "all sects and persons" who were friendly to their cause, as well as lectures, tracts and pamphlets (233). Garrison's eschatological vision was essentially peaceful and he was very fastidious in making sure that the tactics employed reflected the ethical vision of the future imagined by the nonresistants.

They believed that institutions that would not be present in the millennium should be abandoned in the here and now and fully expected to be persecuted for their efforts (233).

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Garrison quotes Matthew 19:29 – "For every one that forsakes houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for Christ's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" – and concludes by asserting the "certain and universal triumph" of the principles of the Non-Resistant Society. Garrison believed that the present order was passing away and that the coming millennial order would be peaceful. The triumphal arrival of this new order was inevitable, but it would come about not by violence (which would sully the peaceful nature of the coming kingdom) but by the spiritual regeneration of the world's citizens. Thus we can see Garrison as an example of the connection between ethics and eschatology in Christian anarchism.

Perry notes several difficulties that such a view might pose, and one of the ways in which we can examine Christian anarchism more broadly is to investigate the ways in which thinkers address (or fail to address) such difficulties. One of the ethical challenges is the presence of justified violence in the Old Testament. A Christian claiming pacifism or the rejection of coercion as the hallmark of Christian faithfulness must square his or her theological commitments with the calls in the Old Testament for Israel to dispatch her enemies, sometimes to the point of killing every living thing in a city or region. Another difficulty for Garrison and company lay in parsing the limits of nonresistance. To what extent did a commitment to nonresistance take certain reform strategies off the table? What did such a commitment look like on the ground for the abolitionist? How does one consistently apply an ethics of nonviolence and non-coercion? Finally, Perry suggests that there were "grave difficulties concerning the obligations of nonresistants toward the slave" (59). If emancipation is the goal, but coercive measures are eschewed by those advocating emancipation, then by what means or mechanism are they expecting freedom for the oppressed to be achieved? From the vantage point of the

oppressed, is there a meaningful distinction between nonresistance and passive indifference? In fact, nonresistants were met with derision from other reformers along just these lines, especially for their refusal to vote (89).

Radical Community

The nonresistants' zeal for the cause eventually led to a position sometimes referred to as "come-outerism," a phrase taken from a passage in Revelation in which the faithful were called to "come out" – in this case from a corrupt church. Perry describes come-outerism as "type of religious hostility to the organized churches" (92) and suggests that for the nonresistants "to reform was to come out and, perhaps, to create anew" (93). The most significant example of creating anew among the nonresistants is the Hopewell Community founded by Adin Ballou. The Hopedale Community, Perry writes, "was founded as an exaltation of Christianity, a place where Christians could behave on a plane unfamiliar to governmental civilization" (139). Perry regards the formation of a specific community to be the logical outworking of Ballou's theology. Ballou was an immediatist in the sense that he believed moral perfection was available to the regenerate soul in the present, but he also had a sense that some would take longer to get there than others. Similarly, Ballou was a Universalist, believing that God would not allow any souls to perish, but held to a belief, called "restorationism,"[21] that those who did not undergo conversion in this lifetime would have to endure some sort of punishment so that the soul might be "restored" in the afterlife before they were prepared for the blissful shores of heaven (140).

Ballou, unlike Garrison, offers something in the way of an ecclesiology in the formation of Hopedale as an alternative society. Those who saw the light of Ballou's gospel – the vanguard

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[21] This is a different use of the word than that which characterizes the Restoration Movement, or Stone-Campbell Movement, which sought to "restore" the New Testament church.

of the redeemed, we might say – needed some way to live out their eschatological ideal in the present. They needed an outward expression of their perfectionism and the freedom they claimed it offered, especially insofar as strategies for wholesale reform would seem to necessitate the very coercion they rejected. Perry describes Hopedale as "neither an engine of social control nor a celebration of individual emancipation; it was a congregation leading itself into conformity with the dispensations of God" (142). Perry continues with this observation:

> Several studies of American anarchism have pointed to Hopedale as an important nineteenth-century expression of anarchist ideas, and this is certainly justified in Ballou's equation of government with slavery and sin. On the other hand, Ballou recognized the necessity of government for those who remained enslaved to sin. Hopedale made no pretense of being "a renewed Garden of Eden," and those who came looking for easy, uncontrolled bliss were disappointed. The community sought a "middle way" between arrangement and spontaneity. Even on free meeting in religion they hedged: in theory they opposed this ideal of come-outerism, but when their theory was attacked, their services were revealed to be in keeping with the ideal. We cannot help noticing curfews, taxes, moral police, and the work force called the Hopedale Industrial Army. It was a strange anarchism which maintained that "everyone may enjoy as much freedom and individuality as is conducive to the *general good*, including of course his own good" [from the *Practical Christian*], but that everyone must sacrifice some liberty until the community is perfected. (150)

It is interesting to note, when considering the potential anarchism of the Hopewell Community, that the issue of private property was raised, even though ultimately the community rejected the anti-property sentiments of Clother Gifford – which has a certain resonance with Proudhon's "property is theft." What they ended up with was a less ideological approach to economics that placed emphasis on eradicating sinfulness rather than altering or protesting specific economic systems. "Their economics," Perry writes, "was fundamentally concerned with sinful relationships among persons rather than the evils of particular institutions" (149).

Perry offers a fairly robust discussion of Ballou's theology. He stresses Ballou's belief that human government was a kind of stopgap measure, intended to keep some semblance of order in a fallen world, but that it would become less and less necessary as people were

converted. Most of the needed reforms would take place, in the process, by voluntary means. If there were necessary tasks left that were not taken care of by voluntary associations, they could be administered efficiently, inexpensively, and without coercion (151). Perry argues that Ballou's theology "could scarcely rise above his rural and middle-class surroundings" and that the relative success of Hopedale (inasmuch as it managed to avoid scandal and extremism as opposed to, say, Oneida) had a lot to do with its largely middle-class or professional-class demographic. In other words, the experiment at Hopedale may not have been able to handle the complexities of urban life or the plight of the poor and/or the working class (or, for that matter, the slave).

There is also a strong etiological component to Perry's description of Ballou. Perry tells us that Ballou was a theological primitivist – that is, he was "determined to resurrect the original precepts and practices of Christianity" (152).[22] In this, Ballou's theological project bears an affinity to the Radical Reformation as well as the Stone-Campbell movement, both of which have within them some tradition of pacifism or nonresistance – though there are variants of theological primitivism without such a tradition.[23] Perry tells us that Ballou saw varying degrees of inspiration in the Bible and that he urged caution in interpretation. A lot of his hermeneutic was highly figurative, or, as Perry suggests as the proper terminology, typological. A typological reading sees the figures and stories of the Old Testament as types or foreshadows of persons and

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[22] The word "primitivism" has a very different meaning in radical literature outside of this theological context.

[23] The Radical Reformation would include many of the historical peace churches, and Alexander Campbell held a pacifist position very similar to Ballou's nonresistance even though this is not characteristic of Stone-Campbell churches in the present. See Craig Watts, *Disciple of Peace: Alexander Campbell on Pacifism, Violence, and the State.* For an example of a decidedly non-pacifist theological primitivism, see Theodore Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: the Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism*.

events in the New Testament and will often see elements of the Bible in general as somehow

prefiguring events in present. Ballou could see Israel as a *type* of the church, which in turn

prefigured the gathering of eschatological communities such as Hopedale, which were then

typologically representative of the age to come. This hermeneutic is similar to dispensationalism

in that it allows for a progressive revelation; fulfillment of a given type might negate or reframe

certain elements characteristic of the earlier dispensation. Perry explains the role of typology in

Ballou's thought:

> First, it obviously eliminated the objection to nonresistance that it was inconsistent with
> the divine sanction of war and government in the Old Testament. Christian reformers
> were supposed to teach the law of love as found in the New Testament. Second, typology
> enabled Ballou to relate the fortunes of his community to the second coming of Christ
> and the millennium. (153)

In this way, Perry argues, Ballou's theology as realized in Hopedale was able to answer some

(but certainly not all) of the paradoxes that beset Garrison's nonresistance.

Whither Nonresistance?

Perry narrates a split between what he calls "political abolitionism" and the more

anarchistic Garrisonian stream of nonresistant abolitionism. But he also, within this stream, tends

to pit Ballou against Garrison. In the face of impending war, and the growing tension between

nonresistance and the calls for immediate abolition, Garrisonians began finding loopholes that

allowed for the sanctioning of violence. "Garrisonians were not in much danger of being led into

licentiousness," Perry writes: "They faced a different pitfall. In their fight to vindicate the virtues

of voluntarism and independent understanding over the vices of coercion and corporate

declarations, their own doctrine allowed a wide toleration of *means*" (249, emphasis original).

Garrison himself railed against attempts to evaluate nonresistance in terms of expediency (250)

but even he was torn as to how to react to the armed slave uprising at Harper's Ferry and the example of John Brown, the white man who led the slaves to revolt (259). In fact, Perry argues, Harper's Ferry was a watershed moment in the nonresistance movement in general and marked a division between Ballou and Garrison (265).

Perry describes Ballou as the lone holdout in the nonresistants' path towards accommodating violence (261), and he credits Ballou's typological theology with guiding Ballou on "the more reliable course" (267). But even Ballou's vision did not survive the Civil War and its aftermath, a loss that Perry laments:

> There may not be any anarchistic traditions in American thought; perhaps there have been only a number of traditions which can be mined for anarchistic potential when it suits the needs of reformers who face changing problems. It remains chilling, however, to recall in a period of racial strife that some abolitionists predicted that if a racist society ended slavery by war the result had to be new forms of slavery and prolonged violence. Their legacy is not a set of beliefs passed down to radicals, but a definition of problems which we are still trying to escape. It is sobering to reflect that they canceled out their own testimony as one of the prologues to a cruel civil war. (307)

By the time Tolstoy began to explore the writings of Garrison and Ballou, anti-slavery radicalism had all but died out.

Radical Abolitionism helpfully addresses three of the five E's of Christian anarchism: ethics, eschatology, and etiology. The most obvious is the *ethical*, particularly as pertains to the role of violence. At what point, if any, is violence justified? If violence is never justified, what are the resources for squaring a pacifist ethics with the cause of liberation? What is to be made of government and war in the Old Testament? Another is *eschatology*: the role that apocalyptic or millennialism plays in the theological discourse of Christian anarchism. How does one's vision of the future correspond to a theopolitical vision in the here and now? A third is the *etiological* identification of Jesus as an anarchist and the early church as a prototype anarchist collective. How do anarchist groups imagine or re-imagine Jesus and the early Christians in ways that are

rhetorically useful?

Additionally, Perry's radical abolitionists introduce a kind of theopolitical thinking in which allegiance to the (coming) kingdom of God trumps the claims of the state upon the political subject. These are not the only issues relevant to Christian anarchism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but they are significant ones, and it is important to recognize their presence both among the abolitionists and, at least in Perry's work, in the secondary literature.

Perry's work is also important because it illustrates an anarchist current in American theological discourse that precedes the twentieth century, but Perry urges caution: "I am wary of the notion of an intellectual tradition of American radicalism, and I question the authenticity of intellectual connections between present-day and antebellum radicals. Mythological needs may be served in making such connections, but historical accuracy may well be forfeited" (297). He goes on to suggest that the radical abolitionists were "quite remote" from the New Left, at least as it appeared in 1973 (297). Perry's caution is well-advised, but his conclusion is probably hasty. Was there no intellectual connection whatsoever between abolitionists and civil rights radicals seeking to end segregation? Would civil rights leaders not have found kindred spirits among the radical abolitionists, even if there is no evidence of an "intellectual tradition" as such?

There is also an interesting parallel between the radical abolitionists and the student protest movements that Perry most likely had in mind when he invoked the "New Left." In both cases, what began nonviolently turned increasingly towards violence and considerations of violence as the situation became more urgent. The student movements, particularly the Weather Underground, sought the dismantling of the "military-industrial" complex as exemplified by the Vietnam War. The abolitionists sought the end of human coercion as exemplified by slavery. In

both cases, the movements foundered when the immediate objective was reached by different

means and without effecting the desired end result. The Vietnam War ended without much

change in the overarching systems that made the war possible; it happened without revolution.

Slavery was not abolished through conversion or moral suasion or the coming of the millennium,

but through state violence. Perry is correct inasmuch as these do not constitute an unbroken line

or identifiable intellectual tradition. But we can point to places where others have taken on the

"problems we are still trying to escape."

Nonviolence in America

In *American Nonviolence: The History of an Idea*, Ira Chernus finds a more coherent

thread by expanding the compass of inquiry to nonviolent movements in general, which includes

but is not limited to those with an anarchist bent. He discusses Garrison, describing him as "the

greatest figure in U.S. nonviolence in the nineteenth century" (26). Chernus, like Perry, situates

Garrison's (initially) nonviolent approach to abolition in the context of general reform and

connects both to what he calls a crisis of authority. Economically, he points out, "more and more

people were gaining wealth by their own efforts rather than by inheriting it," a situation that

served to erode some of the influence of more established families, and he points out that such

movements seemed to be stronger and more prevalent in states, particularly Massachusetts, that

felt this crisis of authority the most keenly (27). The connective tissue seems to be the concern

by Christian reformers that this crisis of authority obtained philosophically as well: "Many

feared that democracy would make 'the people' the source of truth. Then truth would constantly

change as 'the people' changed, and there would always be conflicting truths, which would

create social chaos" (28). Their answer this problem, Chernus argues, was the systematic

persuasion of individuals to accept God as the final authority, and to work toward changing

society to reflect that ideal (29).

Chernus helps to clarify how Garrison's eschatology and ethics connected to his

perfectionist theology. For Garrison, Chernus explains, "true Christians will spontaneously

cooperate with one another to create the perfect social order of the millennium. Their society will

therefore be anarchic yet perfectly orderly and peaceful." He continues:

> Was this a realistic vision? Many reformers did not think so. They still accepted the
> doctrine of original sin, which teaches that sin can be controlled but never fully
> eliminated in any person. So they spoke only of making things better by increasing self-
> control, not making things perfect. Garrison rejected this view. He feared that if people

believed sin was inevitable, they would make compromises with sin. He argued that if human beings cannot be perfect, then inevitably they must sin. If sin is inevitable, it is no one's fault and no one is responsible for his or her sins. Then efforts at moral reform, including the abolition of slavery, are not only useless but unjustified. So Garrison demanded an uncompromising, absolute moral virtue. He was convinced that his vision and his demands were realistic. (31)

This ties in, Chernus argues, to Garrison's absolutism as well as his immediatism. Chernus does not see Garrison admitting any barriers to perfection beyond the reluctance of people to embrace it, suggesting that for Garrison "the argument that perfection is impossible all too often becomes an excuse for passive acceptance of the evil status quo" (31). Thus Garrison's perfectionism is not a theological addendum but a significant part of his ethical thinking.

Chernus's discussion of the ethics of nonresistance, and the attendant problems with such an ethics, does not differ significantly from Perry's, with the considerable exception that Chernus does not mention the John Brown incident as a source of division among nonresistants, but instead ascribes the same role to an incident involving publisher Elijah Lovejoy. The incidents themselves are not much alike – Lovejoy was attacked by a mob and died in the resulting gun battle when he returned fire – but Chernus describes the resulting division among nonresistants, with some defending Lovejoy and others criticizing his resort to violence, in similar terms. Garrison, Chernus tells us, not only condemned Lovejoy's use of violence but also argued that Lovejoy might have lived had he not retaliated (36).

Chernus describes Garrison's view of government as somewhat conflicted or ambivalent. On one hand, Garrison was opposed to coercion and refused to declare any allegiance to earthly government. On the other hand, he rejected the charge that he and his ilk were anti-government as such; rather, they sought the perfect government of God. Eventually, Chernus indicates, Garrison articulated a view that Chernus suggests parallels that of the Anabaptists:

[T]hey argued that government is a temporary necessity, to punish evil and thereby keep

order, until all people learn to obey God alone.... Until the perfection of the millennium is attained, government is preferable to anarchy. Garrison hoped that people would increasingly reject the authority of government in order to become perfect. But he advised those who were not yet perfect to obey the government and its laws. (39)

He also adjured his followers to submit to the government so long as it did not violate conscience, and sometimes took "an even more indulgent view of government" as a preparatory structure ordained by God as a means of moral instruction. Ultimately, Chernus concludes, Garrison reluctantly granted provisional status to government as a necessary evil in light of the fact that humanity had not yet been perfected (39). If Chernus's characterization is correct, then Garrison ended up in a remarkably similar place to those who believed in original sin: humanity might be perfectible in Garrison's view, but it was not yet perfect, and therefore coercive structures were unfortunately necessary. The difference Garrison's position made is that it did not allow the individual Christian to vote or hold office, though Chernus notes that Garrison was silent on other issues such as taxes and court testimony (39).

Chernus characterizes Ballou as "the most systematic thinker of the nonviolent Abolitionist movement" (41). Ballou, he tells us, felt that the millennium could be ushered in if enough people were to choose to be governed by God, and that existing forms of government, especially inasmuch as they are predicated on violence, are a barrier to this realization. Thus Ballou, for Chernus as for Perry, is somewhat more of a "come-outer" than Garrison, seeing it hypocritical for nonresistants to participate in a violent system. Hopedale, as an alternative community, was thereby the logical outworking of Ballou's rejection of human government (42). He also differed from Garrison, however, in being much more of a gradualist over against Garrison's immediatism. Reform of the world at large would be a lengthy process, not simply a matter of mass conversion to a nonviolent religious outlook. Hopedale, then, was a place where Ballou's vision could be lived out prior to, and in anticipation of, the coming millennium.

Chernus likens Ballou to Anabaptists:

> So he and his followers withdrew, following the logic of the Anabaptists and the historic peace churches. And, like the Anabaptists, they looked to the past and the future. They aimed to re-create the original model of all Christian nonviolence: the early Christian community of New Testament times. At the same time, they saw their community prefiguring the peaceful society of the millennium. (42)

Here Chernus highlights both the etiological and eschatological. This characterization is not a far cry from Perry's, but Chernus proffers Ballou's gradualism as an explanation for some of the more hierarchical or coercive elements of life at Hopedale: given the difficulty of the path toward perfection, and the unavoidable influence of the outside world, even an ideal community like Hopedale needed provisional elements intended to help guide its members toward the perfected state in which such measures were no longer necessary (42). Chernus also sees the eschatological component as contributing to the eventual turn to violence. On one hand, he argues, by the time war broke out many abolitionists placed their commitment to abolition itself over their commitment to nonviolence and supported the war effort. On the other hand, some saw it as an extension of their apocalyptic worldview and responded to the call of an apocalyptic holy war (43).

Like Perry, Chernus reflects on the apparent failure of the nonresistants, but takes a more hopeful view of what might be learned from them:

> Most important, perhaps, nonresistant Abolitionism served as a sort of laboratory for experimenting with modern nonviolent social change. It was the first movement in U.S. history that combined principled nonviolence with a primary commitment to improving society by resisting a specific injustice. Perhaps inevitably, it was the first movement to encounter all of the basic problems that later nonviolence movements for social change would encounter. The Garrisonians could never achieve consensus on all of these problems. But in their debates they discovered virtually all the possibilities of nonviolent theory and practice that their heirs would explore. If they could not agree on the answers to the questions that arose, at least they showed later generations what the essential questions were. And perhaps their failure to find consensus was more honest to the complexities of non-violence than easy answers reached by compromise. Rather than simplifying the issues, they persisted in what Gandhi would later call experimenting with

truth. In that sense their movement can be counted a success. (44)

Perry was reluctant to find a thread between the abolitionists and the Left of the 60s and 70s, but Chernus sees at least a potential connection to later nonviolent groups, which he claims might stand to learn from the abolitionists. Chernus is correct to find, in the Garrisonian nonresistants, a foreshadowing of a number of issues and problems that face nonviolent movements, including those that are anarchist, or religious, or both. In fact it is precisely this fact that makes an examination of Perry and Chernus's respective works so valuable for the present study. But if Perry's lament is, as we observed earlier, somewhat overstated, it is worth pointing out that to whatever extent we might see a connection to later movements – Chernus certainly does – we will find little in the Christian anarchist and/or pacifist literature that indicates a direct connection. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, writing some five years after *American Nonviolence*, is one of the only contemporary Christian anarchists to make mention of Garrison.

Good News for the Poor

If Chernus finds continuity by focusing on the ethics of nonviolence, Robert Craig's *Religion and Radical Politics* explores other kind of Christian radicalism by focusing primarily on the economic dimension. Craig's presentation has a liberationist cast, celebrating "a long tradition that sees the Christian gospel as, above all else, good news for the poor and oppressed" (3) and characterizing political action as the manifest expression of faith (4). He argues that mainstream discourse on religion and politics tended, as it does now, toward either conventional liberalism or the Religious Right, and that such a discourse leaves out important voices (1). Craig presents Christian radicalism as an alternative to the social gospel, Niebuhrian realism, or traditional Catholic social teaching.

One significant figure in nonviolent radicalism that Craig explores is A.J. Muste. Muste, Craig tells us, was led to pacifism through the work of Quaker scholar Rufus Jones (202). If Reinhold Niebuhr felt that only Christianity offered a realistic (if bleak) picture of human depravity, Muste felt that only belief in God's grace did justice to the possibility of genuine social change (208). One of the tools of such change was nonviolent resistance. Muste's nonviolence, Craig writes, was influenced by the example of Mohandas Gandhi and very much connected to a vision for a new world. Nonviolence was an integral part of that world, and not just a means to get there. He describes Muste's vision for the future as one in which a cooperative economy (versus the competitive economy of capitalism) would emerge from experiments in community as people sought to live out in the present the world they wished for in the future. Craig goes on to suggest that while Muste was somewhat reticent to be specific about what an alternative order might look like, "a decentralized form of democratic socialism seems in keeping with his pacifist convictions," though Craig stops short of suggesting, as Perry does of the nonresistants, that Muste's pacifist social ethic has anarchist implications (212).

Craig links Muste to Dorothy Day because of their shared pacifism, and his treatment of Day focuses on her solidarity with the poor. He describes a process by which she became radicalized by her exposure to working-class issues, entered into a common-law marriage with an anarchist by whom she had a daughter, and cultivated an interest in Catholicism that initially, she thought, meant the end of her involvement in radical movements. It was Peter Maurin, with whom Day co-founded the Catholic Worker, who helped her see the continuity between her love for the Catholic Church and her commitment to the poor and oppressed (218). Craig summarizes, "Day took with absolute seriousness Jesus's declaration that what we do to the least of our brothers and sisters we do unto him. Christ was visibly present to her in the faces of the poor"

(220).

Craig briefly describes Maurin's threefold program of roundtable discussions, houses of hospitality, and farming communes. The roundtable discussions, Craig explains, "were the efforts of a teacher to radicalize people," while houses of hospitality offered the opportunity for the newly radicalized to serve and live in solidarity with the poor. The farming communes, then, were "a means of instilling in people the dignity of work and the understanding that they were co-creators with God in the creative process. They were also an immediate answer to unemployment and the crisis of a failing industrial order, and that would allow people to rediscover the values of cooperation and community" (219). But it was voluntary poverty, Craig believes, that was the principal means by which Day and Maurin sought solidarity with the poor. Additionally, they discouraged people from taking jobs in advertising, insurance, and banking, which they saw as hopelessly complicit in the capitalist system; they encouraged jobs that had directly to with basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, or health and education (221). Day was known to refuse money she thought might be tainted by profit (222).

Craig also seeks to articulate Day's anarchism, writing that it was "shaped by a number of factors that included her reading of Kropotkin, her experience with the Industrial Workers of the World, her encounter with Peter Maurin, and her own wrestling with the contemporary relevance of the Catholic tradition." He continues:

> For her a Christian expression of anarchism stressed the importance of mutual aid, a decentralized economy, and the assumption by ordinary people of personal responsibility for each other. One of the distinct features of Catholic Worker anarchism was its radical egalitarianism, an ontological belief in the absolute worth and dignity of all people, especially those whom society disregarded, neglected, and marginalized. (223)

This led Day not only into localized politics in the sense of meeting the concrete needs of people in their day-to-day struggle but also to an emphasis on community. This is an emphasis, Craig

claims, which Day shared with Martin Buber. Both saw community as the crucial connective

tissue between religion and socialism (225).

Chernus also addresses Day and Muste, and his treatment of them closely parallels that of

Craig:

> Dorothy Day's nonviolence, like her concern for the poor, did not stem principally from theological belief. Indeed, it might be more accurate to say that her nonviolence stemmed principally from her concern for the poor. Her first encounter with war, during World War I, convinced her that war, violence, and the sufferings of the poor were all symptoms of the same disease: state-sponsored capitalism. (155)

Day, Chernus suggests, saw the social conflicts of her time through the lens of class conflict and

a critique of capitalism much like that of Marxism, but she rejected communisms because it was

putatively atheistic and called for a vanguard to lead a top-down revolution as opposed to the

grassroots organizing favored by Day and Maurin (151). Day's ecclesiology, according to

Chernus, focused on creating alternatives "within the shell of the old,"[24] but it also incorporated

the Catholic doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, meaning that she saw everyone bound

together in a deeply ontological sense that contributed to her pacifist ethics. If everyone is

connected as one body, then violence against one is violence against all, and the responsibility

for violence is shared as well (155).

Chernus describes Muste as "inspirational but not profoundly intellectual" (128) but

credits him as an important figure in the history of nonviolence whose commitment to the ethics

of nonviolence was deeply connected to the Christian faith he returned to after embracing

Marxism for a time (127). Chernus suggests that Muste understood the consequences of

embracing nonviolence – that it might lead to suffering – but felt that suffering was itself

redemptive (132). Muste was critical of capitalism, Chernus adds, but also critical of Marxism

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[24] This is from a Wobbly slogan that seems to have had considerable traction in Catholic Worker circles and is comes up frequently in literature on Day and the Catholic Worker movement.

"for postponing a new economic order until after the revolution was won by 'any means necessary.' Like so many other nonviolence thinkers, Muste argued that good ends cannot be achieved by bad means" (133). Muste, unlike Perry's nonresistants, would not sacrifice his ideals for the sake of efficacy.

Chernus takes the opportunity in his chapter on Muste to reflect on the ethical problems presented by a commitment to nonviolence, especially in light of the desire for results and the perceived need to keep evil in check:

> Critics of nonviolence invariably point to World War II, arguing that nonviolence would not have "worked" against the Nazis. And they often jump from that claim to the much more sweeping claim that the whole notion of principled nonviolence is mistaken or impossible. This jump is a dubious leap in logic. Even if it could be proven in a specific case that nonviolence would not "work," that would not invalidate the whole approach. It would be just as logical to say that if one house burns down, even though the fire department tried to save it, we should abolish the fire department. (137)

Chernus's own logic here is strained; critics of nonviolence suggest an alternative – the use of force – for which there is no analog in Chernus's fire department example. Moreover, the fire department is not a commitment to one particular *means* of fighting fires in the same way that a commitment to nonviolence delimits the ethical options available the tyranny of someone like Hitler. Chernus also seems to be obfuscating his own definition of principled nonviolence: in his introduction he describes his subjects as "people who might have had the reason, the means, the courage, and the physical and emotional strength to do violence. Yet they freely decided not to do violence under any circumstances" (ix). If Chernus is advocating this kind of nonviolence, and he accepts his hypothetical critics' definition of effectiveness, then he has painted himself into a corner. If nonviolence is the all-or-nothing proposition Chernus describes, then a single instance in which nonviolence is ineffective *would* invalidate the position so long as Chernus and the putative critics of nonviolence agree on the terms of efficacy. Chernus creates a straw man in

the form of his hypothetical critics only to get knocked down by his own creation.

The reason this is important is not to criticize Chernus's articulation of nonviolence or his defense of it against imaginary critics, but to recognize the challenges that face a comprehensive ethics of nonviolence. It is not difficult to imagine circumstances in which nonviolence seems woefully inadequate to the task. Garrison, as seen above, initially rejected efficacy as a measure of the value of nonresistance but ultimately gave in to the temptation of sanctioning violence as a means of ending slavery.

Christoyannopoulos explains this challenge (272):

> To put things crudely, if you believe that God is waiting for human beings to manage a transition to his kingdom, then coercion quickly becomes appropriate. This is not so, however, if you believe that Jesus's teaching implies a letting go of any delusion about the efficacy of political management; that God wants us to witness to Jesus's teaching of patient and sacrificial love and forgiveness in our own lives and communities; that the kingdom of God can only be hastened by the *willing* conversion of fellow human beings in response to such witness; and that God calls us to keep faith in his oversight of the mysterious advent of his kingdom. The latter is obviously ...the "purest" (or strictest) Christian anarchist position (273, emphasis original).

Committed pacifism, Christoyannopoulos argues, can break the cycle of violence, and to resort to violence is tantamount to a lack of faith (236). This speaks, however obliquely, to the issues that Perry raises concerning the nonresistants' turn to violence as the abolitionist struggle wore on. Christoyannopoulos's emphasis on "willing conversion" is reminiscent of nonresistants' emphasis on "moral suasion," and we noted earlier Christoyannopoulos's criticism of Garrison for having succumbed to the temptation of violent resistance. Rather than contradict Perry's identification of Garrison as a Christian anarchist, then, Christoyannopoulos's reflections reinforce it inasmuch as he seems to regard Garrison as kindred spirit who nevertheless falls prey to a danger intrinsic to the radicalism they share. This is one of the most pressing ethical issues faced by Christian pacifists and anarchists, and we will want to be aware of the ways in which

they handle that question and the theological resources they bring to bear on it.

Life in Babylon

Tripp York offers both a brief history of Christian anarchism in the twentieth century and a contribution to Christian anarchist thought. York's *Living on Hope While Living in Babylon: The Christian Anarchists of the Twentieth Century* was not available when Christoyannopoulos was writing his dissertation, though York is briefly mentioned in a note in the published version. York's work examines Dorothy Day, as well as Clarence Jordan and the Berrigan Brothers, identifying them all as anarchists and offering a synthesis of anarchist thought using their biographies as material. York takes Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego – the young Hebrews who refuse to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's idol in the book of Daniel – as paradigmatic anarchists and explores "whether the witness of law- (and church-) breakers such as Dorothy Day, Clarence Jordan, and the Berrigan Brothers maintain a line of continuity with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego" (xiii). Ultimately, of course, his answer is yes. He also takes his subjects to be paradigmatic anarchists (the subtitle of his book is "the Christian anarchists of the twentieth century"), though it is interesting to note that Jordan and the Berrigans get scant mention from Christoyannopoulos.

York spends the first part of the book outlining his version of Christian anarchist theology. He argues that Christians in America typically have a "conflated sense of dual citizenship" (xiii) and that he wants to "challenge such assumptions about citizenship, not because I am anti-empire, but because I am pro-church" (xiii). He makes a distinction between anarchy or anarchism and what he calls an "anarchistic posture" (xiii), which presumably casts a wider net. He also makes a distinction between anarchist politics and what he calls apocalyptic

politics in which, as for Christoyannopoulos, Christians are called to bear witness to a kingdom that will not come about by human efforts (xiv).

York makes much of the tension between church and state, regarding democracy as a false salvation story. In his words, democracy is "an attempt to replace the narrative of the church with the narrative of the state" (2). He does not encourage retreat from public life; his concern is not *that* Christians engage the world – he believes they should – but *how* they engage the world (3). He contrasts "earthly cities" with "the heavenly city" and concedes that earthly cities can "perform approximate services in relation to the good," which he follows by saying that "exile is the means by which God's people engage the world" (4). What he seems to mean by this is that Christians should not engage the world by grasping for power or control, but by simultaneously seeking to contribute to the culture at large while not wholly identifying with that culture. "Jesus solidifies the notion that the powerless and the Diaspora are normative for the elect" (34), he writes, making a distinction between *seeking* the peace of the city and attempting to secure it (34).

York further distances his conceptions from "classic" anarchism by linking it to Western liberalism and then by identifying liberalism (in the broad sense) as one of the "principalities and powers" that Christians are called to resist (12). He writes, "The Christian anarchist is neither determined nor created by the forces of liberalism, but via the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Given this reality, Christians are liberated from any and all political theories, including anarchism, which are contingent upon fallen institutional forces for their intelligibility" (13). Conventional anarchism is, for York, too bound up in modern political theory. There are multiple claims upon our identity, York writes, and these competing claims can make it difficult for the Christian to remain faithful. It is the church as a political community that makes this faithfulness

possible and participation in such a community is a logical extension of the Christian's

commitment: "if we are to do as Christ commands, to take up his cross and follow him, then we

must not avoid the performance of the politics known as the church" (21). In York's

ecclesiology, then, the church is an arena in which the politics of Jesus is played out by his

followers. His examples, then, are ostensibly those who have performed this politics.

York organizes the rest of his book, and chooses his subjects, according to Martin Luther

King, Jr.'s "triple axis of evil": materialism, racism, and militarism (xiv). Day is his foil to

materialism, Jordan allows him to address race, and the Berrigans are representative of anti-

militarism. Materialism, for York, has to do primarily with capitalism; he identifies anti-

capitalism as a common characteristic of most forms of anarchism, and argues that the Catholic

Worker movement constitutes a good example of an alternative economy (39). He points out that

Maurin drew upon medieval Irish monasticism as inspiration for his threefold program (43) and

that the houses of hospitality drew upon canon law that required churches to offer hospitality

(46). York reflects:

> Their threefold plan, underwritten by the liturgy of the church, is an act of discipleship in
> which the everyday attempt at survival becomes a conscientious decision as to whether or
> not to follow Jesus. Participation in such a life as this, with its concomitant emphasis on
> worship and the practice of nonviolence, offers the world a different way of dealing with
> enemies, with strangers, with the other. To be exact, the Catholic Worker Movement
> actually calls into question the very category of the "other" inasmuch as they have
> insisted on practicing solidarity with the other, on being *with* them to such a degree that
> they are truly *one*.[25] (47)

York goes on to suggest that this might be "the most scandalous aspect" of Day's legacy,

especially to the extent that it suggests voluntary poverty as normative for Christian discipleship

(48).

York makes explicit connections both to classical anarchism as well as to some

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[25]Emphasis original.

unexpected precursors in the Christian tradition itself. He invokes Proudhon, Bakunin, and

Kropotkin in a passage we will examine later, and he references Proudhon again when he

discusses Maurin and Day's approach to private property (48). He then expands upon Proudhon,

invoking Chrysostom, who, York argues, did not consider private property to be appropriate to

Christian ethics, going so far as to suggest that Chrysostom regarded any accumulation or

consumption beyond basic human needs to be a form of theft (49). Even Aquinas gets into the

act, as York points out a passage in the *Summa* wherein Aquinas offers justification for the needy

to take what they might need from those who have excess (50).

Maurin actually sought, York argues, to "retrieve the Thomistic doctrine of the common

good" (54). Invoking the idea of friendship with God as the proper human *telos*, York describes

the common good in terms of this friendship, which necessitates friendship with one another, and

cites 1 John 4:20 ("Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for

those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have

not seen") as scriptural support. Capitalism, he argues, threatens and even breaks that connection

between creatures through the process of commoditization and the cultivation of competition. It

is doubtful that Maurin expressed himself in quite such terms; this is one of many places where

York (who makes no pretense of doing otherwise) uses his subjects as a starting point for waxing

theological. In a way that differs markedly from Perry and even surpasses Craig, York sees his

subjects as fellow travelers from whom he extracts lessons pertinent to his own theological

agenda.

Clarence Jordan, founder of Koinonia Farm and author of *The Cottonpatch Gospel*, is

York's answer to the problem of racism. As York tells the story, Jordan's conversion to

nonviolence plays a central role, as well as a call for "radical forgiveness" (72). Jordan saw the

white church as complicit in maintaining the structures of racism and saw as well that if racism were to be adequately addressed it would require not only an alternative to the state, but an alternative vision for the church. In a social experiment reminiscent of Hopedale but also evocative of the Catholic Worker cooperative farms, Jordan and his wife joined with another couple in the foundation of an interracial farming commune they called Koinonia Farm. York tells us that they based their common life on Acts 2:44–47,[26] and he identifies four precepts that guided their vision: mutual respect, nonviolence, communal sharing, and careful stewardship of the land. The goal, York argues, was not just to "be faithful to the witness of the New Testament, but to expose how accommodating the American Christian had become towards the world" (75). Unlike Hopedale, however, Koinonia Farm rejected private property, which raised the ire of those who were suspicious of communism, and Koinonia accepted black members on completely equal terms, which elicited vandalism and violence from surrounding white landowners (76). Eventually, York writes, the experiment faced economic pressure, which it endured for a time, only to be reduced to four adult members by 1963. It is now most famous for being the birthplace of Habitat for Humanity (77). Though York's treatment of Jordan focuses on race, the economic dimension is significant, as well as the ecclesiological dimension of participating in an alternative community.

York tells us that Jordan was uninterested in protest except in the sense that the creation of an alternative was a protest of sorts. Daniel and Philip Berrigan – York's representatives for an anarchist response to militarism – took a very different approach, serving quite a bit of prison

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[26] "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

time for their part in the Plowshares Movement. Most famously, they hammered on the nosecones of unarmed nuclear missiles and then poured blood (their own) on the weapons in protest of the Vietnam War (83). York makes a theological connection between the blood of sacrifice and the activists' decision to use blood in various protests: "Blood represents life. The spilling of it in the Bible, even from nonhuman animals, is a serious event. That Jesus's blood was spilled so that blood sacrifice was no longer necessary is an important part of Christian theology," and suggests that the activists in question – in this case, the "Baltimore Four," who poured their blood on Selective Service records – would have been cognizant of this theological meaning, although he does not offer evidence for this.

There is little discussion of the specifics of the Berrigans' theology in *Living on Hope*. York does quite a bit of theologizing himself, but he primarily uses his sources as biographical object lessons as to what Christian anarchism looks like on the ground. In fact, York not only spends the first two chapters introducing his theology, but the chapters on each of his three subjects seem dedicated more to developing that theology than analyzing the figures involved. Day, Jordan, and the Berrigans – whom he treats more hagiographically than critically – simply become exemplars of a York's version of Christian anarchism, which stays close to the understanding of Christian anarchism Christoyannopoulos develops in his synthesis.

Nevertheless, Andy Alexis-Baker is critical of York's book in a review on the Jesus Radicals website, and his criticisms of York are instructive in understanding some of the differences among Christian anarchists. Alexis-Baker takes issue with York in that his examples are not necessarily anarchists (1).[27] Later he criticizes York for leaving out significant anarchist figures:

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[27] Citation numbers are paragraph numbers.

> Anyone who is remotely familiar with Christianity and anarchism before reading the book will be surprised that Jacques Ellul, Leo Tolstoy and others are not included. York's explanation for this – so that he would not err in his claims about non-Americans – is unsatisfactory. Like the other stories he told, their stories are widely available" (9).

He also criticizes York for what he calls a "disquieting triumphalism" in the way York deals with secular anarchists: "he cites classical secular anarchists like Bakunin, Proudhon, and Kropotkin …merely as a prop for 'Christian anarchism'" (6). He goes on to argue that the "Christian anarchist" moniker is problematic insofar it is implies that Christianity is the true anarchism (6). Alexis-Baker also criticizes York for limiting his engagement with anarchist theory to a handful of nineteenth century anarchists, accusing him of being unaware of more recent developments in anarchist theory:

> For example, York argues that seeking the welfare of the city (Jer. 29:7) "is a staple requirement of Christian discipleship" based on a classical anarchist framework that values the Industrial Revolution and primarily vilifies the capitalist state. However, anarcho-primitivism provides a window into another Biblical tradition that critiques and subverts the city: fratricidal Cain built the first city and from there proceeds war, patriarchy, and division of labor that have haunted every civilization (civilization is a network of life built around cities). Babel, Sodom, Gomorrah, Babylon, and Jerusalem multiply the violence and injustice. Jesus almost completely avoids the city, and when he enters Jerusalem and confronts the powers of evil, the city kills him. Anarcho-primitivists such as John Zerzan draw from modern anthropology which strikingly supports the Genesis myth on the origins of war, patriarchy, and the division of labor that York examines. In light of this reading, the church-as-polis cliché inscribes Western violent civilization into ecclesiology; fresh ecclesiological insights should be sought. (7)

Though Alexis-Baker is specifically addressing ecclesiological concerns, his comments betray a strong anarcho-primitivist tendency that speaks to the etiological element of Christian anarchism.

One intriguing aspect of York's work is his eschatology. He suggests that the freedom to be found in Christ cannot be adequately articulated in an anarchist politics alone, but require an "apocalyptic politics" (16). This, for York, entails a dualist division between church and world, to the point that York claims that world is not intelligible without the church identifying it *as* the world: "the category of the world does not even function without the church's narration of such a

category" (17).[28] We might say that in York's "apocalyptic politics" the world really only exists

as the ground against which the figure of the church stands out. This is a totalizing vision that

would not seem to make sense apart from York's faith commitments – in other words, there is no

attempt here to articulate a politics accessible to others in a public arena, and one suspects that

doing so would be antithetical to York.

At first blush this seems unrelated to eschatology *per se*, at least in terms of

prognostications about the end of the world or the proper *telos* of humanity, but York connects

the dots by invoking the apocalyptic proclamation of Christ's victory: "Through the death of

Jesus and his subsequent resurrection the powers that are fallen in this world, and which continue

to rebel and wage war against him are already defeated…As witnesses to this slaughtered yet

victorious Lamb, Christians reflect the defeat of the powers of this earth by being true to that

which we know to be true: Christ's victory" (23). He extends this idea further by arguing that

(following William Stringfellow) the United States is, like every other state, a reiteration of the

Babylon condemned in Revelation (24). York's is not a wholly realized eschatology, but his

invocation of apocalypticism, in which he emphasizes the element of revelation or disclosure,

suggests not only that Christians are to live out an ideal that will be fully realized later, but that

they also embody a counterintuitive reality that has already been revealed:

> The apocalypse of Jesus Christ changes everything. It shows us what to see, what we
> have not seen, and what we should see. More importantly, it redefines words with fetish-
> like appeal such as "realism" and "responsibility." We are now responsible to this
> apocalyptic order, and we are being realistic when we live into *it*. This apocalyptic politic
> is not an alternative politic, it is the genuine politic by which other politics are measured.
> It is the politic of the in-breaking kingdom of God. The employment of apocalyptic
> language reminds us of both the political nature of salvation and its grounding in
> eschatology. We are a people of the kingdom that is already here, is on the way, and has

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[28] York offers this as a summary of a comment by John Howard Yoder that "the church precedes
the world epistemologically" (Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 11), and adds that his summary
reflects Stanley Hauerwas' reading of Yoder (17, n. 3). Hauerwas was York's thesis advisor.

yet to fully come. As political ambassadors of the city of God we are eschatological witnesses to the way the world was created, was meant to be, and one day will be again. (27)

This is not language that is easily translatable into the discourse of Western liberal politics, which is part of the reason York outlines his suspicions of that discourse earlier in the book (11). But it does seek to answer Niebuhr's "Christian realism" and other perspectives that see violence as both necessary and inevitable. York's description of apocalypticism suggests not just a sense of human teleology with a different ending but a radically different political ontology to begin with, and one that can only speak to liberal democracy from the outside – prophetically, as both York and Christoyannopoulos would have it.

York also seeks to distance this perspective from the claim or charge that it is apolitical or anti-political. He dislikes these terms because they presuppose that politics is violent and therefore nonviolence fails to engage the political, and he does not want to surrender this semantic ground so easily (28). To conflate politics with the earthly state and thus violence is to suggest that either violence is an ontological *a priori* or that the secular realm has priority. York is wary of either conclusion. "Why should our politics be defined by that which Christians are against, or rather, that which is against Christianity?" He writes, "Faithful political behavior is not anti-political, for that privileges the orders of the world, but is the only *genuine* politic of which participation in is, for the Christian, mandatory" (29). York then goes on to argue that this politics is therefore non-revolutionary, precisely because it refuses to recognize revolution as legitimate (30). Here, York draws upon the work of Vernard Eller, particularly his 1985 *Christian Anarchy: Jesus's Primacy Over the Powers*.

An-Arky

Vernard Eller, a United Brethren minister and theologian, popularized and expanded the

thought of Jacques Ellul on the relationship between anarchism and Christianity. His works are

popular in house-church circles (the website *House Church Central* hosts a collection of Eller's

works in digital form). Early in his text Eller offers a clear indication of his eschatology:

> Consider that the "coming of Jesus" (even now underway) involves the greatest political change the world will ever see, namely the disappearance of worldly politics with all its moral pretensions and adversarial contest. And if this is what the coming of Jesus *portends*, then the first place this disappearance should be observable is among the members of Christ's body. Thus, God's indication is that the church should be moving *away* from hard-ball politics rather than (as we are doing) *baptizing* such politics – and this in complete disregard of what the hymnist knew almost a century ago: 'For not with swords' loud clashing, / Nor roll of stirring drums, / But deeds of love and mercy, / The heavenly kingdom comes.'" (xiv)

Here we can see similarities to Christoyannopoulos, but Christoyannopoulos notes "serious

disagreement" between Eller and other Christian anarchists on Romans 13 (11).

Christoyannopoulos clarifies:

> [Eller's] contribution to Christian anarchism, however, is somewhat contentious. Because of the submissive response which he advocates to the state, those Christian anarchists who are inclined to more confrontational anarchism have been very critical of Eller's views. Yet Eller's input is valuable precisely for his exegesis of Romans 13 and the "render unto Caesar" passage, on which his advocacy of such submission (which he sees as subversive in a peculiar way…) is based…What should be noted here is only that Eller certainly considers himself a Christian anarchist, and that his book has evidently been noticed by other Christian anarchists. His contribution is therefore very relevant…and he cannot be excluded from the Christian anarchist school of thought even if some in that school find his presence disconcerting. (22)

Eller seems to have been close to Ellul, to whom he dedicated *Christian Anarchy* and on whose

work draws on considerably. In fact, Eller uses Ellul precisely for his treatment of Romans 13, in

which the passage in question is read not as simple obedience to the state but as an injunction

against armed resistance (11).

Eller describes his project as an effort to discern "the position of Scripture (particularly

Jesus and Paul)" (xi). His style is somewhat idiosyncratic, riddled with colloquialisms and folksy

aphorisms, an effect that is augmented by his rendering of the root "-arch" (archon) as the English "arky." "Arky" refers to any and all forms of coercion, oppression, or rule, and not just the state (2). The root also means "source," or "beginning," and as such Jesus is "THE ARKY" (1). Other "arkys" are then rival claimants to which the Christian cannot give allegiance.

Eller offers his own history of Christian anarchism, beginning with the Radical Reformation,[29] but he also claims Kierkegaard as anarchist (5) as well as Barth and Bonhoeffer (6). This might provide a hint as to why Eller's work is contentious among Christian anarchists, as Christoyannopoulos suggests. Nevertheless, Eller offers the same kind of contrast between his version of anarchism and revolution as York and Christoyannopoulos both--a contrast Eller attributes to Ellul (8). Eller also follows Ellul in reading the Israelite monarchy as a dead-end or cul-de-sac in salvation history, pointing out that in the narrative, God takes the Israelites' request for a king as rejection of divine leadership (9). This is important for Eller's etiology, and of course he claims Jesus as a proto-anarchist, or, as he puts it (recognizing the oxymoron) "Arch-Anarchist" (9). For Eller, Jesus rejected any status as a political messiah – that is, one who would lead in a revolution – and his speech before Pilate, in which he tells the magistrate that his kingdom is "not of this world" and therefore would not respond violently, undermined the ultimacy of Roman rule. "Jesus," Eller writes, "will grant not one bit of weight to Pilate and his Empire (10).

Two observations are important here: One, Eller is almost completely prescriptive rather than descriptive. He is not describing the position of Christian anarchists more generally, but extrapolating, mostly from Ellul, a theology that he is offering *as* "Christian Anarchy." Two, we

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[29] He also suggests that his own Church of the Brethren was "a truly biblical anarchism" until the mid-20th century (20).

can see why, in comparison to Christoyannopoulos and York, Eller's position might be unsettling to Christian anarchists who came after him. His prescription is unclear as to what, in terms of praxis, the Christian is supposed to *do* vis-à-vis the existing structures, and he seems to be calling for a kind of studied ambivalence toward the state rather than the animosity toward it that is normally associated with anarchism.

What Eller clearly shares with Christoyannopoulos is a rejection of the revolutionary impulse, and to that extent we might say that Eller's articulation seems different in degree but not in kind. Christoyannopoulos is willing to use the language of revolution but defines it in ways that proscribe the use of violence or coercion. York is less comfortable with revolutionary language but argues for strong critique of the state as part of a broader critique of liberalism itself, whereas Eller is even more careful to avoid the sense that he is privileging one political philosophy over another. Nevertheless, neither York nor Christoyannopoulos are arguing for anarchism as a means of organizing secular society. What Eller does not do – and this may be the real point of contention – is identify anarchism as a means of organizing the church community itself. Eller's focus is on the Christian's relationship to secular politics and the ways in which the Christian might respond to or participate in that politics. What Eller seems to be calling for, rather than the church as an expression, implicitly or explicitly, of anarchist principles, is a thoroughgoing non-partisanship or not taking sides. Eller is critical of "completely partisan power plays as tax-withholding, the sanctuary movement's organized and advertised defiance of the government, civil disobedience, vengeful denunciation, anything – just so long as it stops short of physical violence and so can still be justified as 'nonviolence'" (22). He is very critical of the Social Gospel movement and finds it complicit in the political compromise he is denouncing (22).

Eller's foil to Christian anarchism is not the world, as it is for York, but "Arky Faith," which he defines as a mentality in which Christians believe they can accomplish God's purposes by worldly means, and one that he finds on both the Christian Right and the Christian Left. "Arky faith" can hold an orthodox or liberal view of God, and it can be based in Christian religion, a universal ideal, or in "purely secular, humanistic terms, with no transcendental reference at all" (25). Eller suggests that it makes political projects not so much into idols but false messiahs, compromising the Christian's commitment to Christ as lord and savior (26).

One attraction of this kind of faith, Eller offers, is that it "greatly simplifies moral decision making." Though Eller does not use this term, his description suggests a kind of dualism; the world is separated into good and evil. He explains, "So 'pacifism' (of whatever character) is good and anything that is not pacifism is 'evil warmongering.' A capitalist U.S. government is bad; a socialist Sandinista government is good. 'Masculinity' is bad; 'feminism' is good. The Moral Majority is bad; the National Council of Churches is good. Multinational corporations are bad; cottage industries are good" (27). Here it becomes clear that Eller's target is the Christian Left. Eller describes the "trigger effect" (which he also calls "the David and Goliath effect") in terms that sound remarkably similar to postanarchist theorist Todd May's distinction between strategic versus tactical resistance[30]: "Still completely confident about the justice of our own cause, we dream about the possibility that, judiciously applied to the right spot, the power of even a small pebble from our weak sling with bring down the Goliath of evil" (27). The problem for Eller is not that it will not work – it may or may not – but that it might trigger something unexpected and uncontrollable whether it works or not (28). Again, despite differences in emphasis and articulation, Eller is making common cause with

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[30] See May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*.

Christoyannopoulos and York in repudiating the revolutionary impulse.

Eller also challenges Marxism on the basis that it is just another "arky faith" and that the process of eliminating class distinctions by focusing on class is a self-defeating cause (61).[31] He challenges other liberation movements as having the same pattern, using feminism as his primary example but clarifying that others face similar difficulties (62). Eller then turns to a quasi-Marxist reading of the Bible as the history of class struggle, but does so in order to show what he believes to be the futility of the Marxist program. None of the paradigmatic class struggles Eller finds in the Bible and related literature – the Exodus, the conquests, the Assyrian capture of the northern kingdom and the Babylonian exile in the southern, the Maccabean revolt, the Zealots – succeed in establishing classlessness. "Jesus' success came through anything but the political method of Marxist theory," he writes, "His was the theological way of Christian Anarchy" (66).

Eller claims Barth as a Christian anarchist, especially for the latter's repudiation of the Left, and he uses Barth's distinction between "doing" and "not-doing" as a premise of Christian anarchy (117). He uses the example of tax withholding:

> [I]f you are paying those taxes as a "doing," as a positive legitimation of the state and its evil activity, you are wrong. If the other way around, you are withholding those taxes as a "doing," as an act of protest and rebellion against evil state, you are wrong again. "But what other option is there?" Perhaps the difficulty is that we have been stating the case wrongly. If Jesus is correct that Caesar's image on the coin is proof enough that it "belongs" to him, then, rather than saying we do pay him taxes, wouldn't it be more correct to say that we do not try to stop him from collecting what belongs to him (a true case of "not-doing")? As Barth has it, "It is important for you to know what ye are doing [or, in this case, 'not doing']." (127)[32]

This is not a distinction that is intelligible in historical or material terms. Eller is effectively

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[31] This is as nuanced as Eller's assessment of Marxism gets—which he freely admits: "['Marxism'] is shorthand for 'any philosophy that that defines social progress in terms of a class struggle toward classlessness'' (61).

[32] The editorial comment is Eller's.

saying that the only difference between paying one's taxes in a way that legitimizes the state and one that is anarchical is a matter of intention, and the only reprehensible action is the "revolutionary" act of tax withholding (tax withholding as a "not-doing" is apparently not an option). On the other hand, Eller argues that had Jesus and Paul simply been interested in legitimizing existing authority, paying taxes would not have even been an issue. It only comes up precisely because their refusal to legitimize the ruling authorities raises the question – and their answer, which comes as a bit of a surprise – serves to undermine the revolutionary impulse from the other side (167).

Similarly, Eller uses Barth's reaction to Nazism as an example of Christian anarchy. Barth joined the Social Democratic party because he saw them as the opposition party to German nationalism. This was not, for Eller, a capitulation to politics as usual but a matter of pure practicality, as a letter from Barth to Tillich indicates (137). Later, Barth declined to lead his classes in the Nazi salute (preferring to keep his custom of beginning class with a prayer and a hymn), but agreed to take the loyalty oath so long as he could qualify it: he would only be loyal inasmuch as it did not conflict with his responsibilities as an evangelical Christian. Again, Eller claims that this is not "arky faith" but a robustly anarchical "not-doing":

> With neither the salute nor the loyalty oath can Barth be said to have practiced "civil disobedience"…. He did not stage his disobedience as a calculated political power-play. He made no effort to organize his own ideological bloc to contest that of the evil regime. He did not play up to the media as a form of public demonstration, protest, or witness. He exhibited no rage toward nor condemnation of his adversary. He refused to treat the State as "enemy." He was intent only to give God what belongs to God. And in doing that, he was careful to tread the fine, anarchical line between legitimizing the establishment on the one hand and legitimizing revolution against it on the other. (139)

As with tax withholding, the specific act – saluting or not saluting, saying the oath or not saying the oath – cannot be parsed outside of intentionality. Not saluting was acceptable because Barth "exhibited no rage toward nor condemnation of" the powers that be. Saying the oath was

permissible because he qualified it. In these cases, it is not what Barth *did* that seems important to Eller, but what Eller thinks Barth *meant* by what he did and the sense of expediency that characterized it. Eller sees Barth's willingness to overtly fight against Hitler – which is to say, Barth's support of Czech resistance – to be a betrayal of his anarchist values. He draws upon Ellul for an explanation. Ellul, he writes, saw that there were indeed times when violence was politically necessary. Eller criticizes pacifists who assume there is always a nonviolent solution, suggesting that they are "utopians, showing no sense of political realism at all" (141). This does not, however, justify violence for the Christian, whose sense of necessity is not bound up in human limitations. Violence is never justified for the Christian, but something like just war theory can be used to evaluate the relative justification of war for those bound up in human limitations. In other words, no war is theologically justifiable, but this does not mean that the Christian gives up any and all discernment as to the relative necessity of a given armed conflict (142). Barth's failure was not in encouraging Czech resistance to the Nazi forces, but in finding it necessary to craft a theological justification for it (143). Barth could have supported the resistance anarchically had he couched it as politically expedient and not sought to make it into an ideology. World War II, Eller argues, "is to be understood as a tragic necessity brought about by the constrictedness of the political horizon of human arky. Although it may have been fully justified politically, there shouldn't have been even the thought of trying to justify it theologically" (144).

Another place where Eller seems to differ considerably from other articulations of Christian anarchism is that he argues the incommensurability of theology and politics:

> At any given moment, a person must be clear and make it clear whether he means to be faithfully proclaiming the gospel of what difference God makes in the world or whether he means to be proposing what are the purely human possibilities of a situation. If it be assumed that these two come to the same thing, then the person is not speaking of God –

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who must make a difference, else there is no reason to bring him into the picture at all. (170)

This distinction does not make lucid sense in light of Eller's claim that his vision is *not* apolitical unless we recognize a kind of "two kingdoms" approach: ethical choices which are unavoidable in the world of secular politics – the use of force or coercion for defense, or to maintain peace – are unavailable for Christians. Moreover, the transcendental confidence that God will ultimately vindicate the faithful, whether in this life or the next, is unavailable to secular politics. He seems to agree with the Bismarkian maxim that politics is the "art of the possible" but insists that God is a game-changer whose influence should be recognized in theological discussions. Eller insists that God must make a difference, but he is silent as to what that difference is or how such a difference might be realized in flesh-and-blood communities. What it seems to mean is that the proper milieu for the Christian is theological: though the Christian might venture into politics within the boundaries of the possible, his or her true horizon of possibility is one in which God makes all the difference. He does not seem to reject the idea of Christians voting or holding office – as long as they do not do so as Christians. They are elected to office "as politicians completely committed to finding the best actions possible within the limits of human possibility and to justifying those actions upon the same premise" (179). This, we remember, is where Eller finds fault with Barth. It also renders Eller a pragmatist; the Christian ideal is God, but God is unavailable for (and, according to Eller, uninterested in) human politics. Eller's Christian anarchists cannot sign on to an ideology or idealistic vision as this would constitute an "arky faith," but neither can they bring their own ideals to bear on the political struggle.

Eller makes this clearer in his rejection of pacifism – but the pacifism he rejects is one that insists that peaceful solutions can always be found within the scope of human possibility. Eller offers "anarchical nonresistance" as a possible alternative, but with no mention of Garrison

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or Ballou (173). "Jesus," he tells us, "does not turn out to be too good an example of how pacifism is supposed to work" (175). Later he adds that being a Christian should neither encourage nor hamper one's involvement in politics – that it should not make a difference one way or the other. (187). In fact, on this point Eller sounds almost like Rawls or Rorty: "Religiously derived moral ideals are welcomed and needed in the political marketplace – although not in the form of religious claims." Here Eller, much unlike York and Christoyannopoulos, is simply recapitulating Western liberalism. Whereas York presupposed the separation of church and state on the basis that they represented competing politics, Eller's transcendental approach allows him to place God so far beyond the vagaries of human politics that human agents are no better off than if God were not present at all: "So, on a moral scale from zero to one hundred, the righteousness of God would lie at one hundred (the top), and all the human righteousness of our political morality would scatter themselves at the bottom – from zero, say, up to three" (191). In fact, he adds, the Bible is "unclear about what responsibilities we might have as citizens of a democracy" (196), and even states baldly that without God, the human political struggle is all we have (237). John Howard Yoder addresses this kind of thinking in *The Politics of Jesus*:

> The impact of this radical discontinuity between God and men, between the world of God and human values, is to relativize all human values. The will of God cannot be identified with any one ethical answer, or any given human value, since these are all finite. But the practical import of that relativizing, for the substance of ethics, is that these values have become autonomous. (18)

This is also precisely the same dynamic that Marcel Gauchet locates historically in *The Disenchantment of the World* as the reason Christian theology led to secularism; the idea of the utter transcendence of God did, according to Gauchet, make human values autonomous.

To clarify his position, Eller pits an extended treatment of Romans 13 against a

legitimizing reading: Paul is not arguing legitimacy but offering, in the midst of a passage

encouraging love for all, an example of those whom it might be hard for Christians to love – an

oppressive government (197). Paul has no reason, based on the history of Israel and his personal

dealings with Rome, to legitimate Rome or exempt Rome from the "principalities and powers"

of this "dark age." To "be subject to" does not, for Eller, imply legitimacy. The idea that

government is instituted by God should be read in light of Samuel's warnings against kingship.

Government is something God allows, and to that extent ordains, but this does not imply divine

sanction for any particular government nor for the concept of human government itself:

"Although Scripture never ever gives an inch on government's essential illegitimacy before God,

neither is the possibility ever raised that human piety might be capable of ridding itself of

worldly government and returning to him" (200). Paul's reference to governing authorities as

servants of God should be read in light of similar status ascribed to Assyrians in Isaiah 10 – these

brutal oppressors were nevertheless identified as God's servants for their role in punishing Israel,

but this hardly constitutes an argument for legitimacy (201). In fact, he continues, the only thing

the Romans were really good for was punishing people, which Eller suggests is a "backhanded

compliment" (202).

Eller seems vulnerable here to a charge of quietism, at least in the sense that concrete

action does not seem to be as important to him as the attitude behind the act – though Eller

clearly prefers acts that cannot be seen as contributing to revolution or resistance, especially in a

democracy: "Christians dare never pursue their political objectives by trying to subvert or bypass

the democratic process. Obviously, that process is in no way infallible – but anything else is

worse" (212). Even outside of democracy, however, Eller's anarchism does not imply resistance

or subversion. Jesus, for Eller, pays the temple tax in Matthew 17 freely and not out of coercion

or compulsion: "He pays the tax not because he has to but because he wants to – for reasons that have to do entirely with his relationship to God and not the arkys" (206). Submission to authorities, or what might otherwise appear to passive legitimization of the ruling powers, is really an anarchic refusal to engage in an equally problematic revolutionary program. It is, essentially, "getting out of the way" so that God might accomplish God's purposes (153). It is the "style" of Jesus' submission that saves it from being mere legitimization (154). Eller's "anarchism" seems to come down to indifference toward human politics – a commitment to not taking sides.

Conclusion

As we have seen, there are numerous antecedents to the Christian anarchism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Curiously, however, contemporary Christian anarchist, while they might claim Tolstoy and Day as predecessors and will point back, as mentioned earlier, to the Radical Reformation or Francis of Assisi, demonstrate a woeful ignorance of their nineteenth-century forebears. Many do not know – or do not mention – that there were anarchist abolitionists, or that a spate of communal experiments dotted the landscape a little over a century ago. These movements died out – slavery did not end without violence and the communes and utopias folded as their expectations of a new world failed to be realized. Only the Latter-Day Saints continued, and then only by creatively re-inventing themselves.[33] Even still, it seems odd that those looking for creative ways to live a pacifist and/or anarchistic vision, or are entertaining some sort of communal ecclesiology, do not seem to be looking to, or even aware of, similar experiments from the American past. As Perry describes it, "There is no evidence that anarchistic

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[33] See Kathleen Flake's *The Politics of American Religious Identity* for an in-depth discussion of this re-invention.

beliefs were handed down from one generation to the next; and there is little evidence of modern anarchists seeking to recover a legitimate, anarchistic tradition in the history of abolitionism" (302). This makes it difficult to trace any direct line from one set of examples to another. Even in the nineteenth century, there seems to be little evidence that these various groups were self-consciously about the same things even as it is clear they sprang from the same soil, or so it appears in hindsight. The same is true over the course of the last century; some of the anarchist voices demonstrate an awareness of a larger trend and some meager apprehension of historical antecedents, but others seem to be arriving at their positions independently. The exceptions to this are very recent; Chernus is one such exception, inasmuch as he recognizes the connection to nonviolence, and we noted that Christoyannopoulos recognizes Garrison and Ballou. But Chernus's work dates to 2004 and Christoyannopoulos's to 2009, perhaps indicating that such an awareness is growing.

By examining the questions that face Christians committed to a pacifist ethics and willing to face the anarchist implications of that commitment, we can catch a glimpse of the ways in which theological and political reflection are deeply connected. That Western political thinking remains theological in spite of itself is something that I will hint at along the way and seek to develop in the conclusion. I am not suggesting, as some of our subjects will, that secular political thinking is parasitic upon Christian theology in an ontological sense – that Christian theology is true in some way of which ostensibly secular political thinking is merely a parody. It could well be that if such a parallel exists it is simply an artifact of historical contingency, the legacy of Christendom. I would suggest rather that political and theological thinking are inextricably connected and that this connection is one of the confounding conundrums of Western political thought – but also one of the most generative.

Chapter 2: John Howard Yoder

We could accept, if we would repent, that novelty in our ways of dealing with one another, with ethnic differences, with social hierarchy, with money, with offenses, and with power, for which "revolutionary" is the only word.

–from *For the Nations*

Alexandre Christoyannopoulos describes John Howard Yoder as an "eminent example" of a "growing body of scholars [who have] made the case for the direct and indirect political implications of Jesus' teaching" (2). For various reasons, Christoyannopoulos does not consider Yoder a Christian anarchist (41), and Yoder did not claim to be one – but his work on the political nature of Jesus' life and message and the implications of Jesus' call to "turn the other cheek" make him a seminal figure among the Christian pacifists and anarchists writing today. Yoder was a Mennonite scholar who studied in Basel under Karl Barth and taught at Goshen College, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, and Notre Dame. *The Politics of Jesus* is his best-known work, but he continued to write prolifically on a wide variety of issues in Christian theology and ethics until his death in 1997.

Yoder's breadth and output make him difficult to pin down, especially in light of the fact that most of his writing was occasional, often tailored to specific questions he was asked to address, and he left no magnum opus – no single, systematic articulation of his theological or ethical positions. Mark Thiessen Nation and Craig Carter have both written treatments of Yoder's theology, and John C. Nugent addresses Yoder's use of the Old Testament in *The Politics of Yahweh: John Howard Yoder, the Old Testament, and the People of God*. In fact,

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there is a growing body of Yoder scholarship emerging as thinkers from various traditions wrestle with Yoder's contribution to Christian thought. Frederic Jameson makes a brief (and not wholly accurate) reference to Yoder as a "postmodern fundamentalist" in *Postmodernism* (390-91), and Slavoj Žižek invokes Yoder as the voice of a non-violent alternative in *Living in the End Times* (129). Yoder is sometimes characterized as a monotonous trumpeter whose one note was pacifism, and while this is not the case, it is true that Yoder is one of the most articulate and sophisticated defenders of comprehensive nonviolence, a position that informs much of his work. It is not that Yoder begins with pacifism as an ideal and builds a theology or ethics around that – Yoder rejected the idea of an epistemological starting point at all – but that for him, following Christ and remaining true to the Christian heritage necessarily entail surrender to a nonviolent way of being in the world. Yoder wrestled with the political ramifications of pacifism in ways that bring him very close to anarchism.

Etiology

Like the Jesus Radicals, Yoder sees Jesus as a prototypical radical but also as the culmination of an anti-imperial stream that goes to the Fall itself. In his best-known work, *The Politics of Jesus*, he seeks to demonstrate that the teachings and even the very life of Jesus have relevance and import for the Christian in society today. He does most of this work through an exegesis of the Gospel of Luke. "Luke's story line," Yoder explains, "provides us with a simple outline, and his editorial stance is often taken to have been a concern to deny that the Christian movement was any threat to Mediterranean society or Roman rule" (23). Yoder's assumption seems to be that if he can locate specific political import even in a Gospel purported have an editorial bent away from politics, his case for the political relevance of Jesus will be that much stronger. He also notes that he is focusing on the canonical Jesus, not to avoid the ramifications

of ongoing studies into the "historical Jesus," but because the canonical Gospel serves his

purposes and he has little reason to suspect that additional scholarship would produce an

historical Jesus significantly at odds with the political picture he was presenting (24, see

footnote).

Yoder's introduction, however, speaks quite directly to the five principal *topoi* we are

exploring:

> The main thrust of the "biblical realist" movement a generation ago was in the areas of metaphysics and the personality of God. It led to a renewal of concern for ecclesiology and eschatology without which neither ecumenical developments since then nor Christian thinking about hope since then would have been understandable. What the present volume offers is a late ripening, in the field of ethics, of the same biblical realist revolution, in which precisely ecclesiology and eschatology come to have a new import for the substance of ethics. (5-6)

For Yoder, "biblical realism" means, among other things, taking seriously the sociopolitical

context of the people groups whose stories the Bible compiles.

In this work, Yoder claims Jesus as a model of radical political action and suggests that

enduring popularity of the image or idea of Jesus in various iterations of the counterculture speak

to Jesus' relevance for ethics and politics (12). If the Christian is to take the Bible seriously,

Yoder believes, then Jesus cannot be so easily dismissed by ethicists and political theorists.

Yoder associates most mainstream Christian ethical thinking with natural theology, which he

rejects (20), but also assigns considerable blame to Niebuhr's realism (18, n. 10). Ultimately,

Yoder's claim, and the main thrust of his argument in *Politics of Jesus*, is that Jesus is not only

significant for social ethics, but also relevant and even normative (23).

Yoder begins with the *Magnificat*, or "Mary's Song," from the first chapter of Luke's

gospel:

> My soul magnifies the Lord,
> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Luke 1:46-54, NRSV)

Yoder suggests that this text, which Luke has Mary uttering while still pregnant with the Christ child, bears an affinity to Maccabean sentiments (26) – a reference to the temporarily successful revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes, an event Luke's audience would associate with political reform. Thus Yoder argues that the beginning of Luke's narrative is already politically charged and that Luke gives no indication that such passages are *not* be read in that way. "Failing such a warning flag," he continues,

> we can only conclude that even at that late date when Luke compiled his story for Theophilus, presumably with some apologetic concern to avoid giving the impression that Christians were insurrectionists, he still had no choice but to report that the pious hopes which awaited Jesus were those in which the suffering of Israel was discerned in all its social and political reality, and the work of the Anointed One was to be of the same stuff. (28)

Yoder is concerned to demonstrate that Jesus' rhetoric, as reported by Luke, is significantly political.

One notable example of a text that Yoder reads politically is the temptation narrative, particularly the temptation to turn stones to bread. This is not, for Yoder, primarily about Jesus' own hunger; he points out that one does not end a 40-day fast by eating bread, and certainly not several loaves' worth. He argues that the temptation – one realized later in the feeding of the 5,000 and the crowd's subsequent attempt to make Jesus king by force – was to feed the multitudes and thus gain favor as a messianic claimant (31). Yoder reads the other temptations in

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similar fashion, connecting them to Jesus specific political role as Jewish Messiah. Again,

Yoder's concern is to challenge the idea that Jesus' example or message is apolitical, in spite of

the possibility that Luke's Gospel was intended to downplay the political.

Yoder then turns to a passage later in chapter 4 of Luke's gospel, in which Jesus goes to

the synagogue and reads from the scroll of Isaiah:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me
> to bring good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
> and recovery of sight to the blind,
> to let the oppressed go free,
> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19, NRSV)

Yoder calls this Jesus' "messianic platform," suggesting that in this passage the messianic

expectation is expressed (and claimed to be fulfilled, or in the process of fulfillment) in

undeniably sociopolitical terms (35): "We must conclude that in the ordinary sense of his words,

Jesus, like Mary and like John, was announcing the imminent *entrée en vigueur* of a new regime

whose marks would be that rich would give to the poor, the captives would be freed, and men

would have a new mentality (*metanoia*) if they believed this news" (39). Jesus' words, for

Yoder, are not abstract theological claims about his metaphysical nature; instead, they constitute

a concrete political claim of the advent of a new social reality.

Yoder finds evidence of Jesus' social significance in the way that the ruling authorities

react to him in Luke's story. The religious authorities might have been seeking to do away with

Jesus for blasphemy, but Yoder argues that sedition would be the only reason Herod would seek

to kill Jesus (44). He argues that the charge to take up one's cross had a distinct political

meaning, inasmuch as the cross was the standard instrument of execution for insurrectionists. He

even suggests that it may have had currency as a recruiting slogan among the Zealots (46). Yoder

also points out that Jesus is never portrayed reprimanding his disciples for expecting him to

establish a new social order, but only for misunderstanding "the character of that new social

order which he does intend to set up" (46). These kinds of encounters, Yoder feels, provide

ample opportunity for Jesus to articulate an apolitical stance (or even for Luke to editorialize on

these lines), but this opportunity is never taken, and the reaction of other actors in the story make

sense, Yoder offers, only if they saw Jesus as a political threat.

Yoder discusses the cleansing of the temple, arguing that this display can hardly be

regarded as a breach of Jesus' pacifist ethics inasmuch as the whip he grabbed was simply the

instrument by which one would drive the animals out, and that the story offers no indication of

violence against humans. More significant for Yoder, here, is again the missed opportunity, the

refusal to seize upon a moment that seemed ripe for revolution. From here, Yoder remarks, Jesus

might have launched a genuine *coup d'état*, but he does not, because it is "the nature of the new

order that, though it condemns and displaces the old, it does not do so with the arms of the old"

(52). Again, the Wobbly slogan "building the new in the shell of the old" comes to mind.

Yoder's approach is particularly interesting in his treatment of the Gethsemane narrative,

in which Jesus agonizes over his fate. Yoder argues that "let this cup pass from me" (Luke

22:42) indicates a temptation on the part of Jesus toward messianic violence, with his subsequent

acquiescence being not simply surrender to some divine plan for Jesus' death to have redemptive

significance, but a willingness to embrace his nonviolent calling regardless of the almost

certainly lethal consequences (55). Yoder elaborates:

> This is the third chance. As the tempter has suggested, Jesus once could have taken over
> the kingship by acclamation after the feedings of the multitude. His second chance for a
> coup d'état had been at the entry into the temple, with the jubilant crowd at his back, the
> temple police thrown off guard by the noise and the Roman guard cowed by Jesus' air of
> moral authority. Both times Jesus had turned away from the challenge to take over....
> [Jesus' arrest] is now the last opportunity. As Satan had come thrice in the desert, so the

real option of Zealot-like kingship comes the third time in the public ministry…. Once
more, now clearly for the last time, the option of the crusade beckons. Once more Jesus
sees this option as a real temptation. Once more he rejects it. (57)

Yoder makes much of the places where Jesus might have either launched a violent revolt or

clarify an apolitical stance but does neither. Jesus is arrested as an insurgent, Yoder points out,

and yet offers no rebuttal to the effect that he has been merely misunderstood. Jesus does not

attempt to refute the charges, and the very fact the he is arrested in such a context is suggestive

of the political valence of his words and actions.

The key to Yoder's etiology, in terms of constructing Jesus as the paradigmatic radical, is

how he parses the meaning of the Christian's call to imitate Christ. One important claim Yoder

makes is that no aspect of Jesus' life is held up as a pattern or example in the New Testament

except his willingness to go to the cross rather than engage in violence (97). This, and not some

general sense of self-denial or asceticism or bravely facing the circumstances of life, is what it

means for a Christian to bear his or her cross: "The believer's cross must be, like his Lord's, the

price of his social nonconformity," Yoder writes, "It is not, like sickness or catastrophe,

inexplicable, unpredictable suffering; it is the end of a path freely chosen after counting the cost"

(97).

This is part of the sense in which Yoder's ethics is rooted in Christology, but it goes

farther than simple imitation. Craig Carter, in *Politics of the Cross: The Political Theology of

John Howard Yoder*, spells things out: "Christology implies a specific type of discipleship,

which implies a certain type of ecclesiology and which only makes sense within the context of a

certain understanding of history, that is, within a certain eschatology" (95). That is, it is the

believer's conviction that history is going to work out a certain way (and for which the believer

is not ultimately responsible) that makes following Jesus in a pacifist ethics intelligible. Jesus is

exemplary not only because he happened to be a pacifist and also the son of God, but because, as God's representative, as the Messiah, he putatively had the right to take the course history into his own hands and faced considerable temptation to do so, and yet refused. "The one temptation the man Jesus faced," Yoder tells us, "was the temptation to exercise social responsibility, in the interest of justified revolution, through the use of available violent methods" (98).

At this point, Yoder catalogs a handful of perspectives that seek to render Jesus ethically or politically irrelevant: a) Jesus' death was necessary and therefore his refusal to accept kingship merely reflected acquiescence to his destiny as an atoning sacrifice (102); b) the "Cosmic Christ" of Paul, especially as described in the letter to the Colossians, supplants the earthly Jesus and requires the cultivation of a more universal ethical standard (103); c) the doctrine of the Trinity – and here Yoder points especially to Niebuhr as an exemplar of this position – necessitates the tempering of Jesus' ethical call with the possibility of binding ethical considerations that flow from the character of God as Father or from the Holy Spirit (103); d) some significant difference between the "historic" Jesus proclaimed by the Gospels and the "historical" Jesus of scholarly reconstruction might undermine the canonical Jesus as a normative source of ethical guidance. Yoder addresses this last point by suggesting that, at least at the time he was writing, the most important facets of Jesus' life and teaching for Yoder's thesis are those places in the Gospel materials "at which the historic and the historical most nearly coincide; the place where there is the least distinction between what the critic thinks must have actually happened and what the believing witnesses reported" (104).

Yoder dismisses the other perspectives by calling them "docetic," referring to Docetism, an early variant of Christianity, which held that Jesus only appeared to have an earthly body. "These approaches" he writes, "concede unique authority to Jesus, but do so by divorcing him

from our humanity" (101). He contrasts this to the constellation of views he dismissed at the beginning of the book, which he here calls "ebionitic," after the Ebionites, an early group of Jewish Christians who recognized Jesus as the Messiah but denied his divinity. The ebionitic views, he argues, limit Jesus' relevance to that of any other first century rabbi. The first part of *Politics¸* Yoder claims, showed that "as a radical rabbi Jesus was far more of a political figure than the ebionitic view had been ready to concede; and now we have seen, though only briefly, that the early apostolic church made that political humanness normative for their life" (100). He follows this, several pages later, with a meta-polemic in which he describes the shape that a sustained engagement with these views might take:

> To deal with the many ways, ebionitic and docetic, of avoiding the normativeness of Jesus, would call for a different kind of study from the present one. Such questions are of a dogmatic, not exegetical character, and would need to be encountered on that level. From the perspective of our reading of Luke and our brief glance at the Epistles, all that can be said is that these texts themselves provide no demand for such redefinitions and raise no need for them. If we were to carry on that other, traditionally doctrinal kind of debate, we would seek simply to demonstrate that the view of Jesus being proposed here is more radically Nicene and Chalcedonian than other views. We do not here advocate an unheard-of modern understanding of Jesus; we ask rather 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.

Yoder's choice of terms – "ebionitic" and "docetic" – is not arbitrary, and these terms are not merely descriptive. Both Ebionism and Docetism were deemed heresies by later church councils. In using these terms, Yoder is not only indicating disagreement with his theological opponents, but subtly (or not so subtly) associating their position with classical heresies. In the same move, he aligns himself with the orthodox ecumenical councils at Nicea and Chalcedon, suggesting that his position is properly orthodox and the others are not. But he goes farther than this, suggesting both that his position is "more *radically* Nicene and Chalcedonian" (emphasis mine), and that he is taking Jesus more seriously than others.

Yoder concludes this chapter with a reflection reminiscent of Garrison: "Between the absolute *agape* which let itself be crucified, and effectiveness (which it is assumed will usually need to be violent), the resurrection forbids us to choose, for in the light of resurrection crucified agape is not folly…and weakness…but the wisdom and power of God (I Cor. 1:22-25)" (114). Thus, in light of the Resurrection, these are for Yoder false dilemmas.

As with the Jesus Radicals, Yoder's etiology also reaches back to a narration of the Fall that echoes thoughts of anarcho-primitivism. While Yoder offers no extended treatment of the subject he suggests, at least hypothetically, that there was some kind of human society prior to the Fall that was peaceful – one that did not simply exist in mythical time and that does not necessarily presuppose a wooden, literal reading of Genesis. Consider this passage, for instance, from *Christian Witness to the State:*

> That there would need to be some kind of order is not debatable; but would this order need to express itself in either violence or vengeance? Since in this hypothetical paradise there would be first of all no intentional offenses and secondly no one selfishly demanding vengeance, the claims for the need for retributive justice are hard to conceive of. Likewise distributive justice in such a context would mean giving everyone his share, which everyone in Eden would accept as sufficient. (83).

Later, in an address to the 1992 "Human Values and the Environment" conference, published as "Generating Alternative Paradigms," Yoder holds the Amish up as example of "low-tech sustainable cultivation" that outperforms more advanced models (57). Additionally, he connects this to Eden as a primordial harmony between humans and nature in which humans were not to claim total sovereignty – this, Yoder intimates, is the forbidden fruit (58). He also reads Cain and Abel as "traces of the ancient culture clash between two phases of prehistory," and argues that the Cain story rehearses "within less than ten verses all the basic components of fallen history," which he lists as follows:

- the protective threat of vengeance (which some of us call "the state");

- the city (what in Latin we call "civilization");
- what we call the arts (Jubal's music);
- what we call technology (Tubal-Cain's metallurgy);
- and Lamech's escalating vengeance (which we call war). (58)

Notice especially the identification of the state, civilization, and technology as objects of critique, as in much of John Zerzan's writings, for instance, as well as other anarcho-primitivist literature. Yoder is also somewhat critical of agriculture: "Culture (whose root meaning, we remember, was agriculture), is already morally ambivalent. It is close to nature, but not natural. It scratches open the soil, wounds the breast of Mother Earth, in order to wrest sustenance from it" (59). In this, he sounds a bit like Daniel Quinn, whose primitivist-leaning *Ishmael* came out the year before Yoder's article. Quinn is highly critical of agriculture and the attendant increase in human population it makes possible. Yoder, too, sees population as a problem, sounding very much like Quinn when he writes of "the finitude of the overpopulated planet" and the "population crisis" (60). This anarcho-primitivist aspect of Christian anarchist etiology is not highly developed in Yoder, but it is nevertheless there.

Eschatology

Yoder's eschatology dovetails neatly with this observation. Toward the end of the same article, Yoder turns toward apocalypticism, arguing that the crises faced by humanity call for some kind of appropriation of apocalyptic literature: "[T]he viability of our culture, as we hit the ceiling of the planet's capacity, will be correlative of our finding ways for *our* time, as heirs of the apocalyptic hopes of *all* time, to envision the world that needs to be, on other grounds than that it is the necessary product of our past" (62). Thus Yoder's eschatological thinking has less to do with the "end times" than it does with a particular posture taken by the people of God.

Yoder is committed to the theological principle that the ultimate fate of not just the world

but also of the life of the believer and the community is in God's hands, and if God does not

deliver them in the here and now, God will vindicate them in the future. Yoder thus combines the

eschatological and the etiological inasmuch as the believing community is to adopt the same

waiting stance. But this is not just an extension of the expectations of Jesus and Paul; their own

sense of God's deliverance, and the patient and humble place of God's people in the meantime,

is, for Yoder, not a novelty Jesus and Paul introduce but an existing interpretive option that they

affirm.

Carter is helpful here. "The issue of eschatology is also implicit in Yoder's reading of

Luke, along with ecclesiology," he writes in *Politics of the Cross*, "and the same issues of the

existence of God and the freedom of humanity impinge on it. Only if God exists and has the

power to raise the dead is it possible to believe that accepting suffering to the point of death,

rather than resisting violently, can be meaningful action" (98). Carter explains that Jesus is

definitely an apocalyptic prophet in Yoder's thinking, and that he invoked German theologian

Oscar Cullmann's eschatological thinking – Cullmann coined the phrase "already but not yet" to

describe the situation in which Jesus inaugurated the kingdom but did not bring it in fullness – to

counter the prevailing eschatological thinking of his day (144). Carter sums up this way:

> Yoder's eschatology can be said to be characterized by a theological realism that
> undergirds a view of Christ's lordship as having visible consequences in history. But his
> eschatology is only partially realized. The kingdom of God has come in the person of
> Jesus, but it has not yet come in its fullness. Yoder understands the present age, between
> Pentecost and the *parousia*, to be a period of eschatological tension in which the powers,
> including the state, still struggle against the church and often appear, at least temporarily,
> to triumph over God and his cause. The struggles, ambiguities, and tensions of this age
> will continue until a future decisive intervention by God, which will consummate the new
> age, the age of the final victory of the Lamb. Until then, the disciple and the Christian
> community as a whole must live by faith, be ready to accept suffering, and continue to
> bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. (150)

Elsewhere, Carter explains, Yoder articulates a distinction between the "kingdom of the Son," which has come and in which Christians take part, and the "kingdom of the Father," which is yet to come and in which all unfulfilled expectations will be met (147).

Part of Yoder's eschatology, according to Carter, is a theology of the powers, referring to the Pauline theme of the "principalities and powers" against which the believers are called to strive. This is eschatological in that it speaks to the role of the believing community in the "not yet"; their battle against principalities and powers (in which they engage through nonviolent witness) is part of the apocalyptic dram. In *Politics*, Yoder identifies this language of "powers" as Paul's unique contribution to the ethical portrait (143). Properly understanding this language, he argues, will serve to underscore his claim that Jesus' message constituted a social and ethical teaching with significant political import. Carter suggests that Yoder saw a theology of the powers as an alternative to the natural theology he rejected (Carter, 146).

Yoder offers an exploration of the various ways words like "power" and "structure" are used, and some of the parallel uses that are found in the Pauline literature. These words are generally intelligible in modern use, he suggests, but are hardly univocal; the word "power" gets parsed in various ways vis-à-vis other words like "authority" and "force," at times conflated with them and at others held distinct from them (138). Paul's use of language is no less variegated, Yoder explains:

> He speaks of "principalities and power" and of "thrones and dominions," thus using language of political color. But he can also use cosmological language like "angels and archangels," "elements," "heights and depths." Or the language can be religious: "law," "knowledge." Sometimes the reader perceives a parallelism in all these concepts, sometimes not." (139).

Yoder then poses the question as to whether or not Paul's language dealing with power and structure can be translated in some way intelligible to modern social theory. His conclusion is

that it can, and he describes this in terms of "the juxtaposition of a gap in theological ethics with a puzzle in New Testament interpretation" (140). The gap is the apparent silence of Paul on the issue of the structural problems of society. The puzzle is Paul's language of angels and demons and powers, long assumed to be the untranslatable residue of an ancient cosmology. Yoder argues that these fit together by understanding Paul's cosmological language as the very means by which he addressed structural issues, that Paul is using this language to describe social processes for which we, today, might use different language.[34] Yoder does not discount the more literal or cosmological referents for Paul's terminology, but the upshot of Yoder's argument is that Paul's language might mean more than the language we would use to describe these social forces, but it does not mean less (142).

Thus Yoder seeks to disabuse the reader of the idea that Paul had nothing to say about social problems or politics. He argues that Paul, like Jesus, has been misconstrued as irrelevant to the ethical conversation, and that understanding the language of the powers is key to Yoder's reclamation of Paul as an ethical and political thinker.[35] What Paul calls "principalities and powers" (but also sometimes refers to as "thrones and dominions" or even "angels and demons") do not necessarily have to do with a particular ruler or institution but with the very shape of rule itself – the human need for order and structure and the forces that fill the vacuum and meet that need, however problematically they might do so.

At this point in the text – on page 143, to be precise, Yoder make a typographical shift:

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[34] For this, Yoder is drawing primarily upon the work of HendrikBerkhof, though he cites a rather long list of related scholarship. In the years since the publication of *The Politics of Jesus*, even more work has been done in this area, the most notably that of Walter Wink.

[35]This may seem unremarkable in a day when figures such as Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou have stirred up in interest in Paul precisely as a political and philosophical figure, intersecting with a theological trend sometimes called the "New Perspective on Paul."

> Most of the references to the "Powers" in the New Testament consider them as fallen. It is important therefore to begin with the reminder that they were part of the good creation of God…. The universe…was made in an ordered form and "it was good." The creative power worked in a mediated form, by means of the Powers that regularized all visible reality.

He begins to capitalize the word "Powers," first in scare quotes, and then without. He will continue this usage (though not entirely consistently) throughout the rest of the book. The purpose of the capitalization, along with the definite article, seems to be to invest the terminology with some of the theological import it would have had for Paul. In other words, even though Yoder is looking for ways to understand Paul's language in terms of modern social theory, he is not attempting to translate that language but to re-appropriate it theologically. Yoder's use of the appellation "the Powers" gives the sense that these are somehow entities, more in keeping with Paul's references to angels and demons as well as the other terminology used, as opposed to the more inert language of social science, which might not capture the sense of dynamism or even agency that Yoder seeks to invoke.

Yoder cites Hendrik Berkhof in identifying "the Powers" as the religious, political, and intellectual structures that make our lives intelligible (145). This language speaks to the orderliness of creation, the very substance and structure of things, even what Derrida might call conditions of possibility. The Powers were created good, but tainted by the fall (143). Nevertheless, Yoder explains, while Christ has defeated the Powers by way of the crucifixion, they still serve a purpose – God uses them for good inasmuch as they serve an ordering function (144). Nevertheless, Yoder points out, these fallen powers, which were intended to give order and structure to human life, often enslave it. Thus Christ came to defeat the Powers – not to abolish them, at this point in time, but to mark their defeat and pave the way for others to be liberated from them.

In a chapter of *The Politics of Jesus* called "God Will Fight for Us" [this is an allusion to

Old Testament texts in which God is seen as fighting or is expected to fight on the behalf of the

Israelite people; the exact phrase shows up in Nehemiah 4:20], Yoder points out that in the

Exodus narrative, the Israelites do nothing and yet are victorious (79). Yoder draws attention to

numerous places in the Old Testament wherein the people are victorious but the battle is either

won without direct human agency or the battle is clearly not contingent upon the size or prowess

of the fighting force. He argues that pious Jews (like Jesus) saw Israel's history as one in which

God miraculously preserved his people, a process which sometimes made use of human agency

(and violence) and sometimes did not, such that the question of violence itself is ancillary (86).

The Jews of Jesus' day, Yoder points out, were awaiting deliverance, with differing

expectations as to how that deliverance might take place. Yoder argues that Jesus' nonviolent

tactics, while in some sense unique, did not fall outside the compass of possibilities presented by

their shared cultural history. He offers historical evidence of nonviolent resistance prior to Jesus

(91-93) and rejects the idea that "to reject the responsible sword is to withdraw from history"

(93). This posture is prefigured in their sacred texts. Yoder explains:

> Now whatever be the "actual historical shape" of the events lying behind the story, we
> can be assured that, in the atmosphere of heightened apocalyptic sensitivity into which
> Jesus came, it was at least *possible*, if not *normal* for those who were "waiting the
> consolation of Israel" to see in these miraculous deliverances of the Old Testament story
> a paradigm of the way God would save his people now. When, therefore, Jesus used the
> language of liberation and revolution, announcing a restoration of "kingdom" community
> and a new pattern of life, without predicting or authorizing particular violent techniques
> for achieving his good ends, he need not have seemed to his listeners to be a dreamer; he
> could very easily have been understood as up-dating the faith…whereby a believing
> people would be saved despite their weakness, on condition they "be still and wait to see
> the salvation of Jahweh." (88)

The emphasis here is on the ethical stance of a people waiting for God to deliver them, not in the

Millerite sense of expecting The End to come by some cosmic means at a predicted date, but in

the sense of trusting in God to fulfill the promises made to them. This trust, for Yoder, precludes any disappointment that things do not seem to be happening in a timely fashion. Yoder's eschatological concerns have little, if anything, to do with nature or timing of the Second Coming:

> The kingdom of God is a social order and not a hidden one. It is not a universal catastrophe independent of the will of men; it is that concrete jubilary obedience, in pardon and repentance, the possibility of which is proclaimed beginning right now, opening up the real accessibility of a new order in which grace and justice are linked, which men have only to accept. It does not assume time will end tomorrow; it reveals why it is meaningful that history should go on at all. (108)

If Yoder, as a biblical realist, expects a real *parousia*, or appearance (of Christ) at some real future date, an event that will bring to fruition what Yoder believes Jesus to have inaugurated, his eschatology is also to some extent a realized eschatology – the kingdom is ontologically real and available to the believer in the phenomenological present. Yoder argues that the cross itself is being claimed by Luke as the fulfillment of God's promises, however paradoxical that might seem:

> Here at the cross is the man who loves his enemies, the man whose righteousness is greater than that of the Pharisees, who being rich became poor, who gives his robe to those who took his cloak, who prays for those who despitefully use him. The cross is not a detour or a hurdle on the way to the kingdom, nor is it even the way to the kingdom; it is the kingdom come. (61)

This, combined with Yoder's emphasis is on God as the architect of history over and against human expectations of timing, would seem to suggest that his eschatology functions, for the most part, as an organizing vision, the value of which lies less in the paradox of its perpetual imminence (which Yoder downplays) and more in the ethical options it makes available to the believer.

Yoder approaches the subject of eschatology again toward the end of *The Politics of Jesus*, which is organized in a way that roughly parallels the New Testament canon: first Yoder

offers a treatment of a gospel, then the Pauline literature (though he treats some of the smaller epistles before digging into Romans), concluding with the book of Revelation. Yoder actually uses John's Apocalypse as the basis for a summary, and this is probably appropriate: Yoder's is an apocalyptic theology, even if his apocalypticism is somewhat muted. "The special topoi of eschatology," writes Stephen O'Leary in *Arguing the Apocalypse*, "concern questions of ultimate significance: the nature of time, the destiny of humanity and the cosmos, the sources of spiritual authority, and the meaning and significance of human suffering and evil" (196). Yoder hints at this when he writes, "One way to characterize thinking about social ethics in our time is to say that Christians in our age are obsessed with the meaning and direction of history. Social ethical concern is moved by a deep desire to make things move in the right direction" (233).

Yoder offers only a limited treatment of Revelation. He reflects on what it means for the Lamb – Christ – to be uniquely worthy to open the scroll of history. Yoder's response to this is the one reproduced above: the cross, and not the sword, is the key to the meaning of history – of the "destiny of humanity and the cosmos," in O'Leary's words. For the rest of the chapter, Yoder defends the social and ethical relevance of apocalyptic much as he defends the relevance of Jesus and Paul. It is at this point that O'Leary's work becomes particularly instructive.

O'Leary offers a theory of apocalyptic rhetoric, using the literature of the Millerites as well as Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* as test cases for his theory. Though *Politics* was written around the same time as Lindsey's work, Yoder's approach to apocalyptic literature is very different from Lindsey's – he makes no prognostications, nor does he speculate as to what it might look like for Jesus to come back. In fact, he does not even speculate as to what it

might *mean* for Jesus to come back; rather, he is more concerned with what it means for Christ to be revealed as the bearer of history.[36]

This difference can be understood in light of O'Leary's invocation, following Kenneth Burke, of "tragic" and "comic" apocalyptic frames. O'Leary describes the comic in this way:

> Perhaps, just as the apocalyptic signs have always been with us, the End itself has always been present, though unrecognized; perhaps the End is always near, if not as an absolute closure to temporality and history then as a normative standard against which our actions may be measured. To be sure, this amounts to a redefinition of the Apocalypse as essentially concerned not with temporality, but with ethics. (219)

What this renders, O'Leary explains, is a non-literal rendering of apocalyptic language, such that it functions as critique rather than prediction. "So understood," he continues, "the Apocalypse offers not a prediction of history's final conclusion, but a narrative representation of an End that remains an ethical ground for judgment though it not in principle attainable within history" (220). Rather than reject apocalyptic thinking outright because it fails to materialize in any predictive sense, O'Leary suggests a preservation of apocalyptic language by emphasizing its ethical significance over historical content.

In the end, O'Leary argues not for a pure version of either the comic or tragic frame but a "tragicomic" reading of apocalyptic, recognizing that doomsday predictions of "The End" do not serve us and also that the nature of apocalyptic language is such that it is endlessly pliable and not particularly vulnerable to rational criticism. He explains:

> The comic vision is thus available as a resource for critique, one that provides a textual basis for criticizing the apocalyptic mentality from within its own foundation assumptions. If this critique is to be successful, it must acknowledge that our experience

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[36] Yoder makes mention of the *parousia* in a lengthy footnote on pp. 109-111, in which he points to scholarship that argues against the idea that Jesus' ethics was only appropriate to an interim period prior to an eschatological fulfillment that never came. In another footnote, Yoder addresses a similar charge made of Paul (221). In both cases, it is clear that neither the anticipated event of Christ's return nor its purported delay (or failure) is relevant for Yoder. In the chapter on Revelation, Yoder does not mention the return of Christ at all.

of history includes radical ruptures and discontinuities that only the tragic vision can account for successfully. But if the tragic vision allows us to recognize events such as Hiroshima and Auschwitz as rents in the fabric of history, it is the comic perspective that enables us to mend these rents and continue to build lives and communities in the face of unimaginable horror. (222)

This parallels Yoder's assertion, quoted above, that the kingdom of God "does not assume time will end tomorrow; it reveals why it is meaningful that history should go on at all" (108).

In another essay from *For the Nations,* "The Power Equation, Jesus, and the Politics of King," Yoder comes even closer to O'Leary. Yoder argues that apocalypse is

a way of talking critically about *this* world; yet it recognizes that one cannot be clear about how we shall get from here to there. That uncertainty means that we have no simple basis for assigning ourselves the authority to manipulate history, no justification for lesser-evil calculations of consequential choice with the promise of "less evil" results. We need not assassinate Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar or Stalin or Hitler for it to be confirmed that the proud will be destroyed. (134)

To describe apocalypse as a way of critically engaging the present world is to invoke O'Leary's comic frame. Yoder also agrees with O'Leary when the latter that apocalyptic language is "not susceptible to negation through rational criticism" (O'Leary 221). Yoder puts it this way: "An oppressed community is sustained by a hope which is not verified first of all by experience, and therefore cannot be falsified by apparent defeat" (136). It is for this reason that Yoder rails against efficacy as a criterion for ethical deliberation; the real meaning behind Jesus' ethical call lies not in its temporal effectiveness, but is given meaning in the revelation of Christ as the true sovereign over the cosmos. "One function of the language of apocalypse in the life of a faith community," Yoder writes in "Generating Alternative Paradigms," is that it restrains the presumptuous claim to have mastered the world system, either intellectually by a set of explanations or practically by a set of power manipulations" (61). Yoder's apocalyptic theology is an example – though certainly not the only example, or the only possible one – of the kind of tragicomic frame O'Leary has in mind.

If Yoder's apocalyptic frame tends toward the comic, this does not obviate his expectation of Christ's return; Yoder is clearly a theological realist in terms of Christ's lordship, and this presupposes a return of the king. He argues that his perspective has the advantage (and, he points out, the disadvantage) of being one that does not make sense if Christ is not, in some real, ontological sense, the Lord of all: "If Jesus Christ was not who historic Christianity confesses he was, the revelation in man of the character of God himself, then this one argument for pacifism collapses" (244). There is also, as mentioned above, a sense in which Yoder's is a realized eschatology, especially as it relates to his ecclesiology. As the church lives out its calling, the eschatological promises are fulfilled and the church enters into Christ's triumph – but this is prefigurative of a world to come.

Ethics

Yoder reads the life and teaching of Jesus as a call to a pacifist ethics. Critics of pacifism often equate this stance with passive withdrawal, and charge Yoder with being irresponsible. John Milbank, in "Power is Necessary for Peace," even calls Yoder's position "dangerous" (par. 26). Yoder, however, had anticipated this line of argument in a 1974 essay called "'What Would You Do If…?': An Exercise in Situation Ethics." In it Yoder addresses a common hypothetical situation posed to pacifists: what if someone were to attack your loved ones? Yoder takes this question seriously as an opportunity for ethical reflection.

Yoder spells out ways in which the scenario may not be the binary choice between violence or ineffectiveness that the hypothetical construct makes it out to be. Yoder posits four possible outcomes, with certain variations. The first Yoder calls a tragedy:

> There is the possibility that the attacker would be able fully to carry out his evil designs; this would be, according to the argument, pure catastrophe, an evil God would not want to permit, an event which forever will be looked on with horror. This is the eventuality which the critic assumes much be excluded at all necessary cost. (12).

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The second Yoder describes as martyrdom. "Some suffering," he offers, "has its place in God's saving purposes" (12). He argues that, given the inevitability of the death, and the Christian assertion that one's death might serve as a witness, it is not a forgone conclusion that all death, or even innocent death in particular, should be avoided at all costs. "The death of the Christian disciple," he writes, "makes a greater contribution to the cause of God and to the welfare of the world than his staying alive at the cost of killing would have done" (12). Such deaths are, in the Christian tradition, accorded honor, especially inasmuch as they mirror Christ's death on the cross. Yoder also points out that it is not just Christianity that recognizes and celebrates martyrs, and thus the value of martyrdom cannot be dismissed as merely sectarian.

Yoder offers a variation on this possibility in which it is not the intended victim, but rather the subject presumed by the hypothetical situation who is the martyr, by virtue of redirecting the attack:

> To risk one's own life to save that of another is a kind of heroism which often seems fitting when the danger comes from a fire or natural disaster, a runaway vehicle or a military enemy; why would not my risking myself to give the intended victim a chance to escape or get help be the first logical alternative in this case? (13)

In this variation, Yoder argues, death as a meaningful sacrifice is even more relevant.

A third possibility is an unforeseen way out, either by a natural course of events (Yoder mentions various responses by which the attacker might be dissuaded that do not involve lethal force), or through serendipitous or coincidental event that changes the situation dramatically. Christians, Yoder argues, would consider this providence, or a miracle, and regardless of the ability of modern thinking to make sense of this as a possibility, Yoder feels that Christian faith should leave room for it. He also suggests that would be difficult, in some cases, to tell the difference between this and a natural outcome, especially if the unforeseen event is explicable in

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"visible causal terms" (14). Yoder does not undertake the philosophical task of sorting out which is which; his point is that Christian faith should recognize a wider range of possibilities than those presupposed by the hypothetical construct.

Finally, Yoder recognizes the possibility that the subject might kill the attacker – this is one of the two possibilities (the other being tragedy) that are generally admitted by the way the question is framed. But even here Yoder refuses to be limited. There is the possibility of successfully killing the attacker and assuming that the legal process will find this to have been justified, but there is also, Yoder points out, the possibility of making an unsuccessful attempt that only makes things worse. This, he argues, would "add the lesser to the greater evil…. We would then suffer them both (14).

The death or injury of the victim and the successful violent dispatch of the aggressor are the two evils between which the subject is forced to choose. The former is worse, from the perspective of the person framing the question, than the latter. Yoder argues that the unsuccessful dispatch of the aggressor is worse still, and that possibility is only opened upon the subject's attempt. In other words, the condition of possibility for Yoder's worst-case scenario is the subject's attempt to realize the interlocutor's lesser of two evils. Adding the variations of martyrdom (either for the victim or the subject) and the variations of a way out (either natural or providential), Yoder arrives at seven possibilities, four of which (the variations of martyrdom or a way out) are positive outcomes that are foreclosed upon in the attempt to kill the aggressor. Yoder explains:

> None of those can happen if I choose to seek to kill. This must mean that I do not trust God to work things out along the lines of meaningful suffering or providence. It means that I do not trust myself to be courageous or creative enough to find another way. And further, it opens the door to the worst outcome of all which could not happen if it were not for my exacerbating intervention. To renounce [the attempt to kill] on the other hand would be the path of trust and faith because it leaves the doors open to providence and/or

to martyrdom; it is not lazy; it faces the challenge of creating another way. This renunciation is further responsible; for it prevents the worst. (15)

Yoder further argues that it is not clear that what he is calling tragedy and martyrdom are distinct categories from a properly theological perspective (16).

From here Yoder engages in an extended argument for the methodological viability of the "way out" options. He points out that various accounts of finding a "way out" are to be found in biblical literature and accounts of Christian hagiography, even in places where the issue of pacifism versus violence is not the primary consideration. "[I]t rises naturally out of a particular religious perception of the world and of oneself in the hand of God; it is not a forced product of the rigidity of non-violent principalism" (18). Thus, he argues, the "way out" is not merely an artifact of pacifist conviction but a more general aspect of the shape of Christian faithfulness: "The Christian understanding of divine providence is not only that it might sometimes provide a 'way of escape,' but that for Christians to testify to such a vision of God's care and to trust in it is a positive obligation" (19). He explains providence as follows:

> "Providence" in classical Christian thought, like "the Lordship of Christ" in Pauline thought, designates the conviction that "the events of history are under control in ways that are beyond both our discerning and our manipulating, although their pattern may occasionally be perceived by the prophet, and later will be celebrated by the community. Modern Western humanism, both of the Christian forms prevalent since Constantine and of the post-Christian forms which have arisen more recently, rephrases "providence" into the duty of every individual to participate in making history come out right. It would seem formally that the two attitudes are alternatives. I cannot claim effectively and finally to have taken history into my own hands and still celebrate and trust another Intelligence whose power is fulfilled in my weakness and whose wisdom make use of my ignorance. (19)

He goes on to point out that this kind of trust in providence is not uniquely Christian; other religions and systems of thought evince structurally similar confidence in the outcome of events (19).

Yoder's argument, finally, is that because the "way out" cannot be logically eliminated as a possibility, the hypothetical question "what would you do if…?" as described in the essay is invalid on the basis that it does not account for that option. Moreover, he argues, any scenario in which the subject might, in retrospect, conclude that killing the attacker was not a good idea, then "the logic of the challenge has forsaken its seeming open-and-shut quality and has become a calculation of probabilities" (20). Ultimately, he feels, the Christian faith calls for greater hope than the hypothetical question allows. Providence, for Yoder, is not the certainty that everything will turn out right in human terms, but the surrender to a larger process over which we do not have control.

What does a pacifist do, then in the context of the modern state that, in Weber's classic definition, claims a monopoly in violence? As we have seen, with Garrison as well as with Christoyannopoulos, Romans 13 is a critical passage for Christian anarchists and others who seek to live out Jesus' call to nonviolence. This passage is often used by more politically conservative Christians to justify the existence of the state, the state's use of violence or force in the prosecution of its primary functions, and the Christian's participation in "sword-bearing" endeavors. It is not hard to see why:

> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. (Romans 1:1-6, NRSV)

The theological literature on Romans 13 is rich and varied; for our purposes we need only be concerned with how Yoder affirms a political but pacifist Jesus with what appears to be (and is

often read as) a straightforward claim of divine ordination for human government – the Roman

Empire, no less. In *The Politics of Jesus* Yoder does this by way of a list of six major points:

1) Romans 13 is neither the only place nor the clearest place in which the New Testament addresses the problem of the state (195).

Here Yoder argues that much of the New Testament regards the state to be the purview of Satan,

and points out that Romans 13 was written about a pagan government, not one that either Jews or

Christians claimed to be divinely inspired. Thus, he concludes, extrapolating a theory of the state

from this one passage is deeply flawed.

2) Romans 13 cannot, even on purely textual basis, be taken as an unambiguous prescription for church/state relations (197).

The passage in question, he argues, must be read in the context of suffering and serving love.

"Any interpretation of 13:1-7," he writes, "that would make it the expression of a static or

conservative undergirding of the present social system would therefore represent a refusal to take

seriously the context" (198). He cross-references "vengeance is mine" passage (12:19) with the

call to submission in Romans 13:4:

> [T]he function exercised by government is not the function to be exercised by Christians. However able an infinite God may be to work at the same time through the sufferings of his believing disciples who return good for evil and through the wrathful violence of the authorities who punish evil with evil, such behavior is for men not complementary but in disjunction. God can, in his own way, in his sovereign permissive providence, "use" an idolatrous Assyria (Isa. 10) or Rome. This takes place, however, without his declaring such action which he thus uses is morally good or that participation is incumbent upon his covenant people. If the statements of 12:19 and 13:4 were not in the same passage, we would not necessarily cross-reference from one to the other, so as to conclude that the prohibition of vengeance of one verse excludes the sharing of Christians in the outworking of vengeance as described in the other…. But within the sustained reasoning of one passage, with the same words being used in the midst of the same text, certainly it is a most likely interpretation that the "vengeance" or "wrath" that is recognized as being within providential control is the same as that which Christians are told not to exercise. (199-200)

This parallels Christoyannopoulos' assertion that Christian anarchism is only for Christians. In Yoder's schema, there is not exactly a separate ethics for believers and unbelievers, but there are concessions for unbelievers and those powers that are not submitted to the authority of Christ.

3) The text presupposes the existence of power structures to which the believer is called to submit, but this does not imply divine sanction for any particular power structure (200).

Yoder rejects both what he calls the "positivistic" view which sees specific divine provision in any and every form of existing government and what he calls the "normative" view, which sees Romans 13 as a prescription for a minimal set of expectations that must be met by a government in order to claim legitimacy and thus demand the subordination of Christians. This is the line of thinking that is commonly used to justify the American Revolution, which would otherwise seem to be in conflict with the call to subordination in Romans 13.The revolutionaries were opposed to the British, who had violated the divine mandate, in support of a more just ideal of government to which the colonists were subordinate and which called for revolution.

Yoder argues that a proper reading of Romans 13 in context disabuses the honest interpreter of any such notion of just rebellion. Paul is not offering a theory or doctrine of the state, Yoder claims, nor is he prescribing an ideal social order:

> God is not said to *create* or *institute* or *ordain* the powers that be, but only to *order* them, to put them in order, sovereignly to tell them where they belong, what is their place. It is not as if there was a time when there was no government and then God made government through a new creative intervention; there has been hierarchy and authority and power since human society existed. Its exercise has involved domination, disrespect for human dignity, and real or potential violence ever since sin has existed. Nor is it that in his ordering of it he specifically, morally approves of what government does. The sergeant does not produce the soldiers he drills, the librarian does not create nor approve of the book he catalogs and shelves. Likewise God does not take responsibility for the existence of the rebellious "powers that be" or for their shape or identity; they already are. What the text says is that he orders them, brings them into line, that by his permissive government he lines them up with his purpose. (203)

Yoder does not reproduce the Romans 13 text, and thus it is unclear whether he is using a particular English translation or translating from the Greek when he says, "God is not said to *create* or *institute* or *ordain* the powers that be, but only to *order* them." Nor does he offer any extended treatment of the particular language used, as he does in other places. The NRSV quoted above uses "institutes," whereas other English translations use "ordain" or similar language.[37]

Yoder is arguing that God makes use of the rebellious Powers (of which government is but one) and arranges them a certain way because this serves a divine purpose even as we anticipate their being vanquished in the coming of Christ. As much as Romans 13 might seem like a straightforward sanction of government, Yoder doesn't see the need to read it that way. "The call," Yoder argues, "is to a nonresistant attitude toward a tyrannical government" (204). This, obviously, is the same language used by radical abolitionists, and Yoder seems to be using it in the same way, as indicated by his clarification in a footnote: "By 'nonresistant' here, as in this entire study, is not meant compliance or acquiescence in evil, but what Paul means in 12:7 and Jesus in Matt. 5:39, the suffering renunciation of retaliation in kind" (204, n.12). More than anything, Yoder is reading the text as a call not to engage in armed resistance.

4) The text calls for Roman Christians to be subject to a government in which they had no voice. This cannot be read as a call or even license for Christians to be involved in military or police service (205).

Yoder points out that for most of Paul's audience, these were not options anyway. The military and police functions were largely hereditary, he explains, and not available to the average citizen, and certainly not to the Jews and slaves that constituted early Christianity: "The functions described in verses 3-4 did not include any service that the Christian is asked to render.

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[37] A cursory glance at the Greek suggests that the word in question carries both meanings.

The 'things due to the authority' listed in verses 6-7 do not include any kind of participation or service" (205). They are describing, in other words, two differing sets of responsibilities.

5) The sword-bearing function of the state apparatus to which the believer is to submit is a judiciary or police function. This should not be taken as divine justification for war or capital punishment (205).

Yoder argues from the use of the word *machaira* (the Roman short sword) that Paul has in mind only judiciary authority. It was not the sword used in war and not the instrument of capital punishment. He claims that at the time, there were no military campaigns and no major nation Rome had not already conquered with whom they could go to war. "The brush fire hostilities along frontiers," he writes, "were more like police action than like war" (206). He explains:

> In the police function, the violence or threat thereof is applied only to the offending party. The use of violence by the agent of the police is subject to review by higher authorities. He applies his power within the limits of a state whose legislation even the criminal knows to be applicable to him. In any orderly police system there are serious safeguards to keep the violence of the police from being applied in a wholesale way against the innocent. The police power is generally great enough to overwhelm that of the individual offender so that any resistance on his part is pointless. In all of these respects, war is structurally different. (206-7)

His intent here is not to put a good face on Roman imperialism, but to take Romans 13 away from those who might use it to justify Christian participation in warfare; for Yoder, the text is not even about warfare *per se*. The importance of this distinction is less obvious, however, in light of his comparison to the Assyrians (whose conquest of Israel cannot be read as a police action), and Yoder does not explain what it means, in practical terms, to be subject to the judiciary function of the state but not to war or capital punishment, especially when Yoder interprets the passage as rendering both police and military service a breach of ethics for the Christian, or how this gets parsed in his broader theology of the Powers. His main concern seems to be to argue against "just war" theory as a justification for Christian participation in or justification of warfare (207).

6) Willing submission to the reigning authorities is a means of *retaining* one's moral independence and judgment, not a surrender of that judgment (207).

In this, Yoder is warning against a reading of Romans 13 that calls for slavish obedience to authority. "The authority of government is not self-justifying," he writes. "Whatever government exists is ordered by God; but the text does not say that whatever the government does or asks its citizens is good" (207). Obedience was expected anyway – no Roman citizen needed specific instruction to do so. For Paul to make this admonishment was to ask Christians to whom the gospel granted true freedom to exercise that freedom in willing submission, to lean into their own subjection and exercise genuine power and leadership by being servants.

For Yoder, then, ethics is not just about what one would do in an extreme situation, but the entire way of life of the community in light of the coming kingdom. Just as he uses Luke – a gospel thought to be anti-political – in order to make the case for a thoroughly political Jesus, he uses Romans 13 – a text often used a biblical justification for specific forms of government – to make the case for the church as an alternative politics that operates in stark contrast to the worldly standard.

Ecclesiology

The importance of ecclesiology in Yoder's overall theological project cannot be overstated. The "primary social structure through which the gospel seeks to work to change other structures," Yoder writes, "is that of the Christian community" (157). It is precisely the church's role as an alternative social sphere (and not, for Yoder, merely an enclave, retreat, or refuge) that constitutes a commensurate social ethics and challenge to the status quo. Yoder questions the assumption

> that the forces which really determine the march of history are in the hands of the leaders of the armies and the markets, in such measure that if Christians are to contribute to the

renewal of society they will need to seek, like everyone else – in fact in competition with everyone else – to become in their turn the lords of the state and of the economy, so as to use that power toward ends they consider desirable. (156)

But Christians do not eschew power for the sake of eschewing power; they oppose the Powers which are so corrupted that it would seem "the most effective way to *take* responsibility is to refuse to collaborate, and by that refusal to take sides in favor of the men whom that power is oppressing" (158). In this sense, then, Yoder's pacifist ethics really is a type of critique, one that seeks to distance itself from the corruption of power and is not a far cry from Garrison and Ballou's "non-resistance." This takes a concrete ecclesiological shape. The church's gift of existence is, for Yoder, a testimony to the victory of Christ, and this is a political and social victory because of the nature of the Powers that have been defeated: "That Christ is Lord, a proclamation to which only individuals can respond, is nonetheless a social, political, *structural* fact which constitutes a challenge to the Powers" (161). The personal, for Yoder, is the political.

Carter tells us that Yoder saw "three basic types of ecclesiology: the theocratic vision, the spiritualist reaction, and the believers' church" (184). The theocratic vision seeks to meld church and society and bring everyone in line, the spiritualist reaction turns attention to the inner self, or "heart," and does not (according to Yoder), take social shape, while the believers' church is the proper response, maintaining a coherent social witness but one that is not part of the state and does not seek to either endorse the state, on one hand, or overthrow it on the other (185). Carter explains that this "believers' church" ecclesiology means that one is not born into the church and baptized as an infant, but must make a conscious, informed decision to be a part of the community and submit to baptism (181). Thus the church, as a social body, is a voluntary one, the importance of which will become clear in considering the relationship between ecclesiology and ethic. Carter summarizes Yoder this way:

> Yoder's description of his believers' church ecclesiology as an alternative society is rich and full of suggestiveness for social ethics. He portrays the believers' church as a new society that is established by means of justification by grace through faith. It is characterized by social practices that demonstrate its eschatological character and reenact the story of Jesus: baptism, universal ministry, binding and loosing, the rule of Paul, and the Lord's Supper. (205)

Yoder explains these practices in his 1992 *Body Politics*. In this work, Yoder begins with an affirmation that the church is always already political: "The Christian community, like any community held together by commitment to important values, *is* a political reality. That is, the church has the character of a *polis*…namely, a structured social body. It has ways of making decisions, defining membership, and carrying out common tasks"(viii). The church is also paradigmatic in some ways. It is an alternative to the prevailing order, but it is not *merely* an alternative, nor is it, in Yoder's thinking, merely a reaction against any particular order such that the demise of that order means a loss of coherence for the church. It is a critique of the present system but also a foretaste of the world's future. He explains:

> the will of God for human socialness as a whole is prefigured by the shape to which the Body of Christ is called. Church and world are not two compartments under separate legislation or two institutions with contradictory assignments, but two levels of the pertinence of the same Lordship. The people of God is called to be today what the world is called to be ultimately. (ix)

He goes on to introduce the five specific practices he feels at least partially define the social group that is the church. He calls them binding and loosing, baptism, universal gifting, the rule of Paul, and the breaking of bread.

"Binding and loosing" is a biblical phrase alluding to Jesus' words to his disciples: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven'" (Matt 16:19, NRSV). Yoder also connects this to Matthew 18:15-20:

> If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (NRSV)

For Yoder this describes a process of reconciliation by which an offending member is confronted with a call to repent and accept forgiveness from other members of the community, with the outcome being not only binding in terms of group dynamics but considered to have divine sanction as well. In fact, the action of the community in this regard *is* the action of God (3). Yoder points out that, in the biblical ideal, this process is not the privilege of specially ordained person, but can be administered by anyone (two or more, specifically) – it also, he explains, cuts across the grain of an "anticatholic bias" that insists that no human can represent God in this way (3). He clarifies that the intention is not punishment but restoration, and compares it to theories of conflict management.

Yoder is not blind to the possible abuses of such a practice; improperly administered, it can be damaging. But the most damaging abuses, he argues, issue not from the practice itself but from a misunderstanding of the nature of the Christian community. This kind of mutual admonition is effective among members who have voluntarily agreed to be subject to it. "We can pursue reconciling confrontation because we trust one another," he writes, "and because we asked to be placed under this kind of loving guidance" (5). Trying to implement these practices in a non-voluntary community would mean coercively forcing standards upon a person who did not willingly agree to them. Yoder also argues that flexibility is necessary; this is a process, and not a timeless set of inviolable rules.

For each of the practices he describes, Yoder also takes the interesting step of translating the practice into social terms. Here's his summary of binding and loosing:

a. The process begins at the point of concrete offense, with a real problem.
b. The intention is not punishment but resolution.
c. The frame of reference is a value communally posited as binding of the parties.
d. We should assume that the process is not a zero-sum game. The mediator trusts that a solution is available whereby both parties will win; each party affirms the other's rights.
e. The first efforts are made in ways that minimize publicity and threat, and maximize flexibility without risk of shame.
f. The skills and credibility of intervenors can be validated by experience and accredited by colleagues and clients.
g. The ultimate sanction if negotiations fail is public disavowal of the party refusing reconciliation; what is left is either to let the injustice stand or to see the civil powers intervene in their ordinary way. (12)

This last point speaks to the voluntary nature of Christian community; there must be an "outside" to which the recalcitrant member can go if the process is unsuccessful, because the church does not mete out punishments. The church cannot mete out punishment, in fact, and still retain its noncoercive character. Thus there is no place in Yoder's ecclesiology for a territorially-defined Christian community of which people in a given geographic location are members by birth and which those who do not wish to be bound by the standards of the community – or who refuse the reconciliation process – cannot easily leave. The alternative would be some version of what Yoder calls "Constantinianism" in which the church claims jurisdiction over a particular territory.

The process by which people are voluntary inducted into what Yoder calls a "new humanity," one that is not based on ethnic, class, or gender distinctions, is baptism (28). "Baptism effects and celebrates the merging of the Jewish and Gentile stories," Yoder tells us (29), and he argues that this goes beyond both modern individualism and the idea of the "melting pot" in that Paul's vision calls for the merging of Jews and Gentiles, *as* Jews and Gentiles, into

this new humanity (30). This becomes the model of all inter-ethnic reconciliation. Yoder remarks that "the primary narrative meaning of baptism is the new society it creates, by inducting all kinds of people into the same people. The church is (according to the apostolic witness – not in much of its later history) that new society; it is therefore also the model for the world's moving in the same direction" (32).

Baptism does not just signal the person's acceptance into this new society, Yoder argues, but effects it. It is the normative process by which people become part of the Christian community and take on a communal identity that transcends not just ethnic distinctions but also those of rank and status. Baptism, he writes, "*is* the formation of a new people whose newnesss and togetherness explicitly relativize prior stratifications and classification…. We start with a ritual act whose first, ordinary meaning is egalitarian" (33). Yoder is willing to consider baptism – and the other practices as well – a sacrament in the sense that what happens on earth is ratified by God, but he regards much of the concerns over the precise nature of baptism as a sacrament to be later concerns engendered by the church's Constantinian experiment, in which the original meaning of baptism as the joining of Jews and Gentiles was lost. With the empire declared Christian, there was no "outside" except beyond the geographical borders of Christendom. Baptism became a "celebration of birth, reinforcing in-group identity rather than transcending it. Then it was natural that a new theology had to be developed to discuss what the ritual of baptism does to or for the infant who receives it without asking for it" (32).

Again, this speaks to Yoder's sense that the Christian community must be voluntary in order to avoid being coercive. Yoder is sometimes challenged on this front, especially from other postsecular thinkers who see in Yoder's voluntarism the looming specter of democracy. Consider this passage from John O'Donovan's *Desire of Nations*:

Certainly a church defined by the faith it confesses will be free, for 'coerced faith' is a contradiction in terms. But does that make it appropriate to speak of a 'voluntary society,' which usually connotes an association into which people contract *optionally*, i.e. not only without anyone forcing them to, but without any pressing need driving them to? A voluntary society is one that I could leave without incurring grave or irremediable loss, which might seem a strange thing for a Christian to think about the church. Finally, does the concept of the church as a voluntary society not commend itself chiefly because it fits late-modern expectations of how civil society will be organized? Is Yoder, in the name of non-conformity, not championing a great conformism, lining the church up with the sports clubs, friendly societies, colleges, symphony subscription-guilds, political parties and so on, just to prove that the church offers late-modern order no serious threat? (223-224)

If we follow Yoder's logic, however, it would seem that one of the necessary conditions for a truly noncoercive and nonviolent community is just this kind of voluntariness. For Yoder, baptism marks "the person's free choice to join a movement in response to having heard a message that invites her or him to become a member" (43). A community that is not voluntary in this way denies the religious subject the opportunity to reject membership, and thus to reject the gospel. For Yoder, not even God is coercive. Similarly, Yoder offers baptism, with its call to repentance, as a model for non-violent engagement insofar as such engagement presupposes that the adversary can change (41). Violent response denies the opponent the opportunity for such change and usurps the right of God to effect judgment.

Baptism is also related to Yoder's reading of "justification by faith" in *The Politics of Jesus*. This is key concept for Luther and one that generally, in Christian theology, has to do with the believer's status before God. Yoder plants a naysayer in the text, one who challenges Yoder by suggesting that while he might make a convincing case for Paul carrying some of Jesus' ethical call into the development of the early church, surely Paul's real significance is justification by faith and its relationship to the Jewish law. The mainstay of Pauline theology, for many, is that we are justified before God by faith without any recourse to whether or not we have kept the law. Yoder explains the position he is going to argue against:

Just as a guilty thief or murderer is still a thief or a murderer after a declaration of amnesty has freed him from his punishment, the argument runs, so a guilty sinner is still as sinner when God declares, on the ground of the work of Christ which no man could have accomplished for himself, that he shall henceforth be considered a new man, forgiven and restored to fellowship. But this "being considered" is, spiritually speaking, a kind of legal fiction. It is valid only on the grounds of the sovereign authority of the judge who declared it to be so. (216)

This, Yoder suggests, is part of larger theological picture that separates "body and soul, objective and subjective realities, outward and inward history" such that one's state before God is something that cannot be ascertained by any empirical or objective means. It is known only to God (216). "Does this not," Yoder has his imaginary interlocutor ask, "undercut any radical ethical and social concern by implication, even if Paul himself might not have been rigorous enough to push that implication all the way?" (217). In fact, Yoder concedes, taking this idea to its logical conclusion *would* undercut the ethical program he is outlining, which would become just another outward criterion for faithfulness invalidated by the grace of God and its mysterious workings.

Justification, Yoder argues, is not about inner guilt which is relieved by the believer's being justified, but by setting Jews and Gentiles in right relation in the new humanity brought forth through baptism. It was a reflection on the role of Gentiles in the newly formed church and whether or not they would need to be Jews first. Yoder argues, following Krister Stendahl, that the answer was that the Jews were to be part of this new social order without having to abandon their identity as Jews, whereas the Gentiles could become part of the new order without *becoming* Jews. Thus, they are justified, or set in right relation. In Paul's case, it is about his conversion from someone opposed to the ministry of Jesus (and thus opposed the inclusion of the Gentiles) to someone involved in and advocating for that very process (221). In this way Yoder renders the gospel itself as something with profound social and ethical implications: "It is the

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Good News that my enemy and I are united, through no merit or work of our own, in a new humanity that forbids my ever taking his life in my hands" (232).

What Yoder calls the "fullness of Christ" or "universal giftedness" in *Body Politics* is the presumption that everyone in the community has a role to play, and that any person at any time might be the "point person" for a particular activity or call to decision. No one person can be said to be "in charge" or wholly responsible for the community in the way we normally associate with priests or pastors.

> Sometimes the early Christians said they were all priests; sometimes they said the priesthood was done away with. The concrete social meanings of the two statements, though verbally opposite, were the same. All members of the body alike are Spirit-empowered. The monopoly of the sacrificial celebration that enables and delimits human access to the divine is swept away. The priestly person as the primary agent of access to the divine is swept away with the special ceremonies. (56)

This amounts to a sociopolitical vision that is strongly anti-hierarchical and anti-clerical. Yoder argues, for instance, that "no central authority existed in the early churches" and describes the polity of the Christian as "lay empowerment and decentralized accountable leadership" (57). Yoder applies this to debates over the ordination of women, writing that "The transformation that Paul's vision calls for would not be to let a few more especially gifted women share with a few men the rare roles of domination; it would be to reorient the notion of ministry so that there would be no one ungifted, no one not called, no one not empowered, and no one dominated" (60).

What Yoder calls the "rule of Paul" refers to the way group meetings should be handled: "everyone who has something to say, something given by the Holy Spirit to him or her to say, can have the floor. The others who were speaking before are instructed to yield the floor to him or her" (61). He also notes, in keeping with the polity described above, that "there is no single moderator, 'minister,' or 'priest' governing the process. . ." (61). He traces the history of this

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kind of consensus-based deliberation through parts of the Protestant Reformation as well as the

Seekers, Levellers, and Friends, noting that it is this latter group that has carried on both a

commitment to nonviolent witness as well as the practice of consensus-based deliberation (68).

"Quaker consensus modes of decision," he writes, "can administer a relief agency or a college

just as efficiently a can the 'corporate models' to which Presbyterians and United Methodists are

accustomed. United Methodists know that annual conference decisions or congregational ones

reached by a bare majority create new problems for the future" (70).

It may be instructive here to compare what Yoder is saying with David Graeber's

description of the "New Anarchists" in a 2002 article by that title in the *New Left Review*:

> Over the past decade, activists in North America have been putting enormous creative
> energy into reinventing their groups' own internal processes, to create viable models of
> what functioning direct democracy could actually look like. In this we've drawn
> particularly, as I've noted, on examples from outside the Western tradition, which almost
> invariably rely on some process of consensus finding, rather than majority vote. The
> result is a rich and growing panoply of organizational instruments – spokescouncils,
> affinity groups, facilitation tools, break-outs, fishbowls, blocking concerns, vibe-watchers
> and so on – all aimed at creating forms of democratic process that allow initiatives to rise
> from below and attain maximum effective solidarity, without stifling dissenting voices,
> creating leadership positions or compelling anyone to do anything which they have not
> freely agreed to do. (70-71)

Rather than seeing this as anti-democratic, Graeber seeks to claim the legacy of democracy by

identifying it as "direct democracy," and Yoder seems to be suggesting the same for the church.

It is not, as O'Donovan would have it, a capitulation to modern democracy but a call to a more

radically egalitarian and noncoercive form of democratic process. Yoder's ecclesiology is

pacifist not only in terms of how the church is to relate to the world but also in terms of its

internal organization, which eschews hierarchy and privilege. Thus Yoder's ecclesiology

suggests and even calls forth some version of anarchism. This becomes clear when we examine

Yoder's economics, which includes the Eucharist – the fifth practice Yoder suggests as constitutive of the church in *Body Politics*

Economics

The "messianic platform" of the rich giving to the poor, and the manumission of slaves, Yoder points out, are unavoidably economic concerns. He argues in *Politics*, drawing on the work of André Trocmé, that Jesus is alluding to the Jubilee year, "the time when the inequities accumulated throughout the years are to be crossed off and all God's people will begin again at the same point" (36). Jubilee was the period, every fifty years, when debts were to be forgiven, slaves set free, and property returned to its ancestral owners. Yoder argues that the scholarly debate over whether or not this decree was ever followed in the life of Israel (Yoder suggests at least one canonical instance in it seems to have been, if imperfectly) is immaterial; it is enough for Yoder's argument that Jesus' words evoke the sense of Jubilee.

Yoder uses Jesus' proclamation of a Jubilee year to explain the "do not worry" command in Luke 12:22-27, as well as the reference to debts in the Lord's Prayer, arguing that the Greek word in question does not mean offense or trespass but indicates a primarily economic injunction: "Jesus is not simply recommending vaguely that we might pardon those who have bothered us or made us trouble, but tells us purely and simply to erase the debts of those who owe us money; which is to say, practice the jubilee" (66). He characterizes calls for voluntary poverty as "redistribution of capital" (74) but denies that Jesus advocated communism, suggesting that "collectivism was contrary to the spirit of Moses" and that the prescription was "a jubilee ordinance which was to be put into practice here and now, once…as a 'refreshment' prefiguring the 'reestablishment of all things'" (76).

Elsewhere in *Politics*, Yoder takes his economic reading into what is sometimes called

the "Sermon on the Plain," a passage in Luke 6 that roughly parallels the Sermon on the Mount

in Matthew's Gospel. There are some significant differences between these two, however. Yoder

elaborates:

> Despite extensive parallels with the Sermon on the Mount, the emphasis in Luke's report
> is different. The blessings are balanced with woes, after the fashion of ancient Israel's
> covenant ceremonies. The blessing is for the poor, not only the poor in spirit; for the
> hungry, not only those who hunger for justice. The examples drawn from the sexual
> realm (Matt 5:27-32) are missing; only personal and economic conflict are chosen as
> specimens of the New Way, in which seized property is not reclaimed and the delinquent
> loan is forgiven. As in the jubilee, and as in the Lord's Prayer, *debt* is seen as the
> paradigmatic social evil…. An ethic which is to be guided by the twin foci of imitating
> the boundless love of God for his rebellious children… and being strikingly different
> from the ordinary "natural law" behavior of others…is conceivable only if a new age has
> begun, and if that age's novelty is at the point of economic realism" (41).

The early chapters of Luke's Gospel, for Yoder, suggest the inauguration of a new social order,

one that is marked by a particular economics of debt remission and open sharing, at least in the

beginning.

If the Jubilee frames the initial economic vision for Yoder, the ongoing economic

platform of the church is centered on the breaking of bread, as he describes in *Body Politics*. In

fact, Yoder finds it significant that the first major administrative issue faced by the church, which

he points out was handled according to the rule of Paul, had to do with the distribution of food to

Greek widows at the common table. Yoder sees the New Testament references to the breaking of

bread not as a prescribed ritual but as a robust social practice with serious economic import.

What is called for in the breaking of bread is not chiefly commemoration of Jesus' death or an

opportunity for the believer to ponder the status of his or her soul but the perpetuation of the

common meal practiced by Jesus and the disciples:

> The "common purse" of the Jerusalem church was not a purse; it was a common table. It
> arose not as the fruit of speculation or discussion about ideal economic relations; was not

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something added to what was already going on. The sharing was rather the normal, organic extension from table fellowship. Some of the first Jerusalem believers sold their estates voluntarily (Acts 5 indicates that it was not mandatory) and pooled their goods because in the Lord's presence they ate together, not the other way around. (17)

The Eucharist does not merely symbolize but actually constitutes a form of economic sharing that cannot be understood apart from "the simple social fact, undeniable in the record but often not taken to be important, that men and women left their jobs, homes, and families to constitute with Jesus a new 'family,' a community of consumption, in which he exercised the role of head-of-household" (18). They were extending the economic solidarity of family life, in which meals (and goods) are regularly shared, to the fictive kinship of the church body.

This common meal *is* commemorative, however. Yoder suggests that it is connected to the Passover meal, which is the setting of the Last Supper in some of the gospel accounts (Yoder points out that in John this is not the Passover meal itself but described as a preparatory meal, but does not feel this in any way diminishes the Passover connection). He sees this as a way to "affirm our loyalty to the entire Hebrew heritage and to the understanding of God as liberator and creator of a people, which the Exodus memory celebrates" (19). He also suggests that it points to a "memory of the feeding of crowds in the desert" such as what Jesus enacts in the Gospels as well as God's provision of manna in the wilderness (19). But the overriding point, for Yoder, is fairly straightforward: "What the New Testament is talking about wherever the theme is 'breaking bread' is that people were actually sharing their ordinary day-to-day sustenance" (20).

The breaking of bread, like the other practices Yoder describes in *Body Politics*, has wider significance:

> The first embodiment of the economic newness of the kingdom is thus basic economic sharing among the members of the messianic community. But the distinction between an ethic for the church on one hand, derived directly from the content of the gospel as

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responded to by faith, and on the other hand some other ethic for others, resting on some other base and having some other content, does not follow. The newness of the believing community is the promise of newness on the way for the world. That in the age of the Messiah those in bondage will be freed and the hungry will be fed is also a criterion, thought a distant one, for political economics beyond the circle of faith. (21)

Though he calls it "socialism as implied in the Eucharist" in *For the Nations*, here he qualifies it by suggesting that "Socialism as a modern theory has many meanings, too politicized. The most inappropriate use of the term is to describe the corrupt autocratic form of state capitalism which has just collapsed in Eastern Europe" – but he goes on to say that the New Testament vision of breaking bread "demands *some* kind of sharing, advocacy, and partisanship in which the poor are privileged, and in which considerations of merit and productivity are subjected to the rule of servanthood" (22).

The economic dimensions of the Eucharist fell away as the focus shifted toward theological debates over the meaning of the sacrament, but Yoder finds the economic aspects of the gospel preserved in other areas of church life. He invokes medieval examples from monasticism (which he considers instructive albeit flawed) and also connects this to the medieval prohibition of usury, or the charging of interest (23). These examples, he suggests, testify to the persistence of principles of economic sharing as part of Christian discipleship even when they had long been divorced from the Eucharist (24).

Yoder also reiterates in brief some of the economic themes in *Politics of Jesus*, particularly Jubilee, but speaks in *Body Politics* of the beginning of a "new world whose most dramatic marks would be the forgiving of debts, the redistribution of property, and the freeing of prisoners (most of whom in those days were in prison for debt)" (24). The breaking of bread, he notes, focuses on the consumptive side of economics, though of course it is also related to distribution, whereas Jubilee, toward which early believers gestured in their surrender of

property for the sake of those in need, addresses the productive element (24). "In short," Yoder concludes, "the Eucharist is an economic act. To do rightly the practice of breaking bread together is a matter of economic ethics" (21).

Almost Anarchist

Yoder's political theology works in part through a constellation of displacements, the most significance of which is the claim of exclusive allegiance to a king – Christ – who is absent and whose return is expected but deferred. No human can claim to be king; Christ already occupies this place and, moreover, chose to rule not by the sword, meaning violent domination, but by the cross, meaning willing submission. Yoder summarizes this way:

> Jesus was, in his divinely mandated (i.e. promised, anointed, messianic) prophethood, priesthood, and kingship, the bearer of a new possibility of human, social, and therefore political relationships. His baptism is the inauguration and his cross is the culmination of that new regime in which his disciples are called to share…. *At this one point* there is no difference between the Jesus of *Historie* and the Christ of *Geschichte*, or between Christ as God and Jesus as Man, or between the religion of Jesus and the religion about Jesus (or between the Jesus of the canon and the Jesus of history). No such slicing can avoid his call to an ethic marked by the cross, a cross identified as the punishment of a man who threatens society by creating a new kind of community leading a radically new kind of life. (63)

Similarly, there is for Yoder no identifiable central power structure that, once seized by the right people, might allow us to move history in the right direction. Christ occupies this place, too, and again did not presume to effect the changes his coreligionists thought were necessary. Instead, Yoder proclaims, Christ inaugurated a new community to model what the future holds. There is no grand utopia that we can bring about and that might justify our attempts to establish it by force; there is a social vision to be lived out in patient waiting for *God* to bring things to their destined fulfillment.

This idea, that Christ is uniquely and exclusively both king and priest parallels an argument made by Marcel Gauchet in *The Disenchantment of the World*. For Gauchet, Christ's unique role meant that no mere mortal could be both king and priest – only Christ is so qualified – thus leading to a distinction between the two roles that was eventually transmuted, as Christendom gave way to modern liberal democracy, into a separation of church and state (139). Eventually, the state apparatus claimed complete control over temporal affairs and relegated religion to a private matter. For Yoder, this bifurcation will not do. The point of Christ being uniquely king and priest meant not that no one could be both, but that no one can be *either*. Temporal government has its place, but only for those not under the lordship of Christ:

> The choice is not between God and politics, nor between the Spirit and "men," but between the politics of men (and women) in their (our) rebelliousness and the politics of men (and women) under the teaching and empowerment of God's Spirit. The difference is not one of realms but of paths; not of levels but of options (228).

The church is not called to rule over society (just as Jesus did not, despite his right to do so), and Yoder's ecclesiology does not recognize the role of a specific priesthood. The church, for Yoder, is essentially a theocracy that does not allow for or recognize any human representative; Christ was all possible manifestations of such a representative, and he relinquished any claims to coercive rule or power on the cross.

It would not be difficult, then, to narrate Yoder's vision for the church as a quasi-anarchist collective. The church is to be marked, he writes, by "egalitarianism as implied by baptism into one body…socialism as implied in the Eucharist…the open meeting, and…the universality of giftedness" (*For the Nations,* 33). In broad strokes, Yoder's vision, as extrapolated by this limited selection of texts, does not look significantly different from that of the Christian anarchists: he also offers an ecclesiology in which the church constitutes an alternative society that models the ethics and economics of the eschatological kingdom in the

way the Jesus taught and the early church exemplified. Yoder's ethics is quite obviously pacifist, and the theological apparatus by which he maintains a pacifist ethics in the midst of a world that is not likely to love its enemies or beat its swords into plowshares is a sophisticated one.

Chapter 3: Stanley Hauerwas

Christians are...a peaceable people not because through such peace we can promise the ongoing existence of the world, but because we believe nonresistance is the way God has shown that he deals with the world and it is the way to which he therefore calls us to be faithful
-from *Against the Nations*

Stanley Hauerwas is a Christian ethicist and the Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke Divinity School. Educated at Yale, he taught at Notre Dame from 1970 until 1983 when he joined the Duke faculty. He is sometimes associated with narrative theology because of his emphasis on narrative but he notes in *The Peaceable Kingdom* that to call him a narrative theologian would be a misnomer as narrative is "but a concept that helps clarify the interrelation between the various themes I have sought to develop in the attempt to give a constructive account of the Christian moral life" (xxv). He is also associated with "virtue ethics," due to the influence of Alasdair MacIntyre, and with pacifism owing to his dependence upon John Howard Yoder. In an undated audio clip available on the Jesus Radicals website he remarks that he is "committed to Christian nonviolence, which basically means you have an anarchist view of the world."

Jeffrey Stout, in *Democracy and Tradition*, writes that Hauerwas is "surely the most prolific and influential theologian now working in the United States. He has also done more than anyone else to spread the new traditionalism among Christians in the English-speaking world" (140). What Stout calls the "new traditionalism," which he associates with Hauerwas, MacIntyre, and Milbank, is a reaction to liberal democracy that seeks to ground social ethics in a specific tradition as opposed to the ostensibly neutral or secular ethical discourse of modern democracy.

Like Yoder, Hauerwas argues that the formation of the church as a witness to an alternative politics is the primary way the church should address society at large – thus, what

appears to be withdrawal from one perspective is narrated as the preeminent form of engagement

from another. Hauerwas treats Yoder's social ethics in the early essay, "The Nonresistant

Church: The Theological Ethics of John Howard Yoder."[38] Here Hauerwas writes, "Yoder has

developed and defended a form of Christian pacifism that the conventional arguments against

pacifism fail to meet; and in so doing he has provided a basis for and a form of Christian social

criticism that is theologically more defensible than that assumed by various forms of 'Christian

realism'" (198).

Hauerwas argues that Yoder, particularly his pacifism, should not be summarily

dismissed as sectarian or disregarded as a mere artifact of Yoder's Mennonite heritage, and he

thinks that a more robust engagement with Yoder might dispel such misperceptions. To that end,

Hauerwas seeks to clarify forms of pacifism. He argues that Yoder's pacifism is not a

sentimental pacifism based on the goodness of humanity, pointing out that Yoder was suspicious

of ethical assumptions that states and governments could or should conform to gospel norms:

"Yoder is insistent that pacifism is meaningful only in the larger framework and structure of a

Christian social ethic" (200). It is precisely because Yoder does *not* argue for pacifism as a

universal ideal, Hauerwas explains, that a different kind of engagement is necessary. He argues

that Yoder offers not just a screed against violence but a legitimate social ethic: "The form of

nonresistance required of the Christian is not just a negative ethic in the face of evil, but a

positive form of life that obligates the Christian to confront the world in its socio-political

reality" (203). Yoder, according to Hauerwas, rejects the notion that the only choices are some

form of acquiescence to violence or complete withdrawal. The problem with this way of framing

things is that it takes as given the sinfulness of society:

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[38] The pagination here is from Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*.

> "Substituted for the nonresistant love of the gospel, the value of the survival of civilization becomes an absolute imperative on the assumption that the church has a stake in the ongoing survival of the going social order…Yoder's basic criticism of this position is its failure to make Christian revelation the sole norm of the Christian's witness to the state" (204).

Hauerwas's answer, then, is to take seriously the work of God within Christian communities, which sets them apart from society at large and affords them ethical choices in favor of pacifism or nonresistance that are not available to secular culture. Hauerwas writes that "Yoder posits a 'basic dualism between the norm of Christ and the form of this world'" (205), and clarifies that the Christian does not have the same calling as the non-Christian (203). The Christian, therefore, must learn to recognize society as the "institutionalization of structured unbelief and sin" and distinguish appropriately between the kinds of ethics available to Christians and non-Christians respectively[39] (206).

Hauerwas nevertheless has some concerns about Yoder's position in this early essay. He worries that Yoder's ethics is unable to offer guidance as to how the state might determine guilt or innocence, or how one might determine the "more significant" forms of injustice against which the church might speak. He is also concerned about reductionism: "Yoder's assertion that violence is the essence of the state fails to appreciate that the state as a form of community cannot be explained or reduced to a Hobbesian mutual protection society" (218). Additionally, Hauerwas is critical of Yoder's language of justice inasmuch as it is merely negative and does not acknowledge the possibility of speaking about justice positively in a more specifically Christian way (219). "At this point in his development," Stout offers, "Hauerwas was worried that pacifism fails to acknowledge the difficulty of extricating oneself from complicity in the evils of the world" (144).

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[39] This seems predicated on a misunderstanding of Yoder, who believed that there was, in fact, one ethics, but that the world was in rebellion from it.

Another of Hauerwas's early concerns with Yoder is that he is not sure that Yoder's distinction between the two ages is robust enough to account for his assessment of the church's witness to the world. Hauerwas wants to be able to say that God is at work bringing everything under Christ, in fits and starts, and thus it remains possible that some forms of direct action are appropriate to the Christian in ways that he feels Yoder is not able to recognize. This should not, he clarifies, "be taken as a warrant for the church to take sides in the battles of this world. The establishment of the kingdom of God by Christ is wider than the confines of the church" (220). Finally, Hauerwas expresses concern that that nonresistance could become a norm that superseded the revelation of God in Christ (221).

By 1985, with the publication of *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, Hauerwas seems to have resolved his issues with Yoder. Stout calls this work the "most unified statement" of Hauerwas's "mature theological and ethical outlook" (145). It is clear very early that Hauerwas has, by this time, embraced Yoder's pacifist ethics; in fact, he describes nonviolence as "the hallmark of the Christian moral life." He continues:

> I hope to show such a stance is not just an option for a few, but incumbent on all Christians who seek to live faithfully in the kingdom made possible by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Non-violence is not one among other behavioral implications that can be drawn from the gospel but it is integral to the shape of Christian convictions. (xvi)

In this and in other ways he continues to draw upon and refine Yoder's work for his own purposes, and he describes Yoder as someone to whom he is indebted (xix).

As much as Yoder and Hauerwas have in common, however, and the extent to which Hauerwas's work draws upon Yoder's, the two men disagreed in terms of practical ecclesiology. Yoder was a free church Anabaptist, whereas Hauerwas's background is United Methodist –

though he sometimes quips that he is a "high church Mennonite."[40] This does not come out

explicitly in their writings; that is, while each is candid regarding his ecclesial affiliations,

neither spends much time directly addressing the other on the issue of ecclesiology *per se*.

Nevertheless, it is ecclesiology that marks the principal difference between the two, with

Hauerwas's embrace of hierarchy representing a departure from the incipient anarchism of

Yoder's work. Hauerwas's work, however, remains demonstrably radical in both content and

rhetoric.

Ethics

Nonviolence is a key facet of Hauerwas's ethics, and in *The Peaceable Kingdom* he

draws extensively on Yoder for a discussion of ethical decision-making, particularly the article

"What Would You Do If?" Hauerwas uses this Yoder essay to emphasize that real-life situations

are rarely clear-cut choices between martyrdom and uses of violence guaranteed to be effective

(125-26). Hauerwas assimilates Yoder's thesis into his own focus on narrative:

> I have tried to show that a crucial question is not an abstract analysis of the "situation" in
> terms of one or another option of normative ethical theory, but how we are to understand
> such challenges within a narrative framework. For Yoder's appeal to "providence" in fact
> offers a way of "reading" such situations in a manner that "fits" within the continuing
> story of a community's life with God. It is not, therefore, a blind or unwarranted faith that
> everything will work out in the end. On the contrary, it is a strong rational claim that our
> existence is bounded by a truth that will have its way with us as truth must – that is, by
> defeating the violent with the power of unrelenting love. God's story cannot be defeated
> by our attempts to become the authors of this world's narrative by employing violent
> means. (128)

Hauerwas recognizes that there is no guarantee that our moral decision-making will truly be

faithful to the example of Jesus. He mentions just war doctrine, the prohibition of remarriage

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[40] More recently, Hauerwas has joined the Church of the Holy Family, an Episcopal
congregation in Durham, NC. See Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child*, 279-ff. In *In Good Company* he
describes himself as ecclesially "homeless" (10).

after divorce, and allowance of usury (charging interest) as examples of moral standards that may prove to be wrong-headed. Hauerwas's point is that the church should exemplify what it means for communities to engage together in the ethical struggle (132). In *Transforming Fate into Destiny*, Samuel Wells argues that Hauerwas's ethics is one in which "the final cause is the community of character" (28) and that "Hauerwas's notion of performing the Christian story requires a community" (90).

The Peaceable Kingdom also evinces a strong sense of the situatedness of ethical reflection; it all, Hauerwas writes, "occurs relative to a particular time or place" (1). He even suggests that the word "ethics" must always come with a qualifier that locates it, and he denies the validity of timeless absolutes for ethical reflection (2). He uses Alasdair MacIntyre and Peter Berger to argue in different ways that we suffer not from an absence or lack of moral guides, but from an overabundance. In a sense that is invoked by Taylor's *A Secular Age*, particularly what Taylor calls "secular 3," or Sartre's quip that we are "condemned to freedom," Hauerwas points out that in the midst of such an "overabundance" we are forced to choose (7). The quest for absolutes, he argues, has to do with our own deep-seated ambiguity about our ethical pronouncements; the more uncertain we are, for Hauerwas, the more we dogmatically insist upon absolutes (3). The problem with modern ethics, then, is the tendency to think that ethics traffics only in difficult questions rather than in everyday life lived in the context of "convictions that tell us who we are" (4). In fact, such a quest can lead us to violence: "[T]he attempt to secure peace through founding morality on rationality itself, or some other 'inherent' human characteristic, ironically underwrites coercion" (12). Wells explains it this way:

> Christian ethics is [for Hauerwas] …done by powerless people who recognize that their faithfulness will inevitably result in their being a minority community. It is not so much that they have renounced control as that the forms of life they have adopted mean that control is unlikely to come their way. They do not believe that the forces that determine

the march of history are controlled by the leaders of the armies and markets, so it is not inevitable that Christians must become lords of the state and the economy so as to use that power towards the ends they consider desirable. (112)

Hauerwas defines freedom, then, as learning how to live in a violent world and yet remain at peace within ourselves and others (48). This language is similar to Yoder's insistence that the Christian calling is not to try to get a handle on history to make it come out right.

Hauerwas expresses concerns over the division of theology from ethics (54). For Hauerwas, ethics is the proper starting point for Christian theology, and not the conclusion of systematic process of theological reflection. This because one cannot arrive at the particular truth of Christian confession without a corresponding transformation of character (16). It is unsurprising then, given Hauerwas's focus on communities of character, that he clarifies Christian ethics as an ecclesiological matter as well (60). Hauerwas makes these reflections in a section largely devoted to challenging a natural law basis for ethics, which Hauerwas feels is too abstracted. While not opposed to natural law, he feels that to rely too heavily on it betrays an attempt to ground ethics in a universal that can be located outside of the Christian narrative.[41] Hauerwas also feels that natural law ethics makes violence and coercion intelligible, even if that is not the intention, and that a universal ethics (as opposed to Hauerwas's narrative-driven particularist ethics) tends to underwrite cultural imperialism (61).

Toward the end of *Peaceable Kingdom*, Hauerwas parses a pair of *Christian Century* articles by H. Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr in which the former argues for the "grace of doing nothing" and the latter argues that doing nothing would only perpetuate injustice (135). Hauerwas follows H. Richard Niebuhr's argument that inactivity can take many forms and that for Christians the inactivity that is called for is not one of passivity, apathy, or acquiescence, but

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[41] For an example of Hauerwas's engagement with natural law, see *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001).

the futility of attempting to interfere as if we knew how to make history come out right and the recognition that there are more creative ways to work for good than direct or coercive involvement (137). He explains this more fully:

> Thus the grace to do nothing as a Christian turns out to entail nothing less, for H. Richard Niebuhr, than a very particular faith in a definite kind of God. The patience to sustain such inactivity is possible only if the world is in fact bounded and storied by a God who has the power to use our faithfulness and unfaithfulness that the kingdom of peace might be present among us. The kind of peaceableness required is inherently tied to their acquiring the habits of peace – that is, that they are formed by a definite kind of spirituality. (138)

Hauerwas remarks that Protestants usually associate spirituality with pietism and Catholics with particular disciplines such as prayer or meditation, but this is not what Niebuhr has in mind. "The patience needed to remain hopeful in the face of violence requires a spiritual discipline that is grounded, as all spiritual disciplines are, in the expectation that by being so formed we will be in a position to better hear God's word for our particular lives" (138).

Hauerwas summarizes Reinhold Niebuhr's position as one that recognizes the nuance of the younger Niebuhr's position, particularly the need to understand the eschatological dimensions of the kind of hope involved in waiting on God. What the older Niebuhr finds incoherent, according to Hauerwas, is the sense in which his brother's account renders "a people's anger and resentment…an instrument of God and yet at the same time an instrument they are forbidden to use in a politically effective manner because it is alleged that there are religious scruples against such a use" (139).

He points out that it might be hard to miss the patience that Reinhold's formulation also calls for, that of sustaining the futile effort to achieve the kind of relative peace and justice that he thinks is possible, though he identifies this as recognition of human life as "a perennial

tragedy" (140). Hope, Hauerwas counters, is required to sustain the endeavor of working toward

relative justice. He connects this to his thoughts on the tragic:

> Reinhold Niebuhr was mistaken in suggesting that the tragedy which marks our existence
> follows from realizing that the limited good we can achieve can only be accomplished
> ultimately through coercion and violence. Rather that tragedy resides in the fact that the
> peace to which we Christians witness may well make the world more dangerous, since
> we do not give up our violent illusions without a struggle. (145)

For Hauerwas, then, the patience to surrender our desires to make history come out a certain way

– the patience that undergirds the call and commitment to nonviolence that Hauerwas sees

embedded in the Christian narrative – is the same kind of patience Reinhold Niebuhr calls for in

calling Christians to persevere in the midst of their efforts to seek limited justice (145).   This,

he argues, is a robust spiritual calling. God's peace is unsettling, but it is also a source of joy.

The patience learned by not rushing in with violent solutions even in the midst of violence is not

a means to an end but itself an end (146). Every ethic explicitly or implicitly "involves

recommendations about the means by which our lives should come to embody what is said to be

the good and the true (149).

Particularly important is Hauerwas's emphasis on narrative. To abstract ethics from

theology or from the Christian story and attempt to make it into a universal is to undermine the

theological and narrative qualities of the Christian faith by making them subservient to ethics,

Hauerwas writes. He goes on to argue that an emphasis on the cultivation of virtues rather than

rule-keeping better fits the narrative quality of Christian ethics (24). After presenting the

Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount as examples of ethical mandates that only make sense

in the context of their respective places in the biblical narrative, he explains:

> Narrative is not secondary for our knowledge of God; there is no "point" that can be
> separated from the story. The narratives through which we learn of God *are* the point.
> Stories are not substitute explanations we can hope to someday supplant with more
> straightforward accounts. Precisely to the contrary, narratives are necessary to our

understanding of those aspects of our existence which admit of no further explanation –
i.e., God, the world, and the self. (26)

Narrative, Hauerwas describes later in the book, "is the characteristic form of our awareness of ourselves as *historical* beings who must give an account of the purposive relation between temporally discrete realities. Indeed, the ability to provide such an account, to sustain its growth in a living tradition, is the central criterion for identifying a group of people as a community" (28). Thus narrative is the connective tissue between ethics and ecclesiology. Particularly important here is the emphasis Hauerwas places on the Gospels as narrative media: "God has revealed himself narratively in the history of Israel and in the life of Jesus. While much of Scripture does not take narrative literary form, it is perhaps not incidental that the Gospels do" (29).

The first task of Christian ethics, Hauerwas argues, is to properly conceptualize the world, and this is a function of narrative. He explains: "Christian ethics is specifically formed by a very definite story with determinative content. If we somehow discover the world is not as this story suggests, then we have good grounds for not believing in, or more accurately, not worshipping the God revealed in the life, cross, and resurrection of Jesus" (29). Hauerwas argues that the Christian narrative teaches and trains Christians to see the world as it is and gives them a language appropriate to what is being seen (30). Sin prevents humans from seeing clearly, so one of the most important, but also one of the most disconcerting elements of this (re-)education, he explains, is learning that we are sinners: "We are sinful not because we participate in some general human condition, but because we deceive ourselves about the nature of reality and so would crucify the very one who calls us into God's kingdom" (31).

Hauerwas claims that all existence is "narratively formed" and that humans are "historic beings" (35). To be "historic," as Hauerwas means it, is to be able to make our past our own; it

means both to be determined by our history and to be makers of our history. For Hauerwas this

faces us with a dilemma: do we truly make our own choices, or are they made for us? We are

created by our histories, he concludes, and he regards it a characteristically modern deception

that to be free means to not be bound by such decisions, which do not seem to be truly ours (37).

Autonomy, for Hauerwas, is an illusion. Hauerwas's rival account of freedom is that it is "a

quality that derives from having a well-formed character" (37). He attempts to clarify this by

using the word "agency," defined as that which "names our ability to inhabit our character" (40).

He continues by arguing that to "say that we are agents is an attempt to avoid transcendental

appeals while rightly claiming that we have the power to be one thing rather than another, in

short, to be persons of character" (41). To this he adds, "To be an agent means I am able to

locate my action within an ongoing history and within a community of language users…. My

power as an agent is therefore relative to the power of my descriptive ability" (42). This power of

description is not an intellectual power, but one that is cultivated through habit (43).

It is not difficult to see the influence of MacIntyre. But Hauerwas puts his own gloss on

things by connecting it to narrative – "The fundamental category for ensuring agency, therefore,

is not freedom but narrative," he writes, because it is through narrative that the Christian learns

to see the world properly and cultivate character (43). Thus Christian life is part of a larger

narrative (as it is for Yoder) but it is also very much *about* that narrative *qua* narrative (which is

not, to the same extent, part of Yoder's rhetoric):

> As Christians we believe that peace is most perfectly realized as we learn to find our role
> in God's story. That is, the peremptory story of peace as peace, the sense of being at
> home, comes only as we learn to live true to our nature as God's creatures. Moreover
> God has charged us with the particular responsibility of being his representatives to
> attract others to that story of peace by manifesting it in our common life. That is why
> Christians feel such an urgency to witness, to offer the stranger hospitality, so that God's
> peace might be possessed by all. (44)

Hauerwas's emphasis on narrative pervades the text, but he does take pains to keep narrative connected to his ecclesiology: "The Christian tradition holds us accountable, not to an abstract story, but to a body of people who have been formed by the life of Jesus" (46). Hauerwas connects this to agency by insisting that it is only by being part of a community bearing the story of Jesus that the human subject gains true agency (46).We only become our true selves by becoming part of God's kingdom and learning to narrate our lives in terms of God's story (48).

Etiology

That there is a community faithful to the story of Jesus is part of Hauerwas's etiology, but that etiology is mixed in that he makes many of the common appeals in Christian theology – to the life and teaching of Christ and the example of the early church – but he also draws heavily on Aristotle as modulated through MacIntyre. Moreover, he is so keen to distance himself from natural theology that he seldom discusses the creation narratives. Hauerwas reaches back to Aquinas and Aristotle – or, more accurately, Aristotle through Aquinas through MacIntyre. This connects to Christian anarchist etiology in a roundabout way. MacIntyre begins *After Virtue* with an extended metaphor that suggests we have lost or forgotten some crucial moral knowledge. This idea of lost knowledge is another point of connection with Quinn. In a follow-up effort to *Ishmael*, *The Story of B* (1996), Quinn pursues a line of reasoning that is both more explicitly primitivist and recognizably anarchist. More importantly, he introduces a concept he calls "The Great Forgetting" (246). What we call the Agricultural Revolution, Quinn argues, was the introduction of a dangerous turn of events in human history that is immortalized in many of the world's religions as the Fall. It is interesting to consider this "Great Forgetting" in light of MacIntyre's assertion of lost moral knowledge.

Rejecting natural law means that Hauerwas needs another way to ground his ethical

commitments. In *The Peaceable Kingdom,* Hauerwas briefly describes how he arrived at his

ethical stance: as he pursued an ethics of character and virtue. he began to see that this required a

community. "Gradually," he writes, "I saw that my attempts to develop an ethic of virtue might

have sectarian implications I had not anticipated" (xxiv). He realized that Yoder's account of the

church described the kind of community required for an ethics of virtue while answering the

sectarian dilemma. Because Hauerwas does not begin with natural law or the distinction between

nature and grace, he does not need the doctrine of revelation to do as much work as in more

conservative theologies. He defines revelation as "knowledge about God" and rejects the idea

that it automatically has to do with rationality or irrationality (66). Knowledge about God, or

claims to such knowledge, are not *inherently* rational or irrational for Hauerwas. In fact, it may

be that for Hauerwas nothing is inherently one or the other, but can only be determined to be

coherent on the basis of a shared narrative: "That we Christians witness to a man's life, a man

called Jesus, who is the heartbeat of our life and the meaning and form of our existence becomes

intelligible (and therefore rational) in light of such a narrative dependency…. Revelation is

reasonable if we place it within the ongoing story of God's calling of Israel and his redemption

wrought in Christ" (69). Hauerwas seeks to cultivate a postfoundationalist epistemology that

favors the coherentism (versus the correlational approach of natural law ethics) of his narrative

theology. "If we have a 'foundation,'" he quips, "it is the story of Christ" (67).

Here is where Hauerwas looks to the canonical Jesus as an etiological source for ethical

reflection. Hauerwas assumes the canonical Jesus to be Jesus as narrated through the lens of his

earliest disciples. Regardless of the historical details, the picture we have is already formed,

appropriately enough, by the narrative to which Christians are called:

> [W]hen the early Christians began to witness to the significance of Jesus for their lives they necessarily resorted to a telling of his life. Their "Christology" did not exist first in claims about Jesus' ontological status, though such claims were made; their Christology was not limited to assessing the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection though certainly these were attributed great significance; rather their "Christology," if it can be called that, showed the story of Jesus as absolutely essential for depicting the kind of kingdom they now thought possible through his life, death, and resurrection. (73-4) [42]

Hauerwas believes that Jesus cannot be separated from his ethics and denies that his emphasis on Jesus's life yields a low Christology. Rather, he claims, Jesus's life should shed light on what high Christological claims actually mean (75). Jesus's strategy of adopting a particular way of life in the midst of a hostile society was most like the Pharisees, Hauerwas points out, as opposed to the Essenes, Sadducees, or Zealots (following a four-fold typology that is also in Yoder). Of course Jesus and the Pharisees, who are cast in agonistic roles in the Gospels, differed markedly on the content of such a life. Nevertheless, Hauerwas argues, their strategies are the same or similar (84). Hauerwas also appeals to the imitation of Christ:

> We are called to be like God; perfect as God is perfect. It is a perfection that comes by learning to follow and be like this man whom God has sent to be our forerunner in the kingdom. That is why Christian ethics is not first of all an ethics of principles, laws, or values, but an ethic that demands that we attend to the life of a particular individual – Jesus of Nazareth. It is only from him that we can learn perfection – which is at the very least nothing less than forgiving our enemies. (76)

Hauerwas tells us that the point is not to copy Jesus, but to become trained in the virtues Jesus exemplifies, and this comes by way of community (76). As Wells explains, "There are two dimensions that make the imitation of Christ central to Hauerwas's ethics. First, imitating Christ expresses the continuity of Christian ethics with the ethics of the Old Testament. Second, along with Yoder, Hauerwas maintains that Christ's life is still paradigmatic for Christian ethics, in contrast to those who seek foundations elsewhere" (94). In *Resident Aliens* he and Willimon call

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[42] The idiosyncratic formatting, in that two of the three iterations of "Christology" are in quotation marks and the other is not, is Hauerwas's.

for a renewal of the sense of adventure the early disciples had in following Jesus (49). They describe the "Christian colony" as an embattled community, a "people on the move, like Jesus' first disciples" (52).

Hauerwas also joins Yoder in pointing out that the imitation of Jesus is limited, focused primarily on the cross. This, Hauerwas suggests, is the summary of Jesus' life. Again from *A Peaceable Kingdom*, "to be like Jesus is to join him in the journey through which we are trained to be a people capable of claiming citizenship in God's kingdom of nonviolent love – a love that would overcome the powers of this world, not through coercion and force, but through the power of this one man's death" (76). Hauerwas, like Yoder, gestures back to the Old Testament (though not as thoroughly), suggesting that early Christian saw in Jesus an exemplification of what it meant to follow the Lord, which was the goal of Israel all along (78). God, Hauerwas suggests, did not coerce Israel but always offered the possibility of disobedience, a trajectory that is brought to fruition in the cross (81).

Hauerwas tackles the temptation narratives from a different angle than that of Yoder. His reading is somewhat more typological: the temptation to turn stones to bread is a temptation to be like Moses, who fed the people; the temptation to accept power and dominion is the temptation to be like David, bringing an ostensible peace through domination; the temptation to throw himself from the high point of the temple was a temptation to "act as the priest of priests, to force God's hand by being a sacrifice that God cannot refuse" (79). This is different from the sacrifice constituted by the cross because it necessitates a presumption of control over one's fate in a way that the cross did not. Hauerwas and Yoder's treatments of the temptation narrative are not contradictory, but whereas Yoder is keen to emphasize the political, Hauerwas reads that narrative through a typology in which Jesus is a different kind of prophet, a different kind of

king, and a different kind of priest. Jesus resists the temptation to be any of those things in the conventional (and, Hauerwas would suggest, coercive) way: "Jesus' whole life as narratively depicted in the Gospels, is a life of power that is possible only for one possessed by the power of God. But such a power, exactly because it is a genuine and truthful power, does not serve by forcing itself on others" (81).

Eschatology

Jesus can exemplify this power because he understands the world that is to come, and the community that bears his names lives the ethics of the coming world. For Hauerwas, the church is an eschatological community; just the act of gathering together for worship, he argues, is an eschatological act. "The church is constituted as a new people," he writes in *Resident Aliens*, "who have been gathered from the nations to remind the world that we are in fact one people" (157). This understanding of eschatology is indebted to Yoder. The key to grasping the import of Yoder's social ethics, Hauerwas argues in "The Non-resistant Church," is eschatology: "In order to understand the relation between church and society according to Yoder it is necessary to see each in terms of their eschatological context" (207). Hauerwas summarizes Yoder's eschatology as invoking two simultaneous ages; one that looks back before Christ and one that looks ahead to the fullness of redemption. The church is a foretaste of the latter, while the former is manifested chiefly in the state (207). The question for the Christian ethicist, then, and for Christians more generally, is what it means to claim that Christ has defeated the powers and now reigns over both ages:

> The primary characteristic of Christ's Lordship over the old aeon in the present time is that evil without being destroyed is now used by God to serve his purposes. Vengeance, for example, instead of creating chaos is harnessed through the state in a way to preserve order and give room for the growth of the church. Such a rechanneling does not make

evil good, but rather renders it subservient to God's providential order as an anticipation of the ultimate defeat of sin. (208)

Hauerwas goes on to suggest that this explains Romans 13. The state, as one of the fallen powers, remains problematically coercive, but God is able to use it for God's purposes. In fact, the state exists primarily to assist the church, though of course theorists of the state cannot be expected to recognize this:

> Against all attempted self-glorification of the state the church must constantly stand on guard. It must make it clear that the church does not exist primarily for the ends of society, even when such ends are worthily understood, but rather it is for the church's work of preaching the gospel that society and the state continue to exist. (208)

The Bible does not offer any particular theory of the state, but simply recognizes that the state exists and can be used by God: "Because of this the Christian witness to the state will always express itself in terms of specific criticisms to concrete injustices. The Christian does not assume it is possible to create an ideal society, since that is only the future kingdom of God, and thus no societal order can be accepted as adequate" (209).

Christians can, therefore, call upon the state to prosecute its legitimate police function, but this does not mean that Christians can advocate for war (which has no due process and does not effectively discriminate between guilty and not guilty). Nor does it mean, for Hauerwas, that Christians can be involved personally in police actions, as "the ethics of the police function necessarily involves the ethics of the lesser evil, for the basis of justice for the state is finally the fallenness of men." This is an ethics that Hauerwas (summarizing Yoder) says is fine for the state "but is completely inadequate and illegitimate for guiding Christian discipleship whose sole norm is self-giving and nonresistant agape" (210).

Eschatology is crucial for Christian ethics – which, Hauerwas writes in *The Peaceable Kingdom*,

involves the extraordinary claim that by learning to be faithful to the way of life inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth we have, in fact, become part of the shared history that God intends for his whole creation. But that such an eschatological view is inherent in our morality does not mean that we can assume the "universal inclusion of all people in God's kingdom is an accomplished fact. Rather it means that as Christians we have been given the means to recognize ourselves for what we are – historic beings who must begin our ethical reflection in the midst of history. (62)

Hauerwas uses the figure of Jesus to understand the meaning of the kingdom of God, arguing that "what is significant is not what Jesus may or may not have thought about himself, though he certainly acted as one in authority (Matt. 12:28), but that he was obedient to his calling and therefore is the sign and form of the reality of God's kingdom then and now" (82). From there he offers some additional reflections on eschatology:

To begin to understand Jesus' announcement of the kingdom we must first rid ourselves of the notion that the world we experience will exist indefinitely. We must learn to see the world as Israel had learned to understand it – that is, eschatologically. Though it sounds powerful and intimidating, in fact it is quite simple, for to view the world eschatologically is to see it in terms of a story, with a beginning, a continuing drama, and an end…. It is against this background that Jesus' announcement of the kingdom must be seen, for he came to announce an end that, while not yet final, nonetheless provided a necessary perspective for our continuing life in the world. (82)

Thus, even Hauerwas's eschatology is connected to narrative. The important issue in eschatology, Hauerwas argues, is not "when?" but "what?" (82). This suggests that he, like Yoder, has an eschatology more in line with O'Leary's "comic frame" of apocalyptic.

Hauerwas tells us that the "Gospels portray Jesus not only offering the possibility of achieving what were heretofore thought to be impossible ideals. He actually proclaims and embodies a way of life that God has made possible here and now" (83). As Brad Kallenberg explains in *Ethics as Grammar*:

Following John Howard Yoder, Hauerwas uses the term "eschatological" to connote the characteristic way the church defines its present mode of existence in terms of a yet unrealized goal which gives it meaning. This yet-to-be-realized goal was proleptically revealed in Christ. Thus…the *form* of Jesus' life as the eschatological Messiah – his

obedience, his death, his resurrection – becomes the pattern of this new mode of solidarity. (145)

Hauerwas claims that the age to come is made manifest by Jesus in his healings, in his relationships with others, particularly the outcast, and in the calling of the disciples, especially in their call to dispossession (86). The cross, then, represents the ultimate in dispossession inasmuch as Jesus gives up his right to life, to retaliation, and to rule as expected. "The cross is not just a symbol of God's kingdom; it is that kingdom come," he writes (87), sounding a lot like Yoder from *Politics*: "The cross is not a detour or a hurdle on the way to the kingdom, nor is it even the way to the kingdom; it is the kingdom come" (61). Hauerwas comes back to this Yoderian theme a bit later:

> In effect, Jesus is nothing less than the embodiment of God's Sabbath as a reality for all people. Jesus proclaims peace as a real alternative, because he has made it possible to rest – to have the confidence that our lives are in God's hands. No longer is the sabbath one day, but the form of life of a people on the move…. We can rest in God because we are no longer driven by the assumption that we must be in control of history, that it is up to us to make things come out right. (87)

Here Hauerwas is taking eschatological trope, the "Sabbath rest for the people of God" from Hebrews 4:9, and reading it as available in the present rather than on some apocalyptic horizon. The key to entering this eschatological rest, Hauerwas intimates, is surrendering control of our lives to God, and this is prefigured in the resurrection. It involves coming to terms with being a forgiven people and thus learning to forgive, which entails a loss of control (89). "The resurrection is not a symbol or myth through which we can interpret our individual and collective dyings and risings," he explains, adding that salvation entails our willingness to interpret our history in light of Christ's, not the other way around (90).

Hauerwas's eschatology is perhaps even more a realized eschatology than Yoder's. He makes a connection between eschatology and resurrection, calling the resurrection "God's

decisive eschatological act," and he goes on to suggest that the "Christian commitment to the

protection of life" – which seems like a very this-worldly concern – "is an eschatological

commitment" (88). Consider this passage from *Against the Nations*:

> Christians are a people who believe that we have in fact seen the end; that the world has
> for all time experienced its decisive crisis in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. For
> in his death we believe that the history of the universe reached its turning point. At that
> moment in history, when the decisive conflict between God and the powers took place,
> our end was resolved in favor of God's lordship over this existence. Through Jesus' cross
> and resurrection the end has come; the kingdom has been established. Indeed it had to
> come about in such a fashion for it is a kingdom that only God could bring about. (165)

The end of the story is important, then, but primarily as a way of shaping character in the here

and now. Wells identifies key themes as patience, narrative, resurrection, and character, each of

which has eschatological significance (143-146). Resurrection relates especially to forgiveness:

> Forgiveness relates to the new time particularly in the way it concerns the past. It implies
> being at peace with one's history. This is not an ethic which tries to abstract the
> individual or the community from its history. The community and its members are able to
> claim their past, inexorably sinful, as their own, with no need to tell themselves false
> stories, because they can accept forgiveness for what they have done and not done. Only
> then can they live in peace with themselves and one another. (145)

Resurrection, Wells explains, "inaugurates the end-time and creates a people of the new time"

(145).

In some ways, and this seems in keeping with the MacIntyrian/Aristotelian stream in

Hauerwas, his eschatology is more overtly teleological than that of Yoder or the Christian

anarchists. This sense of teleology is sometimes dissociated from what otherwise seems like a

kind of perfectionism on Hauerwas's part:

> That God saves is not a pietistic claim about my status individually. Salvation is not
> fundamentally some fresh and compelling insight about my life – though such insight
> may be included. Rather, the God of Israel and Jesus offers us salvation insofar as we are
> invited to become citizens of the kingdom and thus to be participants in the history which
> God is creating. (63)

Hauerwas articulates this as a challenge to what he sees as a dangerous individualism that is inherent to modernism and by which the modern church is plagued. Stout explains this, to some extent, in terms of Hauerwas's Methodist background:

> [O]ne constant in his thinking from the beginning has been his own tradition's emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit to transform the life of the believer. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, taught that once God had "justified" the believer through the gift of faith, thus setting straight his or her personal relation to God, it remained for the believer to be made holy through the achievement of Christian perfection. This process of transformation, which is called "sanctification," depends on divine grace but also requires a serious and sustained effort of self-cultivation on the part of the justified sinner. (141)

Hauerwas's commitment to the doctrine of sanctification, Stout argues, put him at odds with the standard Protestant notion of justification through faith alone. Taken too far, this doctrine threatens to undermine the believer's role in the process of sanctification. This meant a loss of emphasis on the virtues. Bringing this situation back to balance meant, as Stout summarizes things, that in ethics Hauerwas had to shift "the balance between the right and the good. In theology it meant playing down the image of God as one who issues commands while playing up the image of God as one who both personifies goodness in the figure of Christ and graciously reshapes the character of those called to follow him" (141).

Because of this Hauerwas does not believe that violence is necessary to underwrite human solidarity. For him, belief in Christ's victory over the powers allows the church to engage the world, not in the process of helping democracy to succeed, but in the process of trying to reconcile the world to God. To withdraw, Hauerwas infers in *Peaceable Kingdom*, would be to abandon the church's calling to proclaim society's ultimate redemption in Christ (206). "The problem," he writes, "is not that there is no social ethic in the gospel but that we do not wish to practice the one that is there because it is not relevant to the social concerns determined by the world" (207). In this, Hauerwas draws upon Yoder to call for not just a rejection of society's

standards but to call into question the very way in which these kinds of ethical questions are

asked:

> Yoder has suggested rightly…that the Christian cannot participate in every form of life he finds present in his societal context. This nonparticipation cannot be simply identified with a refusal to stand against an "establishment" in the name of a more radical cause as this assumes the gospel has no word to the radical. Rather the nonparticipation of the Christian has a more radical form than the current forms of radicalism can know. For it is based on a form of life that points beyond the nature of the loyalties present in this life. The life of nonresistance is only a rational possibility as it is grounded in the hope that there is a deeper form of justice than is immediately apparent in our everyday world. (216)

Kallenberg can help us make sense of this. He points out the connection between Hauerwas's

eschatology and the rejection of violence: "Christians are those who contend that history has

already turned out right in Christ and therefore, all attempts to enforce the outcome are quite

beside the point." He then goes on to suggest, via Phillip Kenneson, that Hauerwas's

eschatological focus has more to do with Christians living in a different *time*, or different history

(Hauerwas might use "narrative") rather than a difference space, such that the charge of sectarian

withdrawal (a spatial metaphor) is rendered unintelligible (146). Wells agrees in *Transforming*

Fate into Destiny, suggesting that Hauerwas's use of territorial metaphors – colony, *polis*, etc. –

only exacerbate the problem. But he argues that would "make much more sense of Hauerwas's

approach to understand the Church as existing in a new *time*" (142). The church for Hauerwas –

and again this evinces Yoder's influence – is living out the future God has planned for the whole

world.

Hauerwas refers to apocalyptic themes explicitly in *Dispatches from the Front*. Drawing

upon the work of William Stringfellow, whom he considers ahead of his time in the way he

employed apocalyptic language, Hauerwas challenges the idea that such language, particularly

that of the "Powers," can be dismissed by demythologizing it. It is not, Hauerwas points out, as if

Stringfellow were only speaking of social forces and not of angelic powers that have fallen and become demonic (108). "Stringfellow did not want to translate the language he used into some other language in order for it to be understood," Hauerwas tells us, "instead, he wanted to help us see how apocalyptic language narrates our world in a manner that helps us not be seduced by the world's ways of doing good" (108). In summarizing Stringfellow, Hauerwas asserts that apocalyptic discourse is the proper language by which Christians might take seriously "Christ's Lordship over the public, the social, and the political" (109).

Apocalyptic is an important facet, for Hauerwas, of the way the church narrates its existence. "Apocalyptic," he writes, "is but the name we give for the struggle to live in accordance with God's good creation as those who no longer have to fear death, baptized as we are into Christ's death and resurrection" (112). It invokes the end of the story as a means of giving life and meaning to the part of the story being inhabited by the gathered community in the here and now. It is in this context that Hauerwas invokes the language of "powers":

> [T]he church becomes the necessary correlative of an apocalyptic narration of existence. It is the Eucharistic community that is the epistemological prerequisite for understanding "how things are." Only as we stand in the reality of the Eucharist can we see...that our world is not determine by the powers, that we do not have to submit to the necessities that we are told are unavoidable. (113)

Hauerwas goes on to suggest that the discourse of American public life is decidedly *non-apocalyptic*, that it tempts all Americans, including Christians, to simply acquiesce to the way things are as if such were the only way they could possibly be. By way of contrast, Hauerwas suggests, the church is able to see rightly that the "principalities and powers" are not the ultimate authority and that evil does not have the last word. To rightly narrate the world in these terms is to gain a significant freedom from forces that seek to deceive and dominate (115).

Economics

Among those forces is economics, but Hauerwas spends little time addressing economics

directly. In *Resident Aliens* he hints at an anti-capitalist bent: "Our economics correlates to our

politics. Capitalism thrives in a climate where 'rights' are the main political agenda. The church

becomes one more consumer-oriented organization, existing to encourage individual fulfillment

rather than being a crucible to engender individual conversion into the Body" (33). In one

selection from *After Christendom*, he suggests that Christians regularly disclose their income as a

practice, but he does so in the context of explaining something he suggested to a conservative

Christian college on the subject of business ethics (100). He offers a brief reflection on

capitalism in a chapter called "Resisting Capitalism" in *A Better Hope*, but as the chapter's

subtitle – "On Marriage and Homosexuality" – makes clear, the focus of the piece is not

economics as such. Hauerwas makes the connection, saying,

> Capitalism thrives on short-term commitments. The ceaseless drive for innovation is but
> the way to undercut labor's power by making the skills of the past irrelevant for
> tomorrow. Indeed, capitalism is the ultimate form of destruction, because how better to
> keep labor under control than through the scarcity produced through innovation? All the
> better that human relationships are ephemeral, because lasting commitments prove to be
> inefficient in ever-expanding markets. Against such a background the church's
> commitment to maintain marriage as lifelong monogamous fidelity may well prove to be
> one of the most powerful tactics we have to resist capitalism. (51)

Hauerwas does not offer a robust account as to why capitalism needs to be resisted, apart from its

tendency to "cultivate short-term commitments," nor does he acknowledge that capitalism

emerged in an age when lifelong marriage was the norm.

Hauerwas's critique of capitalism focuses on the corrosive effects it has on families, but

decries the fetishism of the family that characterizes conservative discourse. He explains this in

the essay "The Radical Hope in the Annunciation: Why Both Single and Married Christians

Welcome Children."[43] Hauerwas agrees with conservatives that the family is in trouble and

points to Adam Smith as the philosopher who "perhaps has had the greatest influence on our

current social and economic order" (507). Smith foresaw the decline of the extended family as an

outgrowth of a capitalism that was intended, and largely succeeded, to make people independent

(508). The problem is that liberal discourse looks to the state as a potential solution, and

Hauerwas finds this problematic, quipping that looking to the state to safeguard the future of the

family is "to have the fox guard the henhouse" (509). The state as much as any other institution

is supplanting the family and thereby weakening it (509).

Here Hauerwas really does sound conservative; this line of thinking parallels that of

Robert Nisbet, whom Hauerwas mentions briefly in this essay: he invokes Nisbet saying that that

family cannot be sustained "on solely interpersonal and psychological grounds" (510).[44]

Nevertheless, Hauerwas is critical of what he calls a "communitarian" response that seeks to

shore up intermediary structures, which is the point of Nisbet's *The Quest for Community* (such

intermediary structured are also championed by Milbank – see next chapter). "To call the family

an intermediate institution," Hauerwas argues, "is to have already accepted the presuppositions

of a legal-rationalistic social order that presupposed the quest to make all relationships exchange-

relations" (509-510). This puts conservatives in a double bind, for while they champion "family

values" and oppose state intervention, they nevertheless support the very economic order that

created this crisis in the first place (509).

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[43] In *The Hauerwas Reader*, pp. 505-518.

[44] A 1990 edition of Nisbet's *The Quest for Community* is sponsored by the right-wing
Intercollegiate Studies Institute. It is part of the ICI's series of "Essential Texts for the
Conservative Mind" and boasts an introduction by Ross Douthat – but it is important to note that
Nisbet's conservatism is of the traditionalist (Burkean) variety and much less the neoliberalism
that dominates the American right in our day.

Hauerwas's answer, however, does not focus on the family as such; he points out that the Christian calling poses its own challenge to family loyalty (511). He suggests that having children necessitates a willingness to relinquish control of our economic destinies, and that this is something positive for Christian communities. He goes on to suggest that the poor, especially, might have something to say about this: "The poor go on having children in our society in a manner that those with money seem to think irresponsible. But I wonder if the poor are not prophetic just to the extent they understand the having of children is not a matter of our being able to make sure the world into which children are born will be safe" (517). He feels our lives are economically determined, or presupposed to be so, in a way that is antithetical to Christian commitment.

Hauerwas addresses economic issues more directly in a 2010 op-ed piece in the Australian Broadcasting Company's *Religion and Ethics* webzine. He does so completely in terms of virtue ethics, focusing not on the distribution of wealth but on the emergence of greed as a vice. "The desire for money may be an indication of greed," he writes, "but I want to argue that greed is a much more subtle vice than simply the desire to be rich" (2).[45] Greed, for Hauerwas, is not a response to a *need* so much as it is constructed upon *desire* for more. This desire, he explains, is rooted in a lack of security, which is a theological problem: "Greed presumes and perpetuates a world of scarcity and want – a world in which there is never 'enough.' But a world shaped by scarcity is a world that cannot trust that God has given all that we need" (29). This, he suggests, might explain why greed seems to get more press in cultures that are relatively wealthy, particularly as those cultured gravitated toward the use of money. Hauerwas hints at but does not specify a fetish dynamic in which greed becomes a desire for more money as opposed

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[45] Citations are paragraph numbers.

to a need for things that money can buy. Hauerwas also notes that it was the rise of monasteries

that made it possible to identify vice in the form of the "seven deadly sins." This, Hauerwas

explains, "is an important reminder that our very ability to name sin is a theological

achievement. No less importantly, monasticism demonstrates the necessity of the existence of a

community for the identification of the subtly of sin" (6).

The problem, then, is that if greed is a vice, even a "deadly sin," it would seem to follow

that the Western economy is predicated on vice. More to the point, it requires reconstructing

greed as something good, a position that Hauerwas cannot abide:

> I am not convinced that understanding greed, even in a limited way, as a good is a good
> idea. There is no doubt that, for those shaped by the habits of modern societies,
> acquisitiveness is assumed to be a character trait that is indispensable for continuous and
> limitless economic growth. But from such a standpoint, the idea that a lower standard of
> living could be considered a viable alternative to the economics driven policies of liberal
> democratic societies is almost unfathomable. (par. 12)

That such an alternative is unthinkable is, for Hauerwas, evidence of our spiritual poverty. We

want more because we do not faithfully rely on God to provide: "Without this faithful clinging to

God, we engage in a self-absorbed pursuit of external goods in order to quell our inner

emptiness. And when those goods fail we turn on others, as well as ourselves, to hide the

emptiness of our lives" (15). He suggests that we "are a people harassed by greed just to the

extent our greed leads us to engage in unsatisfying modes of work so that we may buy things that

we have been harassed into believing will satisfy us" (par. 19). The harried pace of life about

which many of us complain is but a symptom – and here Hauerwas comes the closest to actually

mentioning capitalism though he does not do so – of the our economic system itself (20). But the

problem, for Hauerwas, is not the system, but character.

Hauerwas's answer is the cultivation of virtue. But the particular virtue he calls for is an

unexpected one: studiousness. Drawing on the work of Peter Griffiths in *Intellectual Appetite: A*

Theological Grammar, Hauerwas notes that curiosity was considered a vice in the pre-modern

era because it presumed a desire to seek unique knowledge and keep it for oneself. It "was a kind

of jealousy, a possessiveness, whereby the curious desired to take control over their objects of

knowledge" (23). It is, Hauerwas explains, the intellectual expression of greed. Studiousness is

the counter to curiosity, in this vein, because "the studious accept as a gift what they have come

to know, which means they assume that which they know is known-in-common, thereby making

possible a shared life" (27). This willingness to share is what can make the difference between an

economics of greed and one of generosity, inasmuch as "whether or not we possessed by our

possessions can only be determined to the extent we are ready to give away that which we have"

(28).

> How do we learn this generosity? Hauerwas claims that we learn it in the Eucharist:

> The Eucharist not only is the proclamation of abundance, but it is the enactment of
> abundance. In the Eucharist we discover that we cannot use Christ up. In the Eucharist
> we discover that the more the body and blood of Christ is shared, the more there is to be
> shared. The Eucharist, therefore, is the way the Christian Church learns to understand
> why generosity rather than greed can and must shape our economic relations. (31-32)

In *In Good Company*, Hauerwas writes that the sharing of the Eucharist can help to redefine how

Christians think about ownership. The bringing of an offering to the Lord's table can challenge

capitalistic presumptions about property – and this does begin to sound a bit anarchistic

("Property is theft" Proudhon famously quipped). Interestingly, in both the United Methodist

Church which is Hauerwas's background and the Episcopal Church he has been a part of in

recent years (as well as in the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation to which Hauerwas is

alluding) the Eucharist is not shared, precisely, in the same sense that Yoder affirms the

Eucharist as economic sharing itself, but is distributed by a member of the clergy.

A similar argument is put forth by William Cavanaugh, who studied under Hauerwas. In *Being Consumed,* Cavanaugh addresses ideas of scarcity and abundance, drawing on Adam Smith for the capitalist explanation. The market "tells a story" of a future abundance, "an eschatology in which abundance for all is just around the corner," and of "scarcity miraculously turned into abundance by consumption itself, a contemporary loaves-and-fishes saga" (93). The Eucharist, by contrast, "tells another story about hunger and consumption" (94). Cavanaugh also gestures toward anarchism, if weakly:

> If it is true that the modern state is but a false copy of the Body of Christ, then it should be obvious that state power is the last thing the Church should want. To overcome the privatization of Christianity through attempts, direct or indirect, to influence the state is worse than futile as long as what is meant by "politics" remains centripetal. Fortunately, in the making of the Body of Christ, Christians participate in a practice which envisions a proper "anarchy," not in the sense that it proposes chaos, but in that it challenges the false order of the state. The Eucharist is the heart of true *religio*, a practice of binding us to the Body of Christ which is our salvation. (47)

As with Hauerwas, the emphasis for Cavanaugh seems to be on ritual enactment as a means of performing membership in an alternative political body. There is also a sense in which, for Hauerwas, the Eucharist levels the economic playing field because all around the world, the rich no less than the poor come empty handed to receive the Eucharist. Even still, there is a contrast here to Yoder, for whom the proper Eucharist *is* economic sharing. For Hauerwas, the Eucharist *teaches us about* economic sharing – more accurately, for Hauerwas the Eucharist teaches us to embrace abundance. In Yoder's ecclesiology, the religious subject learns generosity by learning to share, whereas in Hauerwas's vision the religious subject learns generosity by ritually enacting a limitless supply of Christ's body.

Ecclesiology

The church is the community in which this ritual reenactment takes place; it is the eschatological community living out a new ethics in anticipation of Christ's coming. In *After Christendom*, Hauerwas draws on Certeau's distinction between strategic and tactical to argue that the church is (or should be) the latter and not the former (18). He also, like Yoder, argues for the recognition of the church as a political entity unto itself, writing that, "questions of the truth or falsity of Christian convictions cannot even be addressed until Christians recover the church as a political community necessary for our salvation" (26). This is also connected to narrative:

> The church was not and is not a people gathered together in order to remember an impressive but dead founder. Rather the church is those gathered from the nations to testify to the resurrected lord. Without the church the world has literally no hope of salvation since the church is necessary for the world to know it is part of a story that it cannot know without the church. (36)

Not only is the church political, Hauerwas notes, but "Christians are always tempted toward theocracy because we believe what God has done in Israel and Jesus is the only true politics" (39). Wells offers a helpful explanation of what Hauerwas means by political, suggesting that there are at least three uses of the term:

> The first form of politics [for the church] is the politics that takes place within the church itself, between Christians committed to imitating Christ as a community…. The second form of politics is that which takes place as the Church interacts with the world in which it lives. Hauerwas can be seen as sectarian here...since he insists that the Church should always be present *as the Church*, and should be cautious about translating its distinctive narrative into supposedly common ethical foundations…. The third form of politics, how different parties in the world outside the Church relate to one another, does not particularly interest Hauerwas. (99)

Wells goes on to argue, as we shall see later, that Hauerwas is not the sectarian his critics make him out to be and which he seems to be at times. What is important at the moment is Hauerwas's articulation of the church as an *alternative* politics – and, in Hauerwas's thinking, the only true politics.

One succinct expression of Hauerwas's ecclesiology can be found in *Community of Character*:

1. The social significance of the Gospel requires the recognition of the narrative structure of Christian convictions for the life of the church.
2. Every social ethic involves a narrative, whether it is concerned with the formulation of basic principles of social organization and/or concrete policy alternatives.
3. The ability to provide an adequate account of our existence is the primary test of the truthfulness of a social ethic.
4. Communities formed by a truthful narrative must provide the skills necessary to transform fate into destiny so that the unexpected, especially as it comes in the form of strangers, can be welcomed as a gift.
5. The primary social task of the church is to be itself – that is, a people who have been formed by a story that provides them with the skills for negotiating the danger of this existence, trusting in God's promise of redemption.
6. Christian social ethics can only be done from the perspective of those who do not seek to control national or world history but who are content to live "out of control."
7. Christian social ethics depends on the development of leadership in the church that can trust and depend on the diversity of gifts in the community.
8. For the church to be, rather to have, a social ethic means we must recapture the social significance of common behavior, such as kindness, friendship, and the formation of families.
9. In our attempt to control society Christians in America have too readily accepted liberalism as a social strategy appropriate to the Christian story.
10. The church does not exist to provide an ethos for democracy or any other form of social organization, but stands as a political alternative to every nation, witnessing to the kind of social life possible for those that have been formed by the story of Christ. (10-12)

Thus we can see the ways in which ecclesiology, for Hauerwas, is connected to narrative, virtue, and the cultivation of character. It is also connected to nonviolence. As he explains in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, the key to peace is a kind of humility that leads us to relinquish our claims to be able to *make* peace at all. Instead, "peace is a gift of God that comes only by our being a community formed around a crucified savior – a savior who teaches us how to be peaceful in a world in rebellion against its true Lord" (12).

The phrase "a community formed around" is crucial for Hauerwas, as it is in community that we forge the virtues Hauerwas believes are necessary to the task of ethical living. Hauerwas ignores Yoder's emphasis on Jew/Gentile relations in discussing justification; justification in Hauerwas's treatment becomes a reminder of "what God has done for us by providing us with a path to follow," whereas sanctification, or being made holy, means "the formation of our lives in truth, since only such lives have the capacity for peace" (94). Truth, of course, means accepting and living into the Christian story. Hauerwas also argues that truthfulness and nonviolence are intimately connected; violence often stems from falsehood or a failure to assess and articulate the full truth (133).

Communities of virtue, by which Hauerwas means the church, are necessary because "to know and worship God rightly we must have our desires transformed. They must be transformed – we must be trained to desire rightly – because, bent by sin, we have little sense of what it is we should rightly want" (14). In this, he almost recapitulates the Calvinist doctrine of regeneration – that even our rational capacity to choose is corrupted by original sin and thus we are unable to make a choice for salvation until prepared to do so by the Holy Spirit. Hauerwas neither uses that specific language nor takes the argument that far, but rather places the emphasis on the creation and maintenance of communities capable of providing this sort of training. This is the heart of Hauerwas's ecclesiology.[46]

Hauerwas's emphasis on virtue and community challenges mainstream evangelicalism. His account of initiation into the kind of community he calls for stands at odds in some ways with the evangelical emphasis on the conversion experience, and Hauerwas's rhetoric speaks to this rather directly:

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[46]This is the central argument, for instance, in Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*.

Our call is not a general admonition to be good, but a concrete and definite call to take up the way of life made possible by God's redemptive action for us in the cross. To be redeemed…is nothing less than to learn our place in God's history, to be part of God's people. To locate ourselves within that history and people does not mean that we must have some special experience of personal salvation. Redemption, rather, is a change in which we accept the invitation to become part of God's kingdom, a kingdom through which we acquire a character befitting one who has heard God's call. (33)

Again, notice the language of "character," a word that Hauerwas often uses in conjunction with

the cultivation of the virtues, as he does in the following passage:

The gospel is not a "truth" or a philosophical theory that can be appropriated by an individual in the hope of giving some meaning to his or her life. On the contrary, we find ourselves part of a community with a very particular kind of citizenship. As citizens our self-understanding may change, but this occurs only as we acquire the virtues necessary to sustain a community of peaceable people through history. Likewise, Christian ethics must serve and be formed by the Christian community, a community whose interest lies in the formation of character and whose perduring history provides the community we need to act in conformity with that character. (33)

Here Hauerwas connects a number of dots, but he also introduces another idea wherein we begin

to see the radical implications of his ecclesiology: believers have a different kind of *citizenship*,

one that runs counter to prevailing "secular" ideals of citizenship, or at least stands as an

alternative. In fact, the church should exist precisely *as* such an alternative in Hauerwas's

thinking. Christian ethics is primarily for Christians, he points out, but it can serve as an

example: "Christians must attempt to be nothing less than a people whose ethic shines as a

beacon to others illuminating how life should be lived well" (34).

Hauerwas points out that ethics is fundamentally social and argues that Christian ethics is

specifically for the church, and therefore presupposes the church as the basis for ethical

reflection: "The fact that Christian ethics begins and ends with story requires a corresponding

community existing across time." Hauerwas clarifies this in *Against the Nations*:

The Kingdom of God is the hope of the people whom God has called out among all the nations. The question of ecclesiology, therefore, precedes strategies for social action. Without the kingdom ideal, the church loses its identity-forming hope; without the

church, the kingdom ideal loses its concrete character. Once abstracted from the community it presumes the kingdom ideal can be used to underwrite any conception of the just society. (113)

The church is not coterminous with God's kingdom, but points to it and serves as a foretaste of it. But we must be careful, he warns, lest the church be taken captive by other social agendas, whether they seem to be benign or malevolent. Sacrificing what Hauerwas believes is (or should be) the integrity of the Church's witness is not, for Hauerwas, a risk worth taking:

> I am challenging the very idea that Christian social ethics is primarily an attempt to make the world more peaceable or just. Put starkly, the first social ethical task of the church is to be the church – the servant community. Such a claim may well sound self-serving until we remember that what makes the church the church is its faithful manifestation of the peaceable kingdom in the world. As such the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic. (*Peaceable Kingdom* 99)

The world, for Hauerwas, needs the church in order to know that it is the world. It needs the example of unity in the church in order to see clearly the arbitrariness of ethnic and national distinctions. It needs to see, Hauerwas argues, what peaceability looks like in order to know that its social orders are predicated on violence (100). "Church and world are thus relational concepts – neither is intelligible without the other," he explains, "They are companions on a journey that makes it impossible for one to survive without the other, though each constantly seeks to do so" (101).

Hauerwas believes that the church, by virtue of its witness to the truth and the potential unpopularity of such a witness, must be prepared to be on the move (102). This latter reflection is suggestive in some ways of Eller's "caravanning." There is also a considerable focus, as one might expect, on the virtues: the church "must, above all, be a people of virtue – not simply any virtue, but the virtues necessary for remembering and telling the story of a crucified savior" (103). As Wells explains Hauerwas's ecclesiology, the church

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seeks to reflect the character of the God revealed in the Christian story. In order to do so, it develops particular *habits* and *practices* modeled on its understanding of *virtue*. Just as one needs to study and train if one is to be a medical doctor, or do an apprenticeship if one is to be a good bricklayer, or to learn skills of community-forming if one is to be a scholar in a healthy university, so one needs to practice with experts if one is to become a Christian disciple. (129)

Hauerwas also suggests, *pace* Yoder and the Christian anarchists, that "just as in other institutions, the church draws on and requires patterns of authority that derive from human needs for status, belonging, and direction," even though his overall outlook seems in some places to have been cribbed straight from Yoder himself: "As Christians…we seek not so much to be effective as to be faithful – we, thus, cannot do that which promises 'results' when the means are unjust" (104). He elaborates:

We must be a people who have learned to be patient in the face of injustice. But it may be objected: Surely that is too easily said if you are not the ones suffering from injustice. Precisely, but that does not mean that we ought to legitimate the use of force to overcome injustice. Such legitimation often comes from the attempt to have justice without risking the self, as when we ask the "state" or the "revolution" to see that justice is done, but in a manner that does not significantly affect our own material position. If we are to be a hopeful and patient people in a world of injustice, however, we cannot just identify with the "cause" of the poor, we must be like them poor and powerless. (105)

He admits that this kind of resistance to injustice "may appear to the world as foolish and ineffective for it may involve something so small as refusing to pay a telephone tax to support a war, but that does not mean it is not resistance" (106). This reference to taxes is most likely an arbitrary one, but it gives a foothold on some of the differences between Hauerwas and, say, Vernard Eller, who was an outspoken critic of those who withheld taxes. There does not seem to be in Hauerwas much of an equivalent to Eller's insistence that one might pay taxes "anarchically" or to Yoder's "revolutionary subordination."

Hauerwas frequently defines the church against what the church has become in liberal democracies, and seems eager to narrate the church not only as an alternative politics, but

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specifically as a rival tradition to liberal democracy. As Kallenberg writes, "I am not convinced that Hauerwas ever quite escapes the temptation to specify ways in which Christianity is demonstrably superior to rival traditions." This leads Hauerwas to contextualize his ecclesiology in terms of a specific call to stand against liberal democracy. "I seek," Hauerwas writes, "not for the church to be a community, but rather to be a body constituted by disciplines that create the capacity to resist the disciplines of the body associated with the modern nation-state and, in particular, the economic habits that support that state" (*In Good* Company, 26). In a chapter from *After Christendom?* Called "The Politics of the Church," Hauerwas complains that the church has become concerned primarily with a kind of caregiving, helping to ameliorate the effects of modern life, but that this emphasis on care "lacks the rationale to build the church as a community capable of standing against the powers we confront" (93).

This, for Hauerwas, is too individualistic – care is about understanding the individual and helping him or her make sense of life, not about disciplining people into a particular body with its own practices and politics (95). In particular, he argues, the church lacks any sense that people must be trained to be Christians, and that this training is part of the mission of the church (97). Instead, the church leaves this training, to the extent that it takes place, to the educational institutions of liberalism, which seeks to teach students to think for themselves. Hauerwas finds this problematic, writing,

> What must be said is that most students in our society do not have minds well enough trained to be able to think – period. A central pedagogical task is to tell students that they do not yet have minds worth making up. Thus training is so important, because training involves the formation of the self through submission to authority that will, if done well, provide people with the virtues necessary to be able to make reasoned judgment. (98)

Hauerwas also seems particularly concerned that the church not necessarily to favor democracy – instead, Christians must be "particularly sensitive to the misleading assumptions that

democracies are intrinsically more just because they provide more freedom than other kinds of societies." Freedom, Hauerwas explains, can too easily become a distraction; the real question for him is what kind of freedom is afforded and what might be done with it (111).

Justice, too, can be become a distraction as Hauerwas sees it, and he likewise encourages discernment lest the pursuit of justice be used to justify the use of coercion or violence:

> The problem is not that the kingdom brought by Christ is too idealistic to be realized. The problem is just the opposite. The kingdom is present in Jesus Christ. It is thus the ultimate realism that calls into question our vague ideals of freedom, equality and peace. We do not learn what the kingdom is by learning of freedom and equality; we must first experience the kingdom if we are to know what kind of freedom and what kind of equality we should desire. Our freedom is that of service, and our equality is that before God, and neither can be achieved through the coercive efforts of idealists who would transform the word in their image. (113)

He concedes that the argument for limited use of force to prevent "a worse evil" is strong, but ultimately comes down on the side of nonviolence, at least partially because once violence is admitted as a possible alternative, it tends, Hauerwas feels, to foreclose on attempts to find nonviolent solutions. True justice, he explains, "never comes through violence, nor can it be based on violence. It can only be based on truth, which has no need to resort to violence to secure its own existence" (115). For all of this, however, Hauerwas seems short on practical descriptions of what the Christian life together might properly look like. As Wells notes, "What is missing in Hauerwas is a lengthier discussion of these themes. If the Church's first social-ethical task is to be itself, one needs to know more what 'being itself' involves…. Once the focus has settled on the internal working of the Christian community, more needs to be said on how that community works" (101).

Against Liberalism

Jeffrey Stout, author of *Democracy and Tradition* and one of Hauerwas's consistent critics, has deep concerns about the effect that Hauerwas has on Christians vis-à-vis their role in democratic society. More to the point, Stout believes that the new traditionalism contributes to a resentment of the wider culture that is unhealthy, and that Hauerwas, as one of the leading theologians in America, is to be held particularly accountable: "There is no doubt that the main effect of his antiliberal rhetoric, aside from significantly widening his audience, is to undercut Christian identification with democracy. No theologian has done more to inflame Christian resentment of secular political culture" (141).

Hauerwas, as we saw above, came to terms with Yoder's pacifism in order to import Yoder's ecclesiology into his ethical project. For Stout, that ethical project is compromised by Hauerwas's MacIntyrian bent. He explains:

> MacIntyre's traditionalist rhetoric depends on a traditional-modern dualism, the intended effect of which is to eliminate ambivalence in one's response to modernity. "Modernity" and "liberalism" become almost interchangeable categories, two names for a scene dominated by vicious individualism in the epoch after virtue ceases to matter. When this rhetoric is conjoined with Yoder's conception of the church, the result, regardless of Hauerwas's intentions, is an especially rigid form of church-world dualism. This, I take it, is at the root of what Hauerwas's critics are complaining about. *One cannot stand in a church conceived in Yoder's terms, while describing the world surrounding it in the way MacIntyre describes liberal society, without implicitly adopting a stance that is rigidly dualistic in the same respects that rightly worried Hauerwas in 1974.* A defense of this stance that focuses solely on Yoder's conception of the church begs the question. (149, emphasis original)

Stout is justifiably concerned about the effects of Hauerwas's rhetoric and where that places Hauerwas in a larger conversion about democracy and the secular. It is not altogether certain, however, that Hauerwas shares these concerns.

Stout feels that Hauerwas's ethics is too narrow, and that it fails to take into account the full range of human experience. This is especially true, Stout feels, of the pacifism Hauerwas learned from Yoder, claiming that "to advocate [pacifism] at a time when cells of terrorists are

actively plotting the murder of one's fellow citizens is to place those citizens at risk" (159). Stout

accuses Hauerwas of being selective in his ethical reading of the Bible and finds him inconsistent

for taking a hard stand on pacifism but not, to Stout's knowledge, on remarriage after divorce or

the difficulty for the rich to enter the kingdom of God (160). Moreover, Hauerwas's ethics is not

strong enough on social justice for Stout's taste:

> In its Hauerwasian form, virtue's rejection of the way of the world leads to an unpleasant
> dilemma. On the one hand, the stronger its claim to represent virtue as distinct from the
> way of the world, the more quickly it degenerates into a form of "conceit" that cannot
> honestly be sustained. The actual church does not look much like a community of virtue,
> when judged by pacifist standards. A large percentage of those who call themselves
> Christians favor capital punishment, the possession of nuclear weapons, and using force
> to defend their nation against terrorists. On the other hand, admitting that the community
> of virtue itself exhibits the vices it accuses the world of exhibiting causes the substance of
> virtue to evaporate into mere ideality, leaving it "a virtue in name only, which lacks
> substantial content." Either way, it is in danger of collapsing into something it purports to
> criticize. This is why Hauerwas has difficulty in articulating the "for" of his position as
> clearly as he articulates the "against." An extended, sensitive treatment of Dorothy Day
> and her politics would make the "for" both clearer and more concrete…. Mere pacifism –
> in which the memory of distant martyrs and the vision of the peaceable kingdom are
> divorced from a visible practice of social justice – is "like the combatant who, in the
> conflict, is only concerned with keeping his sword bright." (161)

Stout is encouraging Hauerwas to abandon the MacIntyrian antiliberal polemics and couch his

social ethics in different terms, especially if he wishes to avoid charges of sectarianism (162).

Stout is correct to try to locate Hauerwas in a larger conversation about the viability of

liberal democracy. Moreover, Stout's largely implicit critique that Hauerwas has not successfully

escaped the discourse of liberal democracy itself is an apt one. But the issue of sectarianism is

one in which Stout seems to have missed the point. Hauerwas claims not to be sectarian only to

the extent that "sectarian" is used as a synonym for "irrelevant," or a way of denying religious

voices access to public discussion. Hauerwas insists upon employing religious language in the

public square (to which Stout is not opposed), but he can hardly be said to be withdrawn or

reclusive. Michael Northcott writes, in *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire*, that

> after September 11 Hauerwas was one of the very few well-known public voices in America calling for a nonviolent response. Hauerwas spoke and wrote, argued and debated the reasons for his pacifist stance up and down the East Coast, in magazines, journals, books, lectures, and on the internet. The idea that a theologian who goes to so much trouble to put in the public domain a set of extremely unpopular arguments for the legitimacy of pacifism is a sectarian, or is commending a withdrawal from the world, is laughable. (132)

Hauerwas himself responds to the charge of sectarianism in *A Better Hope*: "I have no wish to have Christians withdraw from service to their neighbors, even their liberal neighbors…. I have never sought to justify Christian withdrawal from social and political involvement; I have just wanted us to be involved as Christians" (24). Wells agrees: "Hauerwas's argument is that it is the Constantinian Church, rather than the community of character, that is sectarian. The Constantinian Church, like an army, marks out a territory it can defend, considers the exterior in terms of targets and threats, and then makes forays across the boundaries" (116). Robert Brimlow, on the other hand, argues that Hauerwas is not sectarian *enough*, suggesting in "Solomon's Porch: The Church as Christian Ghetto"[47] that Hauerwas's desire for Christians to "be involved as Christians" is inconsistent with the rest of his message: "[T]he incoherence of Hauerwas's position is that in an effort to change the public policy of the state, the church must…translate what we have to say to an atheistic world and adopt the atheism of our audience for the sake of the common good" (115).

This is precisely the point at which Stout takes issue with sectarian logic, inasmuch as the new traditionalism, in his view, has misinterpreted liberal democracy at least in part by taking at face value some of liberalism's ardent – and, Stout believes, misguided – defenders such as

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[47] Brimlow's contribution to the 2000 collection *Church as Counterculture*.

Rawls and Rorty. Such contractarians, as Stout calls them, offer both a description of democratic discourse and a set of normative implications drawn from that description. "I worry," Stout writes, "that religious individuals who accept the descriptive component of contractarianism as a faithful reconstruction of what the norms of democratic political culture involve will, understandably, view this as a reason for withdrawing from that culture" (75). But it is not the case for Stout that democracy requires the bracketing of all religious perspectives. In fact, he argues similarly to Hauerwas, that religious and other particular perspectives should inform the democratic conversation precisely *as* religious perspectives, *in* their particularity:

> I oppose the contractarians and the new traditionalists on the most important point they share. For they both hold, as I do not, that the political culture of our democracy implicitly requires the policing or self-censorship of religious expression in the political arena. If Rawls is right, contractarian theory may require this. But the descriptive component of his contractarianism is only one competing account of what the ethical life of democracy involves. If its picture of our culture is distorted, then we are not already implicitly committed to the social contract featured in that picture. The picture neither supports the contractarian argument for restraint, nor provides reason for the traditionalist to reject the political culture it depicts. (84)

Hauerwas agrees, as shown in this passage from *A Better Hope*: "If this is a 'pluralist' society, a description I find far too complimentary, then I see no reason that Christians (any more than Jews or secularists) should be asked to put their convictions in some allegedly neutral language in order to talk with one another" (27).

Stout and Hauerwas seem to be arguing past one another inasmuch as they are not working with the same definition of "sectarian." For Stout, "sectarian" means a refusal to participate in the democratic process for the achievement of social goods, and his comments on pacifism suggest that he assents to the necessity of force as the ultimate guarantor of that process – which is to say, the outcomes of democratic deliberation are underwritten by the threat of force, even if putatively only as a last resort. Thus, in certain ways, pacifism implies a rejection

of that process and is therefore sectarian. These would seem to be terms on which Stout and

Brimlow agree – but they are terms that Hauerwas explicitly rejects; as we saw in the discussion

of Hauerwas's eschatology, he does not believe that human solidarity must be or even can be

secured through violence.

Moreover, against the charge of sectarianism Hauerwas contends that the advocacy of an

alternative to the dominant social forms of the age *is itself* an engagement with wider society. As

Kallenberg explains, "The existence of the christocentric, eschatological community is salvific

because it exposes all totalitarian (hence idolatrous) claims – such as can be heard in liberalism's

insistence that political relations are necessarily coercive – as deceptive since in this new

community a real alternative exists" (147). Nigel Biggar, in "Is Stanley Hauerwas Sectarian?"

explains things this way:

> It is true that Hauerwas does not believe that the primary task of the Christian church is to
> support the American liberal democratic status quo. It is true that he does believe that the
> Church's primary task is to be faithful to its own theological norms of practice and
> speech, and to grow in accordance with them. But this does not amount to irresponsible
> indifference to the fate of the world and disengagement from the task of promoting its
> good. On the contrary, as Hauerwas sees it, it is the only way in which the church can
> serve the world properly. (142-143)

It is Hauerwas's rejection of the terms in which responsibility and engagement are

conventionally defined that Stout reads as unhelpfully sectarian, such that Hauerwas's

protestations to the contrary are confusing to him. It is also Hauerwas's rejection of those terms

that allows Brimlow to find his sectarianism lacking. This is complicated, however, by

Hauerwas's antiliberal rhetoric, which Stout takes to task. Hauerwas is mistaken to think that, in

his criticisms of liberalism, he has managed to escape the larger conversation upon which

liberalism is predicated; if he opposes facets of what he considers to be the liberal project, he

does not succeed in being as anti-democratic as his rhetoric would suggest. At points he seems to

recognize this, such as in *A Better Hope* where he worries that capitulation to liberalism and the quest to become powerful would leave the church with "nothing distinctive to say as Christians about the challenges facing this society" (25).

Hauerwas's antiliberalism is a rhetorical device intended to shore up the church's fundamental difference from the world. Virtue, nonviolence, and narrative are characteristic of this counterposition, and they each address a specific liability of what Hauerwas reads as the liberal project: the loss of virtue, the predication of liberal theory upon violence, and the falsity of the liberal narrative. Hauerwas's project is certainly, as Stout points out, antiliberal, and although Stout challenges Hauerwas's claims to be antidemocratic, Hauerwas himself sees a difference – articulated in a jacket cover blurb for Stout's book, no less – between "advocates of democracy and those who hold substantive Christian convictions." To challenge liberalism and democracy in a liberal democratic society is to take up a radical position. It seems, however, less anarchistic than Yoder's, and it does not function quite so much by way of displacement; Hauerwas's primary concern seems to be the construction of Christianity as a rival tradition to liberal democracy.

Chapter 4: John Milbank

The Church is hierarchically commanded…not by people but by signs, supremely the signs-become-what-they-represent that are the body and blood of Christ…This means, not "theocracy" in the sense of men claiming to rule with divine legitimacy, but the very opposite, since all claims to legitimate sovereignty are theocratically tainted. It means rather the gradual end of human self-government, a kind of ordered anarchy.

-from *The Future of Love*

Introduction

"Once, there was no 'secular,'" writes Anglican theologian John Milbank in *Theology and Social Theory*, "and the secular was not merely latent, waiting to fill more space with the steam of the 'purely human,' when the pressure of the sacred was relaxed. Instead there was the single community of Christendom, with its dual aspects of *sacerdotium* and *regnum*" – that is, Christendom served both a priestly and kingly function (9). Milbank explains that the word *saeculum*, from which we get our word "secular," did not mean a separate space outside of the church or a sphere over which the church had no influence, but simply the time in between Christ's ascension and return – the interval, as Milbank describes it, "between fall and *eschaton* where coercive justice, private property, and impaired natural reason must make shift to cope with the unredeemed effects of sinful humanity" (9). The eventual construal of the secular as a discrete neutral sphere and its effect on Western thinking is one of the targets of Milbank's criticism.

Milbank is most commonly associated with the theological movement known as Radical Orthodoxy. *Theology and Social Theory* is often taken to be a seminal work in the movement, but this is a bit of an oversimplification. James K.A. Smith, in *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, points out that Radical Orthodoxy is "not a 'Milbank movement,'" nor is *Theology and Social*

Theory "an intentional manifesto for the movement," but he recognizes Milbank and Radical

Orthodoxy are closely aligned (34). Smith's description of Radical Orthodoxy is helpful in

locating Milbank within it. Smith uses a cartographical metaphor, "mapping" Radical Orthodoxy

by tracing its origin in relation to several centers of theological thinking: Tübingen, New Haven,

Amsterdam, Cambridge, and Durham, NC. He draws other cities on this map that represent

complementary or even competing iterations of these schools of thought:

> [T]he project associated with Tübingen emigrated to Union Seminary in New York and
> the University of Chicago…; the Barthian project in New Haven's "Yale School" is
> something of an immigrant community from Basel that has a competing but related
> vision in contemporary Princeton; the Amsterdam vision is now best articulated in Grand
> Rapids and Toronto; the "Duke school" finds a certain correlate at the University of
> Virginia; and as [Radical Orthodoxy] is wont to claim, Cambridge has a deep affinity
> with the Paris of the *nouvelle théologie* (Henri de Lubac) and, to a degree, Jean-Luc
> Marion. (35)

Smith associates Tübingen with "correlationism," a theological project that seeks to make sense

of Christian revelation in ostensibly universal terms (35). "Central to the Tübingen liberal

project," Smith writes, "is a confidence in the neutrality of the 'secular' sciences such as

philosophy, sociology, and economics, which are then synthesized with Christian revelation as

part of a mediating project" (36). This is part of what Milbank challenges.

Milbank offers his own description of Radical Orthodoxy in his essay "The Programme

of Radical Orthodoxy."[48] He points out that in Britain Radical Orthodoxy is seen as "an

extreme, frightening movement," whereas in the U.S. it is seen more as mediation, hewing a line

between Catholicism and Protestantism, between neo-orthodoxy and natural theology (34).

Milbank contrasts the idea of a "secure but limited" human reason to which faith is the antithesis,

a position he associates with Barth specifically and post-Enlightenment thought more generally,

with Radical Orthodoxy's refusal to bifurcate reason and faith, seeing faith instead as an

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[48] In *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Inquiry*, pp. 33-45.

intensification of reason – and reason, likewise, as suffused with and thus not independent of faith. "If reason is already Christological," he writes, "then inversely, faith, until the eschaton, remains dispersed in all the different discourses of human reason" (34). This also means rejecting the sacred/secular divide:

> For Radical Orthodoxy, the sacral interpenetrates everywhere, and if it descends from above, this descent is also manifest through its rising up from below. Thus to say there is only the sacred is equally to say that, for now, within the *saeculum*, there is only the secular, which is nonetheless only human time through its sacral intimations. (37)

This interpenetration means that there is not, epistemologically or socially, any recourse to sectarianism, inasmuch as there is no neutral place to start from or any purely Christian or religious space to which one might retreat (37).

The danger, for Milbank, is that the separation of the finite from the infinite – the rejection of Aquinas' participatory ontology by modern and then postmodern modes of thought – leads inevitably to nihilism. The postmodern is preferable to Milbank partially because there are resources in postmodern thought for a critique of modernism, but primarily inasmuch as postmodern thought is forthright about this anti-humanism and nihilism (41). One of Milbank's primary theses is that only the theological can properly oppose nihilism, a charge that has been taken up by Radical Orthodoxy and joined with what he calls an "unrepentant, but not priggishly uncritical, left-wing political commitments" (42). This he calls the "theological turn against nihilism" (43). Milbank also suggests that Radical Orthodoxy is a via media between the "Anglo-Saxon linguistic obsession" (in which he includes Derrida, owing to Derrida's popularity among Anglophones) on the one hand and French (particularly Catholic) phenomenology on the other, unable to fully affirm either because they are ultimately too agnostic and cannot successfully mount a challenge against nihilism (43).

Smith traces the intellectual origins of Radical Orthodoxy backward from the postmodern

thought that it engages and challenges. "On the one hand," he writes,

> it is a theological movement that speaks in the idiom of contemporary continental
> thought, engaging in theological reflection in the language of French phenomenology and
> critical theory; on the other hand, it has taken on such thought in the polemical sense,
> seeking to demonstrate the paucity of postmodern nihilism and then to recover an
> alternative, Christian vision by returning to decidedly premodern sources (without
> wanting simply to recover postmodernity). So while Radical Orthodoxy speaks the
> language of postmodernism – at times to the point of obscurantism, some have charged –
> it is at root a critique of postmodernism, or at least certain incarnations of such. (43)

From there Smith goes back further to the *nouvelle théologie* of Henri de Lubac and Yves

Congar among others. This, Smith explains, afforded Radical Orthodoxy a foil to German

theologian Karl Barth, whom they believed was still bound to a modernist distinction between

nature and grace (44). It is also to be distinguished from streams in Catholic thought that led to

liberation theology – which Milbank and other Radical Orthodoxy thinkers find to be similarly

beholden to Marxist analysis as a secular discourse (45). Smith credits Lubac, at least partially,

with the Augustinianism that characterizes Radical Orthodoxy. "In a basic sense," Smith quips,

"Augustine is important because he is not modern" (46).

Smith also points out that Radical Orthodoxy has some connection to Hauerwas and

Yoder. While there are significant differences, there are also, he writes, "deep similarities

between the Radical Orthodoxy project and recent theological and ethical proposals in the vein

of John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas, particularly in the work of William Cavanaugh

and D. Stephen Long (233, n. 3). He expands on this, particularly in reference to Hauerwas:

> The question of the relationship between Hauerwas and Radical Orthodoxy is an
> important one…when Ward or Pickstock discusses theologians who are operating within
> the same "sensibility," Hauerwas is always on the list. In addition, some of the authors in
> the Radical Orthodoxy series were students of Hauerwas….On the other hand, of late,
> Milbank has been quite critical of Hauerwas, particularly on the matter of universalism
> versus Hauerwas's supposed sectarianism (see Milbank, "Materiality and

Transcendence"). But in [*Theology and Social Theory*], Milbank is very close to Hauerwas (233, n. 4).

Milbank and Hauerwas, he explains, similarly reject the idea of a common or universal ethics, which he claims is a radicalization of the ideas of Alasdair MacIntyre, who influenced both of them (240). Smith explains that they share a teleological vision of the church grounded in the distinctively Christian narrative of the New Testament. This vision offers an alternative anthropology and, especially for Milbank, a theological alternative to social theory (240).

Perhaps the best précis of Milbank's perspective can be found in his essay "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism."[49] In it, Milbank describes the end of modernity (which he points out has not fully arrived) as the end of a "single system of truth based on universal reason," and argues that this means that theology no longer "has to measure up to secular standards of scientific truth or normative rationality." For subjects and objects to be intelligible, he explains, they must be part of a particular narrative. In postmodernity, there is more than one available narrative, meaning that theology can take a "half-turn back to pre-modernity" (337). Premodernity is not recoverable, nor is such an outcome desirable, but the postmodern exposure of the foundationalism of modern epistemology means that premodern metaphysics can be invoked as a helpful narrative fiction or heuristic device (338).

This raises a problem, however: if the modern project of externally or objectively verifying truth is problematic both for theology and for modernity itself, and postmodern thought opens the possibility of multiple narratives, on what basis is any narrative chosen over another? For Milbank, this suggests a kind of nihilism – "albeit of a positive kind," he writes, "embracing contingency and arbitrariness as the real natural good" (339). For Him then, postmodern theology can only proceed by way of Christian liturgical practice. God cannot be argued; God

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[49] Cited here from *The Future of Love*.

must be narrated, and this narration must be rehearsed and made manifest – particularly, as Milbank argues elsewhere, in the Eucharist.

This is not to say that Christianity is merely one narrative among many. Milbank feels that Christianity can uniquely internalize the postmodern critique without fully embracing what he sees as the implicit nihilism of that critique and that the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* makes this possible (339). Milbank also asserts that, unlike postmodern nihilism, which can only posit a perpetual antagonism of warring perspectives, Christianity offers the possibility of harmonizing those perspectives such that the diversity and difference in pluralism is not *necessarily* violent, though it may be contingently so (340). Thus, Milbank argues elsewhere, a Christian social order has more to offer other religions than an ostensibly secular state ("On Theological Transgression," 170). "For Christianity," he writes, "true community means the freedom of people and groups to be different" (341).

Milbank argues that Christianity (by which he means, especially in this instance, the church) should not be predicated upon exclusion. Exclusion breeds dualism and violence, he explains, whereas Christianity must embrace difference, "excluding" only the negative, which is to say the failure to help others realize their "capacity to love and conceive of the divine beauty," a position that does not exclude persons because "Christianity should not draw boundaries" (342). This embrace of difference over against the dualism of pitting the sacred against an excluded other inoculates Christianity to deconstruction. Milbank sees a "secret affinity" between premodern paganism and postmodern nihilism, against which Christianity's unique rejection of primordial violence can be seen. The Bible, for Milbank, chronicles the slow development of this rejection, culminating in the Christian rejection of sacrificial violence in favor of a sacrifice of will which is, for Milbank, actually "a self-fulfillment, an offering that is

the same time our reception of the fullness of Being. It is a receiving of God: 'deification'" (343).

This self-offering, Milbank explains, does involve suffering, due to the relative dominance of evil and violence in the world, which is why Christ's paradigmatic self-offering is characterized by suffering. He rejects the idea, however, that the death of Christ constitutes a blood offering to God; instead, it is the result of humanity's rejection of the kingdom of God offered by Christ. From here, Milbank describes a process by which Christian theology has speculated that only God can fully suffer evil, and must do so within the temporal realm, making it necessary to take on human form in Christ. He argues that this speculation exceeds the narrative sources, but flows from them and commends itself to the believing community by virtue of its aesthetics, by the "profundity of the picture of God which results, merely by the pleasing shape of the conceits which it generates" (344).

Milbank moves on from there to ponder the relationship of the resurrection to the memory of perfected community and the goal of its restoration. Resurrection, he argues, makes the memory of perfect community possible inasmuch as it is a refusal of death, which hinders community. Resurrection makes possible the continuance of the mundane artifacts of communal living – eating, drinking, talking – beyond death. The hope for a universal resurrection is a hope that there are truly no boundaries, that the final consummation of community might include everyone, which gives us a hint of Milbank's eschatology (346).

Milbank's reflections on desire speak to his ethics. Desire shapes truth, he tells us, and "all desire is good so long as it is a genuinely restless yet serene desire (a more-desiring desire), which is moved in part by persistent lack, the pull of the 'goal' as well as by a foretaste of consummation" (349). Milbank goes on to point out that desire rightly ordered is not detached –

not, as he puts it, "*agape* sundered from *eros*" – because that would render finite reality evil, a

Manichean move that Milbank does not want to make (it is probably important to note that

Augustine had been Manichean before converting to Christianity). For Augustine, Milbank

explains, this also means that the goal – the destination – is inseparable from what he calls "the

way" (also a biblical trope), and this "way" is learned from examples, of which Christ is primary.

This is not, however, simple imitation but rather repetition: Christ cannot be literally

copied because Christ is the founder of a way that can only be embraced fully in a communal or

ecclesial sense. "Hence the way is Christ," Milbank writes, "but equally the Church as the work

of the Spirit" (350). He ends with a passage best presented intact:

> Creation is always found as a given, but developing "order." As the gift of God, creation
> also belongs to God, it is within God (together with the infinity of all articulations that
> there may be) as the *Logos*. But existing harmonies, existing "extensions" of time and
> space, constantly give rise to new "intentions," to movements of the Spirit to further
> creative expression, new temporal unraveling of creation *ex nihilo*, in which human
> beings most consciously participate. Yet even this movement, the vehicle of human
> autonomy, is fully from God, is nothing *in addition* to the divine act-potential, and not
> equivocally different in relation to him. The latter conception would be "pagan,"
> "gnostic," "Cabbalistic," whereas it is God himself who is differentiation, ensuring that
> this process is "music," not the ceaseless rupture and self-destruction of a differentiation
> poised "univocally" (Deleuze) between an "indifferent" transcendence and an anarchic
> finitude. The trust that in our linguistic and figurative creations we can constantly
> recognize, when it arises, the aesthetically "right" addition, which is, in its specific
> content, a criterion of self-validation, is now the mode of recognition of a
> transcendental/ontological possibility of "participation." And so translates for us, "faith in
> the triune God."

For Milbank, the recovery of an analogical participatory ontology is everything. As we shall see,

his political theology differs considerably from Yoder's; there are significant reasons he is

neither a pacifist (in the conventional sense) nor an anarchist. His etiology does not specifically

invoke anarcho-primitivist themes – though his ruminations on gift-exchange draw on the work

of Marshal Sahlins – nor does it explicitly construct Jesus as a proto-radical. His ecclesiology is

similar to Hauerwas's, and does not eschew hierarchy like Yoder's does. Nevertheless, his work

has some bearing on anarchist thought, as we will explore in the final chapter. If Yoder ends up a

defacto anarchist, Milbank offers a radical socialist appropriation of conservative Catholic social

teaching.

Etiology

Milbank, like Hauerwas, is influence by Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre posits an ancient

moral wisdom, now lost, that can only be regained through communal practices. Milbank offers

an ontological gloss; his theology presupposes a primordial harmony or peaceableness that is

now forgotten, an "ontology of peace" that is nevertheless recoverable through the work of

Christ and the ministrations of the church. Milbank's references to a specific Fall are scattered

and spotty; for the most part, he presumes the orthodox account of the Fall and does not

elaborate on it. In "The Programme of Radical Theology," he describes theology as "the

discourse making a wager on the possible harmony of all discourses in a universe that might be

harmonized, since it rested on an ultimate harmonious source, now obscured" (42). In *Being*

Reconciled, he asserts, in a parenthetical aside, that "only masochism can imagine that death is

part of the primordial Creation," and goes on to affirm that whatever the limitations of narrative

might be, it is important that this narrative point to a "real Creation and a real loss" (244). Earlier

in the book he is more direct:

> Without the Fall, or with the substitution of a necessary Fall, one starts with an
> irreducible scarcity and egotism, and the ethical becomes that which reacts to a bad
> situation which it is secretly in love with, and needs ceaselessly to reinstate, despite the
> fact that this compromises the very character of the ethical. Therefore one needs the myth
> of the Fall in order to think a genuine Good, which to be non-reactive can only be an
> original plenitude. (149)

Milbank's Fall, then, is neither a literal reading of Genesis nor an anthropological equivalent as in anarcho-primitivism (and as hinted at in Yoder). It is ontological (of course) – but also historical (he argues against a Heideggerian purely ontological fall in *Theology and Social Theory*), and the only way to get at this is narrative. This illustrates a tension in Milbank's work: on one hand, he denies correspondence, as we see in "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism," and there are certainly places in which he seems to be almost a non-realist, or at least indifferent to realism, while on the other hand his emphasis on ontology would seem to presume realism.

If Milbank does not give much attention to the Fall *per se,* he does appeal to Jesus as the founder of a set of social practices that are radical in an age of global capitalism. In "The Name of Jesus," one of the essays in *The Word Made Strange,* Milbank tells us that there are two stories of Jesus in the New Testament, one a "straightforward, apparently 'historical' tale of a remarkable man who announced the arrival of a new sort of kingdom, the direct rule of God upon earth, which was still to come and yet already present in his own actions and those of his followers." The other story is "a kind of commentary upon the first story: a 'metanarrative' which discloses to us, in an obscure and mysterious fashion, the secret significance of what Jesus says and does" (146). He illustrates this by pointing out places in the Gospel of Luke where Jesus appears to reverse his policies or change strategies – whether or not to take money or a sword, for instance – and the Lucan author informs us that these things needed to take place to fulfill a prophecy. The gospels are rife with passages in which Jesus' actions or teachings are explained in a way that is not obvious from a straightforward reading of the text, Milbank argues.

Thus Jesus' story comes to us already interpreted theologically. The gospels are not, for Milbank, some sort of bare history. Nor is the attempt to find the "historical Jesus" really the point; Milbank regards efforts to focus on the historical aspects of Jesus' story as just a more

sophisticated variant of liberal Christianity. For the liberal, the mythic aspects – the

"metanarrative" that contextualizes the quasi-biographical details of the gospel story – is captive

to the text, and to authority, and to institutional religion. They may rightly be suspicious, he

concedes, to question the connection of the gospel message to tradition inasmuch as Jesus

appears to call into question the received traditions of his day. Perhaps, he has his imaginary

interlocutors saying, it would be better to de-mythologize the gospel to get at the political heart

of what Jesus was trying to do, and of course central to this myth is the doctrine of the

atonement, which could strike the liberal as a kind of Gnosticism: Jesus' death, which did not

bring in the reign of God's kingdom, has a "secret, hidden efficacy which we must 'believe in,'

'relate to' and somehow appropriate in our individual lives" (147). This will not do for Milbank.

The doctrine of the atonement, he argues, can be "retrieved" by focusing less on Jesus than on

the Kingdom, by making something like the doctrine of the atonement (and Christology more

generally) "secondary to definitions of the character of the new universal community or Church"

(148).

 For Milbank, Jesus is not a character in any normal sense – he is presented wholly in

terms of his actions, as more type than figure:

> At the level of metanarrative, we are told not only that Jesus is to be identified as virtuous
> through his works, and as being none other *than* his works, but also that the works are to
> be taken as signs of his unique significance. The metanarrative therefore shifts the
> emphasis from the works towards the person. Yet this moves us still further away from
> any concrete content…. [The metaphors used to describe Jesus] suggest that Jesus is the
> most comprehensive possible context: not just the space within which all transactions
> between time and eternity transpire, but also the beginning of all this space, the
> culmination of this space, the growth of this space and all the going in and out within this
> space. Supremely, he is both word and food: the communicated meanings which emanate
> from our mouths and yet in this outgoing simultaneously return to them as spiritual
> nurture. (150)

Thus the Gospels are not the story of Jesus but the story of the formation of a new community, of which Jesus is the founder (150). "If we want to describe a founder precisely in the moment of origination of a practice," he writes, "then all we can do is to identify him with the *general norms* of that practice, and this procedure is followed by the gospels" (152). This connects Milbank's etiology and ecclesiology in a way that is nevertheless deeply Christological.

Like Yoder and Hauerwas, Milbank includes the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, but here the emphasis is both ecclesiological and epistemological:

> When he was tempted by the devil, Jesus refused to turn the stones to bread, the food that ultimately cannot save us from death, and offered instead the universal spiritual food that is his "word" or meaningful discourse. At the same time he refused powers of magical immunity and worldly dominion based on a death-threatening force. Thereby he collapsed the powers that he bore into the impotent realm of signs. Yet according to John's gospel, these emanating signs are finally given to us to eat in the form of a body that does not die, because it is an endless sharing, an endless self-renewing. In the materiality of the new community, that which is universally presupposed by meaningful communication, what one might call its transcendental metaphors – "life," "light," "seed," "fruit," "bread" – becomes bodily solidarity. The name of Jesus is attached to a descriptive content at the point where the word of the gospel ceases to be mere teaching, and is made "real" and powerful in a new social body which can transgress every human boundary, and adopts no law in addition to that of "life," or the imperative to greater strength and beauty which is attendant upon a diverse yet harmonious, mutually reconciled community. (153).

What Jesus represents must be borne out in a community, and in order to establish continuity, there must be a tradition (154). The church's goal of consensus is for-itself, a way of achieving a kind of sociability, for which the virtues are helpful but not (*pace* MacIntyre) ultimate (155). "Whereas 'Moses' is just the name of the mediator of the law," Milbank explains, "'Jesus' is the name of the new law itself, because now the word of God is found to be located, not in the dead letter of the law over against the power of bodies, but in true, strong, peaceful relationships, beginning with the practice of Jesus" (156).

Ecclesiology

This practice forms the basis for Milbank's ecclesiology, which is closely tied to his economics. In *Being Reconciled* Milbank undertakes a protracted exploration of the relationship between theology and ecclesiology: "does theology – always *mystical* theology – found the Church, or the Church theology?" he asks; "Does aristocratic inwardly experienced truth hold primacy, or else external democratic peace and inherited consensus?" (109). Again, the answer for Milbank lies in ontology. Reality is marred by evil, he writes, but there is a "narrow chink of light" opened by the Incarnation, one that allows some to move specifically and intensely and many to move (by dint of example and encouragement) obliquely toward this light. He compares this quest to that of the Holy Grail (apropos because he also connects it to the Eucharist), calling the church "the brotherhood and sisterhood of the Grail" (105). The church is constituted by truth, the *Logos*, which he connects to aristocracy (it is "shown to inward sight and requires an aristocratic ascent") and peace, which he connects to democracy and consensus. These are not in tension but rather complementary – it is truth (a real, ontological truth-as-*esse*) toward which consensus must be aimed and upon which it must converge if there is to be real peace (106). He favors, then, forms of social hierarchy that are not fixed but "educative"; these are based not on birth but on talent, such talents being gifts of God of which we are all recipients (we are all given gifts, but we are not all given the same gifts in the same measure). The church is "all the more democratic the more it is genuinely hierarchical. Moreover… [the church] is the only possible real democracy, and the most extremely democratic" (108).

Milbank argues that socialism, properly conceived, is largely a Christian concept appropriated by atheists, and one, which has been relegated to marginal or utopian status – much, he points out, like religion. "All the same," he writes, "as with Christianity in the West, we

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remain haunted by its ideal excellence, because nothing has emerged to replace it; we sense that just as the story of a compassionate God who became human was the 'final religion,' so also the hope and to a degree the practice of a universal fraternity based on sharing was the 'final politics'" (162). He suggests that socialism is actually grounded in counter-Enlightenment thought and that capitalism – not socialism – is the logical outworking of secularity. The idea of community, therefore, is a singularly religious or mythical concept inappropriate to the secular sphere and eroded by capitalist excess. This, he argues, is roughly assented to by what he calls the "libertarian" secular left, and challenged by what he calls "communitarians," who tend in some way to invoke religion (163). Neither of these, however, has a proper definition of "community"; the libertarians confuse it with networking and interest groups, thus underestimating the importance of relative self-sufficiency while communitarians overestimate it, leading to an untenable reification of particular communities over against the larger society (164). True community is found in making exchange part of the community itself, which is Milbank's vision of socialism (166).

Milbank points out that both contract-based society and a closed organic communitarianism presuppose individualism ("the self-governing organic community is already the individual subject writ large") and therefore preclude true community (168). Milbank's way out of this is to posit a universal gift economy: "a universal practice of offering, a universal offering in the expectation or at least hope of receiving back not a price due to us, but others themselves in their counter-gifts, because we aim for reciprocity, for community, and not for a barren and sterile self-sacrifice" (169). He draws on Marcel Gauchet's *The Disenchantment of the World* to argue that the answer – an appeal to transcendence – appears among the axial religions, and thus "not at the end of history but in the middle" (174). Rather than see the birth of

monotheism as an outgrowth of empire, however, Milbank suggests that the forms of community

fostered by these axial religions were intended as a response to growing state power, in many

ways anticipating modernism and thus constituting a kind of pre-emptive strike (175). This

appeal to transcendence does not imply theocracy, however. Milbank rejects this on the basis that

it actually presupposes a version of the secular sphere that he has already established as being

problematic: a ruling sacral class needs such a sphere to rule over, he argues, whereas a more

involved community based on a participatory ontology can actually serve as a bulwark *against*

theocracy (175).

Milbank broadens the political implications of the church by arguing that the idea of the

"body of Christ" suggests a politics of time as a supplement to our usual politics of space (177).

By "politics of time" Milbank means a politics that treats life as passing and celebrates its

ephemerality; it sees the otherworldly as "the pre-condition of justice":

> A politics of time would…treat life and the moments of life as only passing, and focus on
> how they might pass gloriously. Thus instead of the sacrificial cult of instrumentalization
> which encourages us to think of most processes – education, journeys to work,
> technology, administration, communications – as things to be endured if we are to reach
> the really valued (but increasingly elusive) ends, we would rather focus on the cyclical
> "pointlessness" of life (eating to work, working to eat, etc.) and then see in this cycle
> itself the point, a kind of dance to be performed well, as if for the delectation of the gods.
> This, as Pickstock has reminded us, is how Plato finally conceived of the life of the city.
> (177)

This introduction of the transcendent, then, is not one that devolves into an obsession with the

postmortem fate of individual souls. Instead, Milbank is invoking the sense in which recognizing

that present reality is ephemeral means also seeing it as mediating something beyond it.

This speaks to what Milbank sees as the difference between secular and religious

socialism, the latter of which is, among other things, far less individualistic:

> [W]hereas a secular socialism appears to withdraw from egotism with reluctance and rancor, as if it desired to prevent some people from holding too much of the *genuinely good*, religious socialism, with far less austerity, insists like Augustine that only that which is in common is truly good at all, or can be truly possessed, though only in the mode of the reception of a gift, which must be relinquished and passed on. Moreover, this common good – the wealth of being which passes like a flash of light – is always enjoyed (Augustine again) from different perspectives as something absolutely individual and unique, whereas a limited spatial good shared out equally is supposed to grant a portion of the same thing to all. In other words, where what is "in common" is seen as metaphysically and truly in common, collectivity is seen to arise through the uttermost individualism, just as the transcendent universal is only available through local and specific refraction. (178)

Thus Milbank has a socialist vision – rooted, as always, in a particular ontology – in which common plenitude is enjoyed inasmuch as it is embraced as a gift, which comes both *in* time and *as* time – and this, he argues, is most supremely reflected in the liturgical order (179).

There are three modes of this liturgical order: festival, education, and profession (180). Festival is life characterized by celebration and giving, by elaborate public works and other means of reminding ourselves that life and its trappings are fleeting, and yet this is not cause for anxiety or worry, Milbank explains, but for a generous pouring out of what cannot be retained anyway (181). Education is difficult to spatialize, Milbank argues, and cannot be democratic inasmuch as it involves a power relationship and a hierarchy (182). This hierarchy is not fixed, however, and involves (far beyond just education) a complex temporal reciprocity in which teachers and pupils change places over time (183). Milbank points out that a majority cannot be trusted to make policy for education; rather, proper education is the only way to cultivate a citizenry able to participate with appropriate virtue and wisdom in a democratic order (183).

Milbank invokes a sense of "complex space" that has to do with the emphasis in Catholic social thought, particularly papal teaching, upon "intermediate associations" between the individual and the state (271). Defense of complex space, though originally associated with the

left, shifted to the right (and here Nisbet is apropos), which Milbank regards as "one source of

the tragedies of the twentieth century" and for which he blames, in part, the antagonism between

the Catholic church and socialism after the 1848 revolution in France (273). In order to explain

why the right-wing permutations of complex space are, in his estimation, perversions of Catholic

social teaching, he explains what he means by "complex space." While some characterize the

distinction between Catholic social teaching and Marxist liberation theology as one of space

versus time, this is too simple (274). Both visions are spatiotemporal, which allows Milbank to

use Bahktin's "chronotope." The real distinction is between the Enlightenment chronotope,

which involves what Milbank has been calling "simple space" (the direction relationship of the

state to the individual) and both left and right articulations of "complex space," which Milbank

shifts to calling "gothic space" (275).

Milbank describes the enlightenment chronotope as "the temporal figure of human

growth from infancy to maturity…coordinated with the spatial figure of organic coherence"

(275). This, he explains, has a Romantic variant with two features or "modulations": one, a

transcendentalizing of the whole over the parts; and two, a recognition of "intermediate

organisms," the most encouraging of which is a conceptualization of organicism in which parts

are also wholes and not simply subordinate to the greater whole (276). In this way, Milbank

argues, what he calls the "second modulation" – the inference of intermediaries – escapes, at

least partially, the problems of simple space. But Milbank goes farther than this:

> The first modulation also now escapes the organicist major key: not only does the whole
> exceed the sum of the parts, also the parts escape the totalizing grasp of the whole. For
> Gierke, this double excess had been initiated in the Middle Ages and was explicitly the
> result of a linguistic and symbolic reconstrual of space as Christ's body. The Church as a
> whole was not an enclosed, defensible terrain like the antique *polis*, but in its unity with
> the heavenly city and Christ its head, infinitely surpassed the scope of the state, and the
> grasp of human reason. At the same time, what was fundamentally the same excess could

be glimpsed in the single person and the Christian association (monastery or guild) whose activities are legitimized by the quest for salvation, not by human law. (277)

Human work in building physical structures (such as the cathedral) reflects the society from which it comes as well as helps to build it – in a literal (infrastructural) way, of course, but also poetically (278). He goes on to describes a kind of fractal quality to "gothic space" in which one shape (he uses the arch as an example) can be used at various levels and to various scales, alone or in combinations. The same, then, goes for social units such as the family and various forms of association (278).

Instead of an Enlightenment teleological vision of gradual necessary evolution, Milbank calls for a *dramatic* sense of history as ceaseless loss and gain: the Enlightenment has gained for us the formal principles of individual liberty and equality, which sometimes guard against the very worst tyrannies, but at the same time we have lost certain practices of free association for common purposes (279). He also argues that the distinction between enlightenment simple space and gothic complex space describes and is described by the distinction between secular and sacred. "Secular" here does not mean "areligious," however; it has more to do with the establishment and assumption of simple space as static realm over which God (or some analog of God) may preside through the sovereign or through the interplay of market forces or the inexorable working out of history. In complex or gothic space, by contrast,

> every act of association, every act of economic exchange, involves a mutual judgment about what is right, true, and beautiful, about the order we are to have in common…. An order so described, so assented to, tends to be imbued with a 'sacred' character because it cannot be defined, and is always being repeated with a same yet different character, such that, according to the social Christology described above, the excess perpetrated ever-anew by the individual is the only possible "representation" of an infinite excess always beyond our reach. (We are that body of Christ we can never yet see; a kind of "sublimed" micro/macrocosmic relation is involved here.) The assent which such an order commands must clearly have the character of an allegiance of faith rather than that of a rational conviction (279-80).

In a sense, this is a way of narrating re-enchantment, and Milbank argues that this idea properly

preserves a space in which religion, aesthetics, and morality are operative and not marginalized

by political or economic utilitarianism, the latter of which could apply equally to capitalism or

Marxism (280). This existence of this space is predicated on the necessity to make judgments

neither predicted by nor covered in the law. Moreover, he claims, this is actually more in keeping

with the world as it actually comes to us:

> Contemporary socialists are capable of recognizing that a materialist perspective by no
> means removes the necessity for ethical judgment, yet they tend to halt at the point of
> declaring that collective judgments must be made democratically, and that the ultimate
> aims are better fulfillment of basic needs and the promotion of individual choice and
> autonomy. This is still to remain in and with enlightenment simple space, since it does
> not allow that our life in common might transcend the imperative of self-preservation and
> self-emancipation. Whereas this life always points beyond these imperatives, because
> complex space has a certain natural, ontological priority, and simple space remains by
> comparison a merely an abstracting, idealizing project…. This is the case because there
> is no such thing as absolute non-interference; no action can be perfectly self-contained,
> but always impinges upon other people, so that spaces will always in some degree
> "complexly" overlap, jurisdictions always in some measure competing, loyalties remain
> (perhaps benignly) divided.(281)

Thus, Milbank argues, the issue of the common good is a specter that haunts our conceptions of

freedom. There are simply questions that cannot be answered according to market logic, and it is

only through "community"[50] that escape from capitalism is truly possible (282). By this he does

not mean affinity groups, which he considers a false sense of community and rails against

elsewhere, but a more robust sense of community with a sense of purpose or grand *telos*, an ever-

evolving consensus about the common good. For this reason, socialism cannot retreat into purely

pre-modern conceptions, but must "take a wager on justice," on the idea that humans are able to

realize justice (283). By wedding a modernistic concepts of power and law (reading these as

providential) with a paternalistic hierarchy lends a fascist air (Milbank explicitly uses the word

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[50] Milbank puts this in scare quotes.

"fascism") to papal social teaching (283). Catholic advocacy of complex ("gothic") space must be recovered, but it cannot be separated from a specifically Christian and socialist vision (285).

Ethics

Milbank is similar to Hauerwas in arguing against the idea that there are universal limits to ethical action (as opposed to the contextual limits he takes to be essentially given) on the basis that such ultimate limitations result in a kind of Manichaeism which gives undue ontological weight to evil as something that exists outside the divine. In this way of thinking, as he writes in "Programme of Radical Orthodoxy," violence is not seen as something that can be overcome, at least eventually, but an inevitability with which we must compromise (40). In *Being Reconciled* Milbank contrasts what he considers the common understanding of evil in the Christian (but also, he points out, Greek and Jewish) tradition as a "privation of being itself" – that is, not something that has ontological reality on its own but rather the absence of the good – with a view of radical evil (evil for its own sake) that he credits to Kant (1). This, he concludes at the end of the chapter, amounts to an alternative theology. Comparing the two theologically, then, he argues that only a theory of privation allows for the possibility of realizing a just social order. For Milbank, taking Kantian ethics to its logical conclusion means that we inevitably look uncritically to the State as a surrogate determinant of the good in the absence of the eschaton – thus, a liberalism indebted to the Kantian legacy is susceptible to a slide toward totalitarianism, a phenomenon Milbank suggests is apparent in the West, especially after September 11, 2001 (24-25).

Having distinguished between radical evil and evil as privation, Milbank takes up the question of violence. The two are linked inasmuch as evil "always removes and destroys," and

the failure or refusal perform the good is *de facto* a threat to peace: "if peace is harmonious

plenitude, when it is disturbed there is always an instance of noisy distortion, which impairs just

distribution" (26). But Milbank warns against an easy equivalence between evil and violence,

suggesting that it is the theory of radical evil that tends to see peace merely as the absence of

conflict. Identifying violence, then, requires a certain discernment; things that appear to be

violent may not be so (they may be manifestations of the good), and things that appear to be

neutral or nonviolent may in fact be violent inasmuch as they constitute privation:

> So in terms of the effect of evil, the theory of radical evil focuses *too much* upon
> violence. Life, after all, is one invasion after another: if invasion as such is violence, good
> is the Rousseauian secluded glade. But if, rather, we must discriminate amongst
> invasions, then violence is only violence when it ruins an essence (how something should
> be) or diverts from a goal (how something should develop). In this case, violence is
> violence when it is also evil. (27)

Evil and violence are truly convertible, he argues (but not identical) only in a theory of privation

that allows us to recognize as evil (and thus violent) even private assertion of autonomy because

such assertions limit or foreclose upon full participation in the good. Such a view also allows us

to recognize as not evil (and thus not truly violent) those actions that may involve force or

coercion but nevertheless serve the good or the *telos* (28). "Overwhelming by power" is not

violent, he contends, if the power in question is real power and thus a "manifestation of the

actual" (31).

Milbank's aim in this chapter is to take away the ethical imperative toward pacifism

asserted by both Yoder and Hauerwas. Thus, he argues, violence in the service of a robust *telos*

can be seen as educational, and education in the service of truth may well need to be coercive.

"In a word," he writes, "we cannot as human beings suppose that violence is entirely

unavoidable, in so far as it runs the educative risks of redemption" (38). He adds that the

intuition to use counter-violence in protection of the innocent is a created one and thus part of the good. Nor does the use of force necessarily carry an ethical imperative of certainty: "We *should* defend – even sometimes with violence – what we believe in, though with the knowledge that we may well be mistaken," he claims (39).

In addition to arguing the necessity of the use of force, Milbank also challenges the ethics of pacifism itself, arguing that it is ultimately irresponsible and not properly incarnational:

> Since we only have weak intimations of the absolute Good and only enjoy these in theory when conjoined with some practical attempt to enact it in fragile finite structures, pacifism is like a kind of over-apophatic iconoclasm, which despises the necessary fragility of these realized intimations. It seeks to have a cheap and easy participation in the eternal; it tries to leap out of our finitude, embodiment and fragility. (40)

Milbank characterizes pacifism as an unnecessary withdrawal and compares the pacifist stance to one of a monastic contempt for the laity; neither celibacy nor pacifism is generalizable as options for non-monastics (40). Milbank goes on to point out that peaceableness is a communal virtue and cannot be practiced alone; pacifism, he suspects, is connected to individualism (43). Moreover, Milbank argues, completely absolving ourselves of violence is ultimately impossible:

> Even if one says "I oppose all violence," the word "oppose" gives the game away: violence has tragically sucked even you, the pacifist, into its *agon*. Standing aloof, not intervening when you might – this mere gaze – is *also* an act: it *opposes* the violent person by violently leaving him to his violence and not trying to stop him in his tracks. Contrariwise, it *is* important actively and chivalrously to oppose violence: for example to stop someone from going as far as murder, even if one thereby kills him, for soon (now or hereafter) he may come to repent of his intentions, whereas it is for more difficult to repent of the actual deed. Not to see this is to underrate the importance of act and to fall prey to a Kantian privileging of motivation. (42)

He goes farther, however, than simply suggesting that pacifism is less moral by virtue of failing to realize the good in situations where this would seem to call for violence; he actually argues that pacifism is ultimately *more* violent by virtue of gazing at violence: "It is not simply that

pacifism as non-violence is less moral than the defensive use of physical violence. It is also that

pacifism, as looking at violence, is at least as violent as and probably more absolutely violent

than actual physically violent interventions. This then will confirm my more general

conclusion…that gazing at violence is the greatest violence, indeed the very essence of violence"

(30).

As is often the case for Milbank, the issue is one of ontology. To gaze upon violence

without acting is to fail to participate, to enact a kind of ontological indifference to evil as

privation of the good. The failure to act on behalf of the good is itself an act of violence

inasmuch as it is an act of evil. Milbank argues that the middle class in the West have become

onlookers of violence in three ways:

1) In the consumption of violence in video texts (fictional or not, human or not)
2) In a gaze upon the past as the site of a violence we have ostensibly outgrown
3) In the pacifist eschewal of violence, which Milbank claims becomes a de facto form of
   gazing upon violence while doing nothing (28-29).

Fictional violence exists as a "double passivity" – the viewer is limited to gazing at the violence

and cannot do anything about it, while the characters/actors are limited to the roles assigned to

them. Neither world can interfere in or interact with the other (31). This dynamic, however, is

not actually limited to watching violence on the screen or encountering it in art. It also pertains to

real acts of violence – which is to say, those acts or circumstances which fail to realize the good.

All violence is simulated to the extent that "to be successfully violent we must shield ourselves

from the effects of violence; to enjoy violence we must switch off our capacities for sympathy.

In short we must, in this instance uniquely, be spectators of the deeds we perform" (33). For this

reason, then, "the spectator of sublime artistic violence, the Christian apologist for the Christian

past, and the Christian pacifist idealist, all actually enact different version of the same scenario of

double passivity which constitutes any 'fictional' spectacle" (43).

The solution to violence and evil, Milbank asserts, is theological, and comes in the form of forgiveness. He uses an image from *The Divine Comedy* of the stream of forgiveness that flows from Mount Purgatory: the stream divides, with one side being waters of forgetting but the other is, paradoxically, waters of pure remembrance (45). Both are necessary, Milbank affirms; the merely negative gesture of offering to forget an offense, to let it go, is not enough to bring about the positive reconciliation that is ontologically required of us because of original sin. He draws on Aquinas to point out that "forgiveness realized through repentance looks initially at damaged past events which it then seeks to transform" – thus the medieval practice of penance adds to the more ancient concept of forgiveness as complete forgetting, a positive aspect that allows the penitent the opportunity to participate in the reconciliatory process (45).

Milbank adds to this yet another positive aspect: sometimes, he points out, forgiveness involves a self-giving in which the one offering forgiveness actually makes recompense – this being, of course, most perfectly exemplified in the Atonement. To "forgive" becomes "to give for another" in a bit of wordplay that Milbank admits may be of questionable etymological legitimacy but nevertheless, he feels, accurately describes this particular dimension of Christian forgiveness (46). This emerged culturally, he explains, in a system of exchange that cannot be reduced or equated to the flow of capital; the exchange is always asymmetrical and unpredictable, grounded as it is in a prior divine self-giving that is "without measure and without price" – nevertheless this milieu presupposed an earthly participation, in the form of a harmonious mutual giving and fair distribution, in the divine economy of grace and forgiveness (47). To seek reconciliation, to make recompense, to attend to maters of justice – these are all way and means of participating in that larger economy, as prefigured by the parallel rise, in the Hebrew scriptures, of God's presumed infinite capacity to forgive and the cultic dimensions of

ritual purity and atonement (49). This forgiveness, while it may partake of the "waters of forgetting," is thus a primarily positive construction, and it is only in the wake of the Enlightenment (which Milbank describes as "new theological assumptions and new ecclesial practices," though he does not specify them here) that we have a re-emergence of forgiveness as a negative gesture, which Milbank connects back to the assumption of evil as a positive entity, the "radical evil" he contrasts with evil as privation (48).

After considering the tension between forgiveness as positive and as negative, Milbank explores the tension between divine and human forgiveness, coming to the conclusion that pure human forgiveness is impossible, based on what he terms "five major *aporias*" (50). The first is the question of who can forgive: the victim or the sovereign – is forgiveness a private matter between the wrongdoer and the one offended, or does forgiveness come from a third party bearing the authority to grant it? Milbank pushes back against the conventional wisdom that only the victim can forgive by pointing out that a) there is never only one victim, as evil has broad repercussions of which we are only dimly aware, so it would be impossible to round up every possible victim in order to secure their forgiveness, and the victims of the most egregious wrongdoings are dead and simply not available; and b) we cannot exempt the exchange between victim and wrongdoer from the need to have the justice of the arrangement verified by a third party (50). Even in the New Testament, Milbank points out, in which Christians were called to seek reconciliation outside of the secular courts, there was still an ecclesial trial of sorts, making it just as public and just as political. He further argues that private forgiveness does not secure public justice, meaning that only the leader or representative of a given community can offer forgiveness, but that public absolution may not necessarily include private forgiveness. Thus neither the victim nor the sovereign can truly forgive (51).

The next two *aporias* are related. One is the relationship of forgiveness to time. No wrong act can be erased from the flow of time, and even attempts to move forward as if the wrong had never taken place cannot escape the consequences that past acts have on the present (52). For Milbank the only way out of this conundrum – which involves a complex interplay of memory and ontology, both for perpetrator and victim – is to invoke an Augustinian framework that is decidedly theological (55). The related *aporia* is that of the relationship of forgiveness specifically to memory; Milbank asserts that an offense cannot be forgiven unless it is ultimately forgotten, but an offense that is truly forgotten does not need to be forgiven (56). Milbank's fifth *aporia* can be considered here as well; it concerns forgiveness and finality as well as memory: in relationships where there has been no offense, there is some question as to whether the relationship could survive one. Thus, an offense provides an opportunity for forgiveness, and a successful resolution is thought to strengthen the relationship. But, Milbank points out, it simultaneously introduces the possibility that something similar might happen in the future. The relationship cannot be said to be strengthened if the offense is completely forgotten – nothing has been gained, Milbank points out – but the very act of remembering means not only that the offense may not be truly forgiven but also that the offense could well be repeated, nullifying, as Milbank sees it, any strengthening effect thought to be the fruit of reconciliation (59).

The fourth *aporia*, then, is that of forgiveness as a trade, or the impossibility of pure motive. In Milbank's view of forgiveness as a positive participation in divine reconciliation, purity of motive is not a primary concern, as it is a predicated on a mutual desire for harmoniousness (57). Without a participatory ontology, Milbank claims, forgiveness can only be negative, and thus susceptible to the charge that the magnanimity of the one offering pardon without recompense is motivated by the desire to be regarded as (or to be able to regard oneself

as) a generous person, or by the hope of eternal reward. The dispassionate act of letting go an offense presumed to be the goal of secular forms of forgiveness, Milbank argues, cannot escape this contingency and is thus impossible (58).

For Milbank, the problem with an individualist ethics, which he believes characterizes both the theory of radical evil and the pacifist stance, is that it allows for the consideration of ethics without attention to politics, that is, without attention to the collective good or issues of just distribution. This, he argues, simply serves to underwrite capitalism and the liberal state (80). He also takes umbrage at more conventionally liberal calls for harmonious living as well the rejection of hierarchy that characterizes pacifist and postmodern political thinking.

Milbank contrasts Christian ethics with the Greek idea of moral luck: to be virtuous (and thus happy) required some element of chance in which we are both given the resources to be virtuous and not placed in situations where the unambiguously virtuous path is denied us (139-40). In Christianity, he argues, the ethical life, now divorced from the expectation of happiness (at least in this life) is one of self-sacrifice. Moral luck, then, is not at issue; the virtuous path of self-sacrifice is always available, and to everyone. Milbank answers the question of moral luck by positing the *ecclesia* as the political site of the exercise of virtue, one in which each member has a role to play and thus the exercise of virtue lies in the fulfillment of that role (153).

> [E]thical exchange is only genuinely imaginable as a mutual and unending gift-exchange, construed as an absolute surrender to moral luck or absolute faith in the arrival of the divine gift, which is grace. Secondly…the sustaining of such an exchange requires a notion of resurrection and faith in the reality of participating in resurrection. The first element, gift-exchange, is paradigmatically figured either as feast or as marriage, and therefore is appropriately combined with the second element, resurrection, in terms of images of the heavenly banquet, or the eschatological marriage of God and humanity, heaven and earth. Outside an overcoming of the present economy of death *as well as* sin…and a practice which seeks to anticipate the resurrection Sabbath, there can be no notion of the Good that does not fall prey to irresolvable *aporias*. Hence, in theological

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terms, I am arguing that resurrection is an inseparable moment of atonement, or that sacrifice is only ethical when it is also resurrection. (134)

He positions this against a postmodern ethics that construes the ethical as disinterested self-sacrifice such that, as Milbank summarizes it, only such giving can distinguish gift from contract, death becomes the necessary condition of the ethical (and not, as for Milbank, something to be ultimately overcome), and that there cannot be an agentic God inasmuch as any such entity capable of interfering (particular to offer some kind of reward) would undermine the ethical purity of the gift (154). Milbank writes that the "idea of self-sacrifice unto death without return for the sake of 'the whole,' even if that be the rule of moral duty to an unspecified other, is *not at all* the true moral kernel of the Jewish and Christian legacy, but much more a transcription of secular modernity, which reads time not as gift-of-self in the hope of an eternal return, but rather as a giving-up-of-self in time for a future absolutized space which will never truly be set in place" (159). He argues that the higher ethical stance is not unilateral giving or giving up, but a more convivial exchange (160).

Economics

This exchange forms the basis of Milbank's economics. As noted earlier, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between Milbank's ecclesiology and economics, inasmuch as the formation of local socialist collectives seems to be, for Milbank, part of the mission of the church. Milbank does not see the church *as* such a collective but *as part* of the community in which such a collective is possible. In *Being Reconciled* Milbank writes, "The point for socialism is not (at least primarily) to 'limit' the market," he explains, "but rather to reconstrue exchange according to the protocols of a universal gift-exchange: that is to say, in every negotiated transaction, something other than profit and loss must be at issue" (186).

Milbank explores these themes in an online interview with *The Other Journal* in which he argues that the Marxist critique of capitalism as irrational, as "conflicting with the mass of basic human needs," ignores the question of ends – it is more of an ethical question than the way Marx framed it (2).[51] He describes capitalism as a game that anyone can possibly win, but by definition a good number will lose. And the goal of the game, he claims, is an empty, nihilistic goal of meaningless accumulation. The Marxist idea of "use value" is a step toward counteracting this nihilism, but is ultimately unsuccessful because we can have "different accounts of what is useful, or most useful, or most worthy of human pursuit" (4). Milbank blames the theological collusion with capitalism on a misreading of Augustine that effectively delivers the "secular sphere" over to competing forces, of which the capitalist market is a mirror. Nineteenth century evangelicals in both England and the United States, he tells us, saw the market as something providential; sin is disciplined or reined in and hard work is rewarded. He points to the "health and prosperity" as a contemporary example (7).

Another issue Milbank identifies in the interview is the emphasis on the individual over against the church as community, and a focus on the will that emerged historically within Christian theology. This allowed for the assumption of a contract society (as opposed to a gift economy). This then, is connected to natural theology that ontologizes violence. He clarifies this as a kind of theodicy, an explanation of evil in the world – in this case, as a necessary outworking of the providential play of forces in something like the market, which is presumed to be impartial or neutral. This is not, Milbank claims, what actually happens. In the market it is not "the accidental outcome of the unconscious matching of supply and demand that's going on. In

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[51] Citation numbers are paragraph numbers.

fact, the market doesn't really work like that at all; it works rather through a systematic and semi-deliberate economy of desire that's deliberately engineered by social forces" (11).

This is, as we have seen, inseparable from Milbank's ecclesiology. He describes the church as a community of gifts, both in terms of material sharing and sharing of talents, suggesting that the mutual giving of gifts goes beyond the issue of interest versus disinterest. Thus the church, as Milbank sees it, definitely includes an economic dimension. He points out that monasteries were economic – farming, brewing, etc. – but nevertheless part of the church. So were the guilds. The church, however, should not just be the site of an economics of gift-exchange, but must seek to permeate the society as a whole. He even suggests, as an example, churches involved in cooperative banking (25). When asked if this is not some form of theocracy, Milbank answers that he does not think of it that way (theocracy presuppose a sphere over which the clerical class holds sway, and Milbank denies that this sphere exists), but he offers an interesting concession: "So if you were to say, 'Well this is in a way a kind of democratized theocracy, a democratized, anarchic theocracy,' I suppose I couldn't really deny that in the end – I guess Stanley Hauerwas would probably say something rather similar" (40). As far as specific strategies in the here and now, Milbank sees fair trade as an example of a gesture toward a more gift-oriented economy, but this is clearly not enough. Milbank calls for a more comprehensive vision:

> Neither market solutions nor state solutions are what Christian social thought should be favoring but on the contrary, entirely new modes of economico-cum-social-cum-educational practice; in other words, communities if you like of small communities, or interlocking communities of something like total formation, if you like to put it that way, where you're concerned with producing material things but at the same time you're trying to promote spiritual ends and ecological ends and educative ends. (27)

For this reason, he suggests, we need something like the medieval guilds – some kind of

professional association at every level, working to make sure that decisions are made for the

greater good and not simply for the goal of maximizing profits.

Milbank also suggests we get away from the idea of the economy as a wholly separate

sphere of human activity concerned only with wealth production, especially as wealth in a

capitalist order is abstracted and not connected to flourishing. Milbank mentions consumer

action, growth of cooperatives, and working in and through business schools to effect cultural

change as possible avenue, but in a sense that invokes May's "tactical" over "strategic":

> In industrial capitalism there seemed to be a certain mode of activity – you had unions,
> you had strikes, you could work toward battling against capitalism, you could even have
> the idea of a revolution taking over the handles of the state. None of these models seem to
> be available any longer or plausible any longer, and so I'm not sure that we have a very
> clear plan. And I can only suggest that we have to work on a multiplicity of fronts and it
> just could be that at a certain point you cross a certain critical mass that has developed
> such that suddenly things have flipped over into something else. (29)

So there is an overarching goal, but no single lever of control or locus of power that a

"vanguard" might take hold of in order to effect full and final change. In *The Future of Love*

Milbank advocates the formation of "systematic links between producer and consumer co-

operatives" along with cooperatives, guilds, and even "voluntary economic courts (perhaps

supervised by Church, Islamic, and Jewish bodies) to regulate and adjudicate the interactions

between many different modes of cooperative endeavor" (252).

He is also not advocating the renunciation of private property. In fact, Milbank invokes

Belloc's argument for universal property, on the basis that property would stave off greed and

give people the opportunity to do creative work (255). In his interview in *The Other Journal* he

specifically brings up distributism, and points out that there was not always a clear distinction

among English socialists between socialism and distributism. Milbank favors localism on several levels, which he refers to as a "Wendell Berry sort of thing":

> I think particularly that insofar as possible you try to be self-sufficient in agricultural production, the idea that there is something fundamental about the agricultural economy because this is the production of food and clothing and so on, the basic fundamental needs of the human body, and the materials you need for building houses; but when you get away from the idea that that is the guiding basis of the economy, you're into something decadent. (35)

In *Being Reconciled* he points out that in certain places, even capitalism bears some of the qualities he advocates, suggesting that his vision of a "liturgical socialism" may not require overt revolution so much as "small incremental gains worth pursuing, and small resistances to a total eclipse." Such resistances, he writes, can be "considered as local resistances to globalization. But at the same time, they will only be finally effective and liturgical if they blend, universally, to encompass the globe as a sacral locality" (186). Local, but ultimately and ideally with global impact.

This is, after a fashion, a response to global capitalism with a global counter-vision, not unlike that outlined by Hardt and Negri in the trilogy of *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*. Indeed, global capitalism is a significant target for Milbank. This, too, is an ontological issue, as Jamie Smith explains:

> Milbank begins by asserting that every politics presupposes (and needs) an ontology. Nihilist ontologies (whether idealist or materialist) suffice for capitalism, but not for socialism. Socialism, Milbank contends, needs something else: a nonreductive materialism – materialist because it is concerned with embodied, material reality and distributions, nonreductive because only transcendence can make immanence to be immanence as such. In other words, only when immanence is "suspended" from transcendence does it make sense to speak about freedom and liberation, subjectivity and meaning. (190)

In *Being Reconciled,* Milbank describes globalization as a merging of the economic and political spheres, but adds that the state still has a role – perhaps today an even greater role – in policing

the conditions necessary for the flourishing of capital (192). He draws on Hardt and Negri to describe a particular kind of postmodern, global empire emerging as an outgrowth of American expansionism (192). He also narrates the American political experiment as a perversion of a true "Christian Republic," where instead of a proper and harmonious working out of differing gifts among the "many" and the "few," the political environment is simply one of multiple factions seeking legal protection from one another (193). This seems to be the upshot of his earlier assertion that groups can easily, in the political milieu of liberal democracy, recapitulate individualism under the guise of group interest. Notice that Milbank's assertion of the working out of gifts parallels Yoder's "universal gifting," but applies to society generally and not the just the church (Yoder would also see the principle as applying to society, as something that could be learned from and through the church and would only come to complete fruition in the eschaton).

Milbank cites Negri's claim that the twentieth century has primary been "the mere outworking of the ideological projects of the century that preceded it," identifying three such projects that sought to temper the capitalist market: fascist corporatism, state socialism, and social democracy. Since 1989, however, it has seemed apparent that these three have failed (268). He then compares Negri's thought to that of Pope John Paul II, arguing that the latter is particularly concerned with the failure of state socialism and offers a return to Catholic social teaching as a corrective, but has little to say about the failures of social democracy (welfare capitalism), especially with the failure of Catholic social teaching to stave off fascism. This not just the perversion of Catholic social teaching, Milbank argues, but of Catholic social teaching's failure to be socialistic enough (268). Corporatist thought that is not sufficiently socialist leads, for Milbank, inevitably toward fascism, which is not just an embarrassing chapter in the European past but a clear and present danger for the future of liberal democracy (269). Milbank

seeks to understand the debate between Catholic social teaching and liberation theology, but

warns that these are different in kind as well as degree:

> In the first case [Catholic social teaching] one has an ahistorical, prescriptive social vision: here is the general pattern for the well-ordered human society, time and place will supply unprescribed but legitimate variations. In the second case [liberation theology], one finds little concrete prescription (economic, political, or social), but instead an attempt to give a positive theological construal to certain *temporal* process which supposedly characterize modernity – the releasing of humanity's rational and political autonomy from religious tutelage, and the gradual flowering of human freedom and general sociality. This process is apprehended as being still under way, and as furthered by revolutionary socialism. (269)

It is not simply that the Catholic social teaching is inherently conservative and authoritarian

whereas liberation theology is liberatory and progressive, Milbank argues; by actually separating

the theological content of the Christian from socialist politics, the liberation theologians distance

themselves from a tradition of religious socialism that is the only answer to modern global

capitalism (269). Liberation theology, in short, recapitulates the Marxist error of placing too

much weight on (indeed, trust and faith in) historical process: "Marx was simply too cavalier in

trusting the emergence of a socialist society to the logic of history, and, moreover, to see that his

advocacy of a necessary phase of expropriation and centralization, along with a permanent

element of central 'scientific' direction of society, itself contained the germs of totalitarianism,"

though he is quick to point out that is it overly simplistic to blame Marx for Stalin (271).[52]

In *The Future of Love,* Milbank suggests that Christian socialism is "more in tune with

the radicalism required today" than Christian Marxism, and that "socialism is not right because it

is 'rational' but right because it is just," meaning that the critique of capitalism has to be a moral

critique (112). This moral critique has to do with the clash between Christian values and the

capitalist system. Capitalism, in its failure to realize justice, is a departure from those values –

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[52] On the relationship between secular millennialism and totalitarianism, see Arthur Versluis'
The New Heretics.

practically, Milbank says, a kind of apostasy – and was treated as such by Christian critics (113).

Christian Marxism, by which Milbank largely has in mind liberation theology, cannot mount a

specifically Christian critique of capitalism, as Christian socialism does. Instead, it must borrow

the critique from Marxism, but this also involves positing capitalism and other trappings of

modern secularism as a necessary (and thus good) stage on the way to a more complete liberal

emancipation (116). Thus, he explains, the critique of capitalism shifts from a focus on a

theologically informed sense of justice that capitalism denies to a liberal focus on freedoms on

which capitalism forecloses (116). For Christian Marxism, he continues, freedom displaces

justice, anthropology displaces ecclesiology, and dialectics replaces ethics (118). He points out

that the Marxist critique, though it contains valuable insights (Milbank mentions fetishization

and reification, suggesting that these are why Marxism remains the preeminent critique of

capitalism), is nevertheless predicated on distinctions (between exchange value and use value,

for instance) inherent in capitalism (124). To compromise with the Enlightenment, Milbank

feels, is to ultimately lose out to capitalism as a more virulent and purer form of instrumentality:

"Capitalism cannot be challenged as irrational," he writes, "but must be counter-narrated by an

alternative that exposes its arbitrariness, related to a genealogical reading and connected to what

Nietzsche called 'baseless suspicion' (126). Only Christian theology, he asserts, can truly

accomplish this, providing the necessary ontological basis upon which a robust socialist practice

can be sustained (129).

Milbank argues that what we are facing in the West is not the failure to be properly

modern but the logical outworking of modernity itself (242). Liberalism has left us impoverished

and communism has been impotent to challenge liberalism. What is needed, he argues, is an

ethics of generosity over against an assumption of contract as the fundamental social idea (250).

This requires the subordination of contract to gift, in the sense that different people have different gifts, offered for the good of the whole (245). It is here that Milbank's localism can be seen; in fact, he is somewhat sympathetic to small-scale capitalism, which he sees as retaining cohesive social elements of gift-exchange. What we need, he argues, is a new market of equitable and ethical exchange (253).

Eschatology

Realizing this new order of mutual gift-exchange is, in one sense, Milbank's eschatological vision. It is the proper *telos* of humanity and should be sought after, but it will only be fully realized in the eschaton. In an essay called "Socialism by Grace," published in *Modern Theology*, he writes, "Christians can have faith that things will, ontologically, arrive in the mode of beauty, of proper proportion, which is also the mode of justice" (545). He suggests that socialism, "the hope of a universal fraternity based on sharing" is, in a sense, the "final politics" in a way that some see Christianity as the "final religion" (532). Milbank's eschatology is teleological, and his thought evinces what we might call a double eschatological horizon: the emergence, temporally, of a robust socialist order based on gift-exchange plus the expectation of a final consummation involving the resurrection of the dead. Sometimes these seem to be conflated; other times it would seem that the temporal horizon prefigures the other. In both cases this seems to carry a postmillennial sensibility, an assumption that the eschaton is less historical rupture than the teleological goal of history itself.

This can be seen in Milbank's contrast between Christian Marxism and Christian socialism in *The Future of Love*. Milbank describes Christian Marxism in terms of "apocalyptic negativity" – that is, a focus on the ultimate removal of restraints versus what he sees as the more

constructive project of Christian socialism, which seeks the active presence of justice. In this sense, Christian socialism is more of an ecclesiology – "the mystical body of Christ as itself the incubus of a more just society" (117). Additionally, in "The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy," Milbank argues that faith and reason are both framed by eschatology, in the sense that they are both bound up in the final revelation of God in the beatific vision. For reason to be functional, according to Milbank, it must have some teleological sense of its own future in that revelation (35).

This also comes out in Milbank's discussions of evil and violence. Smith explains the basic thought: "If violence is ontologized, then, in fact, it cannot be resisted or eradicated – only minimized. But a specifically Christian onto-logic affirms both a peaceful origin and a peaceful eschaton" (197). In *Being Reconciled*, he argues that the idea of radical evil is a "theology of radical eschatological postponement of a guaranteed good and a guaranteed justice. And this theology cannot really allow any *anticipation* of the *eschaton*" (21, emphasis original). Milbank arrives at this by arguing that the Kantian view of free will, which allows for radical evil as among the choices available to that will, must rely on the promise of the *eschaton* in which God will adjudicate all our choices. Thus, rather than evil being a privation of the good, the final determination between good and evil is deferred and thus unavailable (20). Milbank finds this level of deferral to be irresponsible.

On the other hand, Milbank is not arguing for a completely realized eschatology. In "Paul against Biopolitics," one of his contributions to the collection *Paul's New Moment*, Milbank writes clearly of eschatological expectation: "The world awaits a final historical event already commenced" (59). Similarly, in "An Essay Against the Secular Order," he rejects the idea that eschatological hope is merely a motivating fiction:

> The narratological dimension insists on the tension between history and eschatology. Everyone is going to be taken seriously; their salvific destiny follows upon their historical situation, their historical choices. Yet at the same time salvation is not complete within history- this would be to make a liberal mockery of the sheer apparent meaninglessness of millions of oppressed human lives. In every Christian re-telling of the past, the very organization of the material into a dramatic narrative of salvation is implicitly a thrust towards not leaving the dead where they are, but rather at retrieving and re-making their actions and destinies. Our faith in the word and in the possibilities of typological re-fashioning is not just a faith for the future, but also a faith in the eschatological *nunc stans* when this *recherche du temps perdu* will be finally and not just fictionally accomplished. (205)

In fact, it is not that he rejects deferral *in toto* so much as he reads it differently, and parses the ramifications differently. In *Being Reconciled* Milbank argues that the violence of the past often came about "accidentally, in a sense, from the pursuit of peace – from their visions of peace, or of a reality that enabled peaceableness to be attained, and therefore from an envisioned ontological peaceableness" (37). To err on the side of zealous violence is the risk that one takes in living out the defense of the good, and thus, if Christianity has a legacy of violence, it is because it has overreached in its pursuit of the good, a situation complicated by the fact that we do not truly know the good prior to the eschaton (38). On one hand, the eschatological vision means anticipation of and participation in the future, much as it does for Yoder. On the other hand, our knowledge is limited prior to the apocalyptic unveiling of the eschaton, and we are forced to take action on this limited knowledge whereas Yoder calls for greater circumspection.

Therefore, in contrast to Yoder who sees our limited knowledge of good and evil in the *saeculum* as a reason to eschew violence inasmuch as it constitutes judgment, Milbank issues a call for the believer not to try to elide our embeddedness in the human condition: "We therefore should not and even cannot be pacifists. Instead, prior to the ultimate, we are always partially in the apocalyptic situation of 'opposing force,' if by force one means the attempt to disturb, for egoistic reasons, the harmony of reality. In opposing force, we are always tragically deploying

the enemy's means," he writes, "This is the best we can do; our scenario is apocalyptic, not

utopian" (43). For Milbank, we *must* risk "some sort of conjecture as to the nature of the Good,"

and while Milbank asserts, following Augustine, that the true Good is not something that can be

imperiled, we nevertheless bear a responsibility to protect the relative good in face of privatory

violence.

Milbank also challenges a stream of postmodern ethics, which he associates with Derrida

and Levinas, in which the call to self-sacrifice is in a sense purified inasmuch as the ethical call

is now one that offers no recompense whatsoever. Milbank sees this as a secularization of

Christian ethics (141). He wants to turn this around, arguing that Christian ethics actually

maintains the goal of happiness, and does so by giving up the idea of self-possession, along with

"the cognate themes of self-achievement, self-control, and above all self-government, which rule

nearly all our inherited ideas of what is ethical" (142). He then undertakes a lengthy and

deconstructive argument that what this "secularized Christian ethics" is after cannot be truly

ethical at all:

> Hope…that it may be given to me in the next moment to act well, is inseparable from
> hope that there may be universal acting-well, and at last a non-futile mourning; to be
> ethical therefore is to believe in the Resurrection, and somehow to participate in it. And
> outside this belief and participation there is, quite simply, no "ethical" whatsoever. (148)

As he writes in *The Word Made Strange*, belief in resurrection means to believe in both a

primordial plenitude and the restoration of that plentitude. It is not a matter of exercising virtue

in the face of nothingness, as he characterizes the postmodern ethical call, but of anticipating a

resurrected state in which virtue is no longer necessary and only charity remains. Not fearing

death, Christians can give of themselves confidently and without fear (230).

Milbank explores this more fully in "Paul against Biopolitics," pointing out that secular

politics pits life against death, whereas resurrection allows us to believe that life transcends death

– and not just the life of an immortal soul, but embodied life in some kind of continuity with the

life we know now (42). Thus the resurrection of Christ, for Milbank, reveals life – true life – to

be more than biological life, something this exists in and yet beyond that life to which the

believer can gain access (45). He invokes a new order into which the believer is called, a "higher

organicism, the resurrected body of Christ collectively participated in." He continues,:

> This *ekklesia* is undying because it is not composed of sacrifices in the face of death for the sake of the endurance of a finite edifice that must one day collapse. Rather, in Benjamin's and Agamben's terms, it is composed only of "pure means," of ecstatic living offering of divinized bodies according to a "logical worship"…whose superfluous potential can always be resumed, in any circumstances. Yet the realization of an infinite ecstatic community is itself here seen as the penultimate true *telos* and as possible only within an ontological reality lured by an infinite transcendent harmony: God, who is the ultimate goal-beyond-goal of all human life, surpassing all contrasts between ends and means. (46)

What this means, Milbank explains, is that justice in community is predicated upon the assertion

of a particular ontological reality in which life does not end, and that Paul not only affirmed the

classical notion of the civic order as the highest life but claimed that spiritual participation in this

ontological reality (presumably through baptism, though Milbank does not specify this) is a

requirement for citizenship (46). Crucial here is the role of the body, which serves as a nexus

between the sociopolitical reality in which it is enmeshed and the spiritual reality in which it

participates (46). This is not completely new, he points out: the Greeks already connected justice

to the idea of an immaterial and possibly immortal soul, depending on the thinker, and Milbank

asserts that only belief in the soul can stave off "various modes of political fascism," though he

does not pursue that line of thinking. But Paul adds to this bodily resurrection, which brings the

entire corporeal realm of human life into the scope of the truly political (47). The cultic

definition of citizenship that derives from this made it possible, in contradistinction to the ancient

world, for women, slaves, and children to be part of the community (and here Milbank specifies

this as taking place through baptism) as full-fledged citizens – there are even hints, Milbank suggests, that all living things, perhaps even everything in the cosmos, will eventually be a part of the new order (48).

Milbank's eschatology allows him to contrasts law and trust: justice is possible, he asserts, not by confidence that the law can finally adjudicate difference and rein in our agonistic bent (though it does this in a limited way in the meantime) but by "trust that God is just to an eminent and infinite extent that we cannot begin to fathom and that this justice will eventually so triumph that a harmony of peaceful order will embrace not just Jews and Gentiles (who will at last discover just how their various customs might cohere) but also all God's creatures." This allows us to trust others – this trust also being a gift – as possible expressions of the final good, even if they do not immediately recognize this and have no inclination or ability to reciprocate (53). The believer can risk giving, even to the ungrateful, because of the eschatological hope that one day all will be worthy of the gift, and this eschatological reckoning of sorts will retroactively make the gift appropriate. (71)

Nevertheless, there is a tension in Milbank's work. If there is an eschatological horizon, one that Milbank insists is historical and not merely a guiding fiction, and if there are limits to our recognition of the Good prior to full revelation in the eschaton, there is still a teleological horizon: "[W]e must insist that if community resides only in exchange, we must have a socialist market. We must *strive still to abolish capitalism*, albeit this must now be undertaken on a global scale" (544). His speculations are muted, however; in "Essay Against the Secular Order" he challenges Marxist dialectics, particular the invocation of necessary stages on the way to a socialist order, but also what he sees as a kind of secular utopianism:

> What is questionable here is firstly the attempt (see chapter one of Capital) to see these stages as part of a universal genesis rather than a particular diachronic structure; secondly

the notion that each stage of contradiction will be resolved in an immanently "determinate" way rather than through a partially contingent new narrative development; and thirdly the idea that all contradiction will be finally and completely resolved rather than merely "contained" in an endlessly re-adjusting strategy. (212)

This suggests that Milbank sees the realization of socialism, on the temporal level apart from the final eschaton, as contingent and limited. He might also suggest that it represents not an endpoint but a site of continual negotiation of the good. He is also skeptical of prognostications of capitalism's imminent demise, especially – and this parallels his ethical concerns about passivity and eschatological deferral – if it means acquiescence to some kind of economic fate. "Certainly, it is true," he writes in "Essay against the Secular Order,"

> that capitalism has hitherto relied upon a non-capitalist third-world imperial sphere for both primary accumulation and a supply of demand less eroded by the drive to extract surplus value from workers. Yet the erosion of this sphere by globalization by no means betokens necessarily yet another illusory "final" crisis of capitalism, such that socialists need only passively await this outcome, or else work negatively in its favor, without a constructive imagination and proto-formation of a counter-globalization. (194)

Milbank's screed against seeing capitalism in an endgame which might be awaited or even hastened by socialists seems to be aimed at Slavoj Žižek, a frequent sparring partner for Milbank who proclaims the "last days" of capitalism in *Living in the End Times*. Milbank is skeptical that capitalism is going to collapse any time soon and calls for a constructive response in light of its persistence. For Milbank the appropriate cite of a constructive counter-globalist politics is the church.

Anarchist Gestures

Milbank identifies as a radical and is a champion of socialism. "The only possible transgression of the current order," he asserts, "would be a theological one. So it is not simply that I am not a mere 'conservative,' it is even that I am one of the few people continuing to

uphold the bare *possibility* of a 'radicalism'" (156). He is not an anarchist, though there are some significant intersections of his work with the anarchist tradition. In "Paul against Biopolitics," he has Paul sounding rather anarchistic indeed: "The term *ekklesia* itself originally meant within Greek culture "the governing assembly" of the city, and it had already been occasionally applied by Hellenistic Judaism to the gathering of the elders of Israel. Its application to an entire new polity as such by Paul implies that in some sense all are now elders, all are now governors within a process of continual mutual governance" (55). He also speaks to the element of displacement we saw in Yoder: "there can be justice for Paul only if we all act as surrogates for the king who is resurrected and yet also semiremoved and absent. Christ can reign on earth only if we all become kings…which means that his one-way top-down equity has now been democratized and itself circulates" (63).

In some ways, however, Milbank surely *is* a conservative, and this can be seen in the similarity of some areas of his work to conservative socialist Robert Nisbet. Thus it is not particularly surprising that Milbank's thought might parallel Nisbet's in certain ways. Milbank mentions Nisbet briefly in *Theology and Social Theory* (54), and both refer rather favorably to eminent traditionalist Edmund Burke. To identify Milbank as a conservative in this way is not to do anything surprising, especially to Milbank himself. We need to consider, he writes in *The Future of Love*, "the possibility that only a re-alignment of the Left with more primordial, "classical" modes of thinking will now allow it to criticize the currently emerging tyranny" (243). He also, as we noted earlier, laments that there are concerns originally part of Catholic social teaching that were eventually co-opted by the right.

The clearest connection, however, comes where Milbank and Nisbet's thought intersects, curiously, with the anarchist tradition. As we have seen, Milbank finds problematic the loss of

intermediary structures, small communities in which one is embedded which include the local parish but also the guild, the cooperative, professional associations, etc., much like the medieval guilds and religious orders. Milbank seeks a balance between "aristocratic" and "democratic" tendencies at least partially because this reflects his ontological concerns. He invokes Tolkien in *The Future of Love*: "Christ is now King upon the earth, so that it follows that there should be always also a secular fusion of democratic dispersal with monarchic liberality and objectivity. Indeed this should also run in the direction of monarchic anarchy, as clearly recommended by Tolkien in the *Lord of the Rings* (no law in the Shire, but the orderly echo of remote kingship)" (255). But Milbank's assumption is not that a hierarchical power is necessary to keep competing interests at bay; rather he sees the need to protect democratic consensus by virtue of an "ecclesiastical elite" charged with preserving the tradition (*Being Reconciled*, 129). At any rate, Milbank's concern for structures "at every level is consistent with his invocation of "gothic space." Only a properly analogical ontology, which sees all of creation as participating metaphysically in the Godhead, can anchor the kind of social constructions necessary to displace liberal capitalism, as Milbank claims later in *Theology and Social Theory*. These ontological questions are not particularly new. Milbank's foil is what he identifies as a "stoic ontology," which is "grandfather to the political tendency of modernity to cut out all 'middle associations' and erect a direct relationship between a 'sovereign' state and a 'private' individual, sovereign within his own sphere of ownership" (405).

This ontology, however, problematizes the relationship between church and state. Milbank points out that this relationship is fuzzy even in Augustine, despite the "two cities" metaphor (406). Milbank gives the occasional nod to anarchist-sounding sentiments: "Better…that the bounds between Church and state be extremely hazy, so that a 'social'

existence of many complex and interlocking powers may emerge, and forestall either a sovereign

state, or a hierarchical Church" (408). He suggests that liberation theology's "base

communities," if they sufficiently blurred the lines between church and state as well as between

sacred and secular, might best exemplify what Milbank finds most compelling and encouraging

about Augustine's political thinking, despite the stated distaste for "Augustinian politics" in

liberation theology circles and Milbank's reservations about other aspects of liberation theology

(408).

Nisbet's argument in *Quest for Community* is that the Enlightenment desire to free

individuals from social roles and ties thought to be hindrances also paved the way for a stronger

state apparatus, and the desire for genuine community left by this shift makes us more

susceptible to totalitarianism (41). Nisbet is not always clear whether the eradication or

weakening of intermediary communities paved the way for the state to emerge and gain power or

if the emerging state concept pushed these aside, but he clearly sees a relationship here, and the

state is a specific target in a way that it is not for Milbank. This also, Nisbet feels, is a detriment

to emerging forms of community: "The structure of political power which came into being three

centuries ago on the basis of its eradication of medieval forms of community has remained – has

indeed become ever more – destructive of the contents of new forms of community" (xxii).

There is a strong localist cast to Nisbet's thought, and this is not unrelated to anarchist

thought. In fact, Nisbet is candid about some of these connections: "What the anarchists said, and

this is the splendid essence of anarchism and the link between it and such conservatives as

Tocqueville and Acton, is, first, that there must be many authorities in society and, second, that

authority must be closely united to objectives and functions which command the response and

talents of its members" (xxvii). Later he uses a quote from Proudhon: "multiply your

associations and be free" (247).

Nisbet connects the loss of community with the rise of Protestantism inasmuch as it

emphasized a direct relationship with God, though he notes that even in his day there could be

seen a theological shift away from this (10). "The historic emphasis upon the individual," we

writes, "has been at the expense of the associative and symbolic relationships that must in fact

uphold the individual's own sense of integrity," adding that a relationship to God is untenable

apart from mediation (11). He elaborates in way that does not seem far from Radical Orthodoxy:

> The loss of the sense in the visible community in Christ will be followed by the loss of
> the sense of the invisible. The decline of community in the modern world has as its
> inevitable religious consequence the creation of masses of helpless, bewildered
> individuals who are unable to find solace in Christianity regarded merely as creed. The
> stress upon the individual, at the expense of the churchly community, has led
> remorselessly to the isolation of the individual, to the shattering of the man-God
> relationship, and to the atomization of personality. (11)

In fact, he describes shift in religious thought toward a greater emphasis on community and

tradition that almost seems prescient of Radical Orthodoxy (23). Protestant efforts to clear away

mediatory structure between the individual and God also made possible a much more direct

relationship between the individual and the state (85). Nisbet even sees a parallel to capitalism:

"As Protestantism sought to reassimilate men in the invisible community of God, capitalism

sought to reassimilate them in the impersonal and rational framework of the free market" (86).

This similarity to Nisbet, however, stands in contrast to the neoliberalism that

characterizes today's conservatism. Milbank agrees with Hauerwas that *merely* shoring up such

intermediary structures will be not be enough, and that Christian theology is the only thing that

can present a serious challenge to capitalism itself. Thus, part of Milbank's rhetorical strategy is

to find postmodern reasons to re-appropriate premodern structures – as well as a premodern

metaphysics – in the interest of constructing an overtly political orthodox Christianity capable of challenging global capital. This has a different feel from Hauerwas's more overt antiliberalism; for Milbank, capitalism and Western liberalism are problems because they fail to fully realize the good. Milbank sees Christianity as capable of displacing these power structures precisely because it is the preeminent means by which the good might be realized this side of the eschaton.

Chapter 5: The Subversive Kernel and Postanarchist Theory

Jewish and Christian scriptures have much to say about some vital questions – death, suffering,

love, self-possession and the like – on which the left has for the most part maintained an

embarrassed silence. It is time for this politically crippling shyness to end.

-Terry Eagleton

The "five E's" that frame the above survey – etiology, ethics, ecclesiology, economics,

and eschatology – are not necessarily unique to Christian radicalism. Most forms of Christian

theology make etiological appeals, address the issues of ethics, ecclesiology, and economics, and

conceptualize the future in some way that bears on the present. In fact, with a bit of translation,

many forms of Western political thinking can be examined with the same rubric: politics is not

without its origin stories, ethics, social theory, economics, or teleological horizon. Admittedly,

this framework has been somewhat forced since these ideas intersect, intertwine, connect, and

recombine in ways that make them difficult to systematize. Sorting them out in the way that we

have obscures some of the deep connections between them, but it also proves helpful for the

purposes of comparison, to which I turn now. Economics is not much of a point of contention;

the rejection of capitalism is part of the shared radicalism of Yoder, Hauerwas, and Milbank.

They disagree, however, on how a proper economics might be embodied and how to get there –

issues that are ecclesiological and eschatological. Eschatology and etiology sound throughout

like a pair of drone notes in Celtic music. This is because the concepts of first things and last

things frame the proper *saeculum* in which ecclesiological and ethical considerations play out.

Our three main thinkers differ in all of these. Yoder and Hauerwas have similar ethics but

different ecclesiologies.[53] Milbank and Hauerwas share an ecclesiology but disagree on ethics. All three make similar etiological appeals but different etiological assumptions; they agree that eschatology is important but seem to have divergent expectations. These theological differences map onto political differences that speak to the future of radical politics.

In bringing things to a close, I begin by establishing the neoliberal context in which contemporary radical politics is situated. I also look back to the radical abolitionists discussed in chapter one, asking what today's radicals can learn from the legacy of the abolitionists and how they can avoid the same mistakes. The next two sections compare and contrast Yoder, Hauerwas, and Milbank in terms of their respective declension narratives (a function of etiology) and their ethics as it relates to ecclesiology. From there I argue that Yoder is not only the most anarchistic of the three, but that he is quite close to the shift in anarchist discourse called "postanarchism" and that he offers significant resources to postanarchists seeking to transcend the limits of classical anarchism in a neoliberal context. This brings us back to postsecularity and the relationship between religion and politics, particularly in radical thought. I conclude with a call for mutual openness among radicals and theologians.

The Slavery of Our Times

Since the 1999 protests at the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference, dubbed "The Battle in Seattle," anarchism has garnered attention from both the media and the academy.[54] The WTO protests were part of what is sometimes called the "anti-globalization"

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[53] This suggests that they really do not have the same ethics except in the superficial sense that they are both pacifists.

[54] It may be worth noting that two very popular films – *The Matrix* and *Fight Club* – brought radicalism to the big screen that same year.

movement, and the attempt to theorize the relationship between this movement and emerging forms of anarchism that seem to characterize it is called "postanarchism."[55] Postanarchism is characterized by the introduction of poststructuralist and postmodern thought to anarchist theory and is often contrasted to the "classical" anarchism of Bakunin, Proudhon, Kropotkin, and others. Whether this is a truly a break from these thinkers or a continuation of their thought is a topic of some debate among postanarchist thinkers, but is enough for our purposes to note that postanarchism is critical of the humanism and essentialism of modernist anarchist discourse.

In *The Political Theory of Poststructuralist Anarchism* May borrows language from Michel de Certeau and calls this a difference between "strategic" and "tactical" thinking. In strategic thinking, May explains,

> the variety of oppressions and injustices that pervade a society and the possibility of justice are located in a single problematic; if that problematic is properly analyzed and the right conclusions for intervention are drawn, then justice, inasmuch as it can be had, will be had….[This reduction] lies at the core of strategic political thinking. All problems can be reduced to the basic one; justice is a matter of solving the basic problem. (10)

Whether the basic problem is seen to be ownership of the means of production as with Marxism or the state as with classical anarchism, postanarchism questions the strategic calculus by which a single site becomes the focus of resistance. We might borrow from *Star Wars* and suggest that strategic thinking presumes a Death Star – a primary target to be removed and a single point of attack by which it might be destroyed. Tactical thinking, by way of contrast, assumes power to be multiple and fluid, requiring more creative responses (11). Saul Newman points out that contemporary radical politics is working more and more outside the state rather than strictly

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[55] For a rehearsal of the post-Seattle resurgence of anarchism in intellectual and academic circles, as well as a helpful discussion of the problematics of the "anti-globalization" designation, see Süreyyya Evren's introduction to *Post-anarchism: A Reader*. Also, as with most words beginning with the prefix "post-," there is some variance with regard to the use of a hyphen. My preference with most such words is to not hyphenate them, but I retain the hyphen when quoting authors who do.

against it ("Post-anarchism and Radical Politics Today," 48). Postanarchism sees the state as a

problem, but not *the* problem; it rejects the logic that would make any single point of resistance

primary or central.

One reason for this shift, besides the influence of poststructuralist thought, is the

changing role of the state in contemporary politics. Both postanarchism and the anti-

globalization movement have come about as a response to neoliberalism, in which the state is no

longer the primary political actor. In "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy" Wendy

Brown argues that "neoliberalism" describes a repudiation of certain aspects of Keynesian

economics in favor of a more radically free market – the Chicago School of economics run amok

(37-38). But she points out that this is not merely economic. It has an ideological and political

component as well:

> Neo-liberalism is not simply a set of economic policies; it is not only about facilitating
> free trade, maximizing corporate profits, and challenging welfarism. Rather, neo-
> liberalism carries a social analysis which, when deployed as a form of governmentality,
> reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire.
> Neo-liberal rationality, while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily
> focused on the economy; rather it involves *extending and disseminating market values to
> all institutions and social action*, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player.
> (39-40)

Responses to neoliberalism are mixed. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe neoliberalism

as a global empire and call for an equally global multitude to rise up in resistance.[56] Slavoj Žižek

issues a new Marxist – even Leninist – call for socialist revolution. Much of the response on the

streets has been, as Graeber argues, largely anarchist. There are Christian responses also: Radical

Orthodoxy and the Jesus Radicals both emerged during this period and are critical of

neoliberalism.

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[56] See their trilogy which begins with *Empire* and continues with *Multitude* and *Commonwealth.*

If neoliberalism is the slavery of our times (to borrow a phrase from Tolstoy), then we might look among these various responses for a new cohort of "radical abolitionists" seeking nonviolent solutions. The problem is that the story of Perry's radical abolitionists is tragic. Their downfall was twofold: they gave up nonresistance when it became clear to them that slavery was not coming to a peaceful end, and they defined themselves against slavery to such an extent that when it ended in ways different from how they expected the movement collapsed. They lost their identity, and it was nearly half a century before another viable example of Christian anarchism would show up. New expressions of radicalism, Christian or otherwise, will need to learn from their mistakes.

We see a similar dynamic in the history of Weatherman, the student-led resistance group that became The Weather Underground. Originally nonviolent and calling for the end of the Vietnam conflict and the dismantling of the "military-industrial complex," they grew more acquiescent to violence over time, until a botched bomb-making attempt took the lives of three members. This, combined with an anticlimactic end to the war without significant changes in U.S. society or policy, demoralized the group and led to its disintegration.[57] This illustrates what we might call the *Animal Farm* aporia[58]: how do we resist oppression and violence without becoming the very thing we are resisting or without recapitulating the evil we are seeking to resist? What if nonviolent resistance does not "work"?

Our survey of the work of John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and John Milbank suggests that there are theological answers to these questions – but there are also limits in that

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[57] See Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*, and Bill Ayers's memoir *Fugitive Days.*

[58] I am grateful to Tony Hunt for this turn of phrase.

theology is done from a particular location in a particular language. There are dangers in translation. Risking such a danger, we might place these three thinkers on a continuum: Yoder is the most thoroughly pacifist and thereby the most anarchistic, to the point of being almost indistinguishable from Christian anarchism; Hauerwas is less so, particularly in his acquiescence to and even a need for hierarchy in the church; and Milbank gestures toward anarchist thought in places but cannot be considered an anarchist as such. In a sense, if Christoyannopoulos and the Jesus Radicals show us what Christian anarchism looks like, Milbank shows us what a Christian radicalism that is *not* anarchist might look like. This may seem an insignificant distinction. Milbank does not claim to be an anarchist, though he welcomes the anarchist struggle against capitalism to some extent, and there are some interesting connections between his "gothic space" and the federalist tradition in anarchism – but that is as far as it goes.[59] To say that Milbank is not an anarchist is to state the obvious. Hauerwas does, on occasion, connect himself to anarchism, but this identification is not crucial to his project. Likewise, if Yoder is an anarchist, it is an artifact of his theology, and not an identification that is central to his thinking.

Nevertheless, all three articulate some sort of radical politics, and the theological means by which they arrive at that politics are relevant to anarchist theory and conversations about radical resistance. Their responses correspond roughly to those in radical thought more generally, albeit in a theological register. Hauerwas and Milbank, both formidable thinkers, ultimately fail to be radical enough. They succumb to temptations of power and thus lose the purchase Christian theology might have on a genuine political alternative. Their projects are in danger of recapitulating the failures of Garrison and Ballou. I think Yoder's work offers a more promising

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[59] We might compare Milbank's "gothic space" to Colin Ward's articulation of the federalist tradition in *Anarchy in Action*, for instance.

way forward. His "comitragic" eschatology[60] offers the most robust analog to anarchist theories

of power, his egalitarian ecclesiology offers the strongest constellation of social practices for

radical communities, and his comprehensive pacifist ethics offers the best answer to the "Animal

Farm" aporia. The combination of these elements allows us to see Yoder as contributing

significantly to (post)anarchist political theory.

Constantine's Ghost

We have been using "etiology" to mean the ways in which Yoder, Hauerwas, and

Milbank narrate both a specific Christian origin in Christ as well as the origin of the human

condition in the Fall. But there is a third dynamic as well, one we might call a "declension

narrative." By this I mean the way in which these theologians narrate how the church and/or

Western culture arrived at the place where a particular theological intervention became

necessary. For all three theologians, there is a point at which things have gone awry to which

their work is addressed as a potential solution. Yoder and Hauerwas both see a pivotal moment

in the mainstreaming of Christian thought in the Roman Empire symbolized by the conversion of

Constantine in 313 CE. Milbank's declension narrative has to do with a shift in philosophical

thinking that takes place a thousand years later.

Yoder's declension narrative names a failed eschatology. In *The Original Revolution* he

posits two overlapping aeons – one looks backward to the time prior to Christ and is

characterized by "the world"; the other looks forward to the realization of the Kingdom of God

and is characterized by the church (55). This realization, however, is not something the church is

called to bring about by any means necessary, but a future vision the church is called to

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[60] From O'Leary's *Arguing the Apocalypse*; see chapter 2.

prefigure. Prefigurative politics is an important theme in anarchist discourse; it means that the way a group reaches its political goals must be consistent with those goals. If the *telos* is one of world without domination, then it is inconsistent to pursue this goal through domination. If the goal is peace, then the means to reach this goal cannot be violent. This requires a willingness to rethink efficacy, which is part of what Garrison and other "radical abolitionists" failed to actualize. "The cross," Yoder writes, "is the extreme demonstration that *agape* seeks neither effectiveness nor justice, and is willing to suffer any loss or seeming defeat for the sake of obedience" (56).

Yoder describes Constantinianism, then, as a conflation of church and world that forecloses on this call for patience. It describes the circumstances under which the church "has a vested interest in the present order of things and uses the cultic means at her disposal to legitimize that order" (65). It mistakenly thinks that the kingdom is being realized *through* the present order (66). The equation of Christianity with empire reconstructed the church/world distinction in geographical terms; later it would show up in ideological terms, where one group or faction could claim divine sanction for its revolutionary agenda (68). This is not merely a collusion of church and state, though of course such is often the case; Yoder also identifies as Constantinian modes of thought and practice that are not contingent upon a formal church/state alliance.

It is important to note that "Constantine" is a metonymy; the figure of Constantine stands for a trend that Yoder sees as beginning before Constantine and making the idea of a Constantine possible.[61] "Constantinian," then, represents a particular kind of relationship to power that May

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[61] This is a point that Peter Leithart misses in *Defending Constantine* when he accuses Yoder of being a poor historian and then seeks to rehabilitate Constantine. Yoder's use of the appellation "Constantinian" to signify a particular relationship to power structures is not a referendum on the

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would call "strategic." May invokes the image of concentric circles, with the primary problem in the center and derivative problems farther out. What lies in the center varies, but the hallmark of "strategic" thinking is the identification of a central issue (11). For Yoder it has to do with "looking for the right 'handle' by which one can 'get a hold on' the course of history and move it in the right direction" (*The Politics of Jesus*, 234). He continues,

> Whichever the favored "handle" might be, the structure of this approach is logically the same. One seeks to lift up one focal point in the midst of the course of human relations, one thread of meaning and causality which is more important than individual persons, their lives, and well-being, because it in itself determines wherein their well-being consists. Therefore it is justified to sacrifice to his one "cause" other subordinate values, including the life and welfare of one's self, one's neighbor, and (of course!) of the enemy. We pull this one strategic thread in order to save the whole fabric. (234)

Not only is this ethically wrong for Yoder, but it is also ineffective; history does not really respond to our efforts to steer it in one direction or another. Yoder even uses the word "strategic" in a way that prefigures May's critique: "The strategic calculus is subject to a very serious internal question. It has yet to be demonstrated that history can be moved in the direction in which one claims the duty to cause it to go" (235).

Milbank's declension narrative is quite different and is part of his genealogy of the secular. For Milbank, the secular is complicit in what he calls an "ontology of violence" – it presupposes a chaotic order in which force is reined in by counter-force. Milbank argues that this is a construction and that there is no particular reason to presuppose such an ontology over against what he considers the Christian presupposition of a primordial peaceful order, or "ontology of peace." Arguably, the core of *Theology and Social Theory* is a chapter called "Ontological Violence," in which he brings home his argument against postmodern nihilism and locates an important shift in our understanding of being in the univocity of Duns Scotus. This

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character or sincerity of Constantine as much as a critique of the church. That he uses Constantine's name mostly as a symbol is evident in Yoder, "Primitivism in the Radical Reformation," in *The Primitive Church in the Modern World*, 81-82.

shift is particularly important for Milbank; it is in many ways his version of Yoder's Constantinian turn. But while Milbank uses language of "peace" and "violence" there is no sense of a critique of the church's relationship to power. The problem, as Milbank sees it, has to do with a shift in philosophical thinking that takes place long after the power structures Yoder finds problematic are well in place.

For Yoder, all Constantinian conceptions of political relevance invoke a vantage point from which real change can take place, and which allows for a strategically placed and uniquely qualified group of people to wield power for the good of all. Just as for May it is the concentric shape of the power conception that matters and not what lies in the center, the specifics in Yoder's description—which group, which particular seat of power—are not as important as the fact that there is assumed to *be* a particular seat of power and a particular group qualified to occupy it. Also similar is Yoder's assertion of its pervasiveness: "[W]hat modern man finds himself practically incapable of challenging is that the social problem can be solved by determining which aristocrats are morally justified, by virtue of their better ideology, to use the power of society from the top so as to lead all men in their direction" (245).

Hauerwas falls prey to this temptation. His rhetoric against Constantinianism is well known,[62] but he does not apply this conception of power to the church. For Yoder the rejection of strategic thinking implies a criticism of post-Nicene ecclesial structures as themselves Constantinian in a way that is not true for Hauerwas. Baptism is not the egalitarian practice it is for Yoder. "I have little use for the democratization of our moral existence so characteristic of

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[62] See, for instance, Hauerwas's essay "On Being a Church Capable of Addressing a World at War: A Pacifist Response to the United Methodist Bishops' Pastoral *In Defense of Creation*?" (available in *The Hauerwas Reader*) particularly the section called "Christological Pacifism." He narrates the relationship between eschatology and peace in Yoderian terms, accusing the bishops of being Constantinian.

egalitarianism," Hauerwas writes in *Dispatches from the Front*, "Indeed, I regard egalitarianism as the opiate of the masses and the source of the politics of envy and influence so characteristic of our lives. The interesting question is not whether hierarchies or elites should exist, but what goods they serve" (8).

Here Hauerwas and Milbank are in considerable agreement. Their view of the sacraments is quite similar and they are equally suspicious of liberal democracy. For Milbank, the need for hierarchy is ontological. His argument against postmodern nihilism rests on his assertion that there is no particular reason to favor univocity over analogy that does not invoke or imply a metaphysics of the very sort that postmodern nihilism sough to eradicate: "[I]f Being remains in itself unknowable, always absent and concealed, then how do we justify the characterization of Being as univocity?" He goes on to argue that the "simultaneous univocity (of Being) and equivocity (of beings) provides a workable code, which could even become a guide for practice[63] – but nothing grounds a preference for this coding" (304). What, then, grounds a preference for retaining analogy over univocity? Ultimately – and here Milbank is very MacIntyrean – it is adherence to a specific tradition:

> For whereas the univocal process is absolutely indifferent to each particular difference, the analogical process is a constant discrimination of preferences and erection of hierarchies. Hence the character of these preferences, and the order of these hierarchies, is attributed to the analogizing process itself: it *is* the very ladder which it erects. What this implies in practice is adherence to a particular tradition. Only such adherence permits a metacritical philosophy to remain *not* strictly transcendental, in the sense of a dualism of scheme and content, without an exchange of predicates. Nihilism, by contrast, which refuses adherence to a particular tradition, produces a metacritique which unavoidably lapses back into a transcendentalism, into mere "critique." (305)

This "analogical process," Milbank explains, is our participation in Being (as God) but also in God's creativity, which allows for the possibility of novelty, of further diversity in which the

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[63] Grounding a practice-based ethics in a univocal ontology is, in fact, exactly how postanarchist Todd May proceeds. See May, *Our Practices, Our Selves*.

depths of the Godhead can be expressed. For this to not collapse back into univocal nihilism, Milbank argues, the analogical process must also imply orders and hierarchies in the sense that preferences are shown and discriminations made. These must be grounded in the divine character of God as revealed in Christ and in church history by way of the Holy Spirit.

In "Radical Democracy, Radical Ecclesiology," Peter Dula and Alex Sider point out a rhetorical artifact in which "the people" functions as a legitimating designation justifying the ministrations of a democratic government without involving the people, as such, directly in the deliberating process. "This is repeated in the work of Rawls," they write, "where the citizen is virtually non-existent, while the judge and legislator are ubiquitous…. A similar repetition occurs in the work of Hauerwas as well, where the role of the discerning *ekklesia* is repeatedly invoked but often eclipsed by the offices of pastoral authority" (486). Indeed Hauerwas needs such authorities, even an elite class, in his ethical project. He argues that modernity eclipses the possibility of extraordinary persons who command our respect or deference: "The elitism of the ethic of the gentleman, the ethic of honor, is slowly eroded in the favor of the virtues necessary to sustain the life of commerce" (*The Peaceable Kingdom*, 170). For Hauerwas, egalitarianism smacks too much of liberalism.

Yoder and May disagree; both are skeptical of a ruling elite or vanguard capable of representing and therefore leading the whole. For Yoder, the church is not so much called to be the leading edge of change in society as a witness to the possibility of an alternative. Though Hauerwas ostensibly agrees, within the church he still wants an aristocracy. Yoder's opposition to those who "by virtue of their better ideology…use the power of society from the top" is similar to May's rejection of vanguardist politics:

> If there is a central problematic and a central site of power, then it is possible that there
> are those who are peculiarly well placed to analyze and lead the resistance against the

power relationships of that site. Their well-placed position may derive from their knowledge of that site, or from their involvement in it, or from their place within the social order which allows them effective access to means of pressure…. Tactical thought, because of its perspective, rejects the idea of liberation through a vanguard. If power is decentralized, if the sites of oppression are numerous and intersecting, it is hardly likely that any one set of individuals will find itself peculiarly suited to a vanguardist role in political change. (12)

For both Yoder and May, because there is no central locus power of which humans might gain control, there is no group of humans who can claim to occupy it legitimately. David Graeber puts this bluntly in *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*: "Any anarchist social theory would have to reject self-consciously any trace of vanguardism. The role of intellectuals is most definitely not to form an elite that can arrive at the correct strategic analyses and then lead the masses to follow" (11).

Hauerwas's use of liberal democracy as a foil is key to understanding some of these differences. Dula and Sider argue that there is a difference between liberal democracy and radical democracy in that the former sees conflict as threat and the latter is open to conflict as opportunity. They go on to suggest that this might also be a significant difference between Hauerwas and Yoder: Hauerwas sees conflict as threat and seeks a rival approach to that of liberalism, whereas Yoder sees conflict as opportunity and therefore articulates a political theology that is more amenable to radical democracy (487). Sider and Dula point out, however, that Hauerwas himself has expressed an openness to a democracy that is not liberal—one that is "not only compatible with the church but essential to it" (494). Articulating such a democracy, however, has never been important to Hauerwas, they explain, and this helps to illuminate some differences he has with Yoder. "It is clear," they write, "that he wants as distinct and radical a

church…as Yoder does. Tellingly, though, whether it is Yoder's church or John Paul II's doesn't matter to him. What matters is that it resist liberalism" (495).[64]

Though Hauerwas shares Yoder's concerns and even the language of Constantinianism, he seems to interpret Constantinianism more narrowly in terms of church versus state. In this sense, as Nathan Kerr argues in *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic*, his theological politics bears a structural similarity to the political theory of Carl Schmitt in that it is predicated on the construction of a particular enemy (the liberal state) and the church's identity in contradistinction to that enemy (118). "Hauerwas's political antiliberalism," Kerr writes, "forces him into an account of Christian mission that is methodologically 'imperialist': the church's mission just *is* to maintain its distinctiveness from the state as a *polis* that is 'encompassing' and 'universal' in a way that the latter could only ever pretend to be" (122). Kerr suggests that Hauerwas is advocating a modified Christendom, and points out that Hauerwas shares Milbank's MacIntyrean concern that the Christian tradition be able to "out-narrate" rival traditions (111, n. 70).[65]

Yoder's construction is quite different. In "*Apocalypsis* and *Polis*" Douglas Harink writes, "Yoder stresses that God's invasion of the cosmos in Jesus Christ creates a people whose calling and task is to live amidst the nations for the sake of the nations, as a *paradigmatic sign* of humanity's and creation's destiny, and to do so as witness, servant, exemplar, and intercessor" (18). The way Harink puts this – "for the sake of the nations" – makes an important point. Yoder did not see the church defined negatively by its difference from the world, but by its faithfulness to the witness of Christ. This is how Yoder avoids, to some extent, the persistent problem of

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[64] Hauerwas answers Dula and Sider in *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, but only to explain why he does what they say he is doing (29-30).

[65] In fact Hauerwas narrates with approval a liturgical but also civic celebration he witnessed in an Irish village, noting that he could not help thinking "If this is Constantinianism, I rather like it" (*In Good Company,* 20).

resistance being parasitic upon what is being resisted; it allows Yoder to conceive his politics constructively rather than oppositionally (11). Exile is the shape that the new community must take, but this does not presume that it will *automatically* be alien to the surrounding communities, Harink writes. It is not the character of the radical community that is determined by its host but the level of correspondence its practices might have with the host community's practices (14). Yoder's vision is not defined against any *particular* instantiation of Constantinianism because that would only lead to another form of Constantinianism.

Yoder traces this idea through Western history with a somewhat whimsical typology. He explains that Constantinianism was originally global in scope; the Roman church and empire could at least claim worldwide status even if this were never literally the case (it is in this context, for instance, that Milbank can say, "once there was no secular"). This global marriage of church and world he calls Constantinianism. With the collapse of Christendom as such, the church/state collusion was more localized: each state or province had its own established church. Yoder dubs this "neo-Constantinianism" (142). In the wake of secularization, nations might have a stated polity of non-establishment but evince popular support for Christianity (like the U.S.) or formal support for Christianity amidst popular indifference (Yoder's example here is Sweden). Yoder calls this "neo-neo-Constantinianism," and it is here that we can see that simply arguing for separation of church and state does not answer the Constantinian problem for Yoder (144). Yoder calls the church's willingness to translate the Christian gospel into terms that are more conducive to the philosophical fashions of the day for the sake of relevance "neo-neo-neo-Constantinianism," and he calls versions of Christianity that give *a priori* approval to forms of polity yet to come (through revolution, for instance) "neo-neo-neo-neo-Constantinianism" (147).

In these latter cases, the relationship between church and state as such is immaterial; one could be anti-state and yet still be Constantinian, and within these schemas there are no guarantees that the latest theological interest (e.g., Radical Orthodoxy) is not also the next "neo-" added to the designation. Yoder explains that these various iterations of Constantinianism have emerged in response to one another. They are bound by a common logic. What emerges to fight one form of Constantinianism often ends up becoming the next version of it. In each case, Yoder argues, they end up finding the true meaning of history not in the church *qua* the church but in their particular cause – they fall into strategic thinking (146). It is the very idea and structure of this identification that is the problem for Yoder:

> At each of these stages the church tried to strengthen her hold on society and her usefulness within society by taking the side of the persons or the ideologies currently in power. Then when a given ruler or ideology needed to be rejected the church would take the side of the next triumphant one. Yet as it has worked out, the succession has not brought progress but rather disillusionment. Should we not therefore suggest that the error of the church in earlier days was not that she allied herself with the wrong power, with the outgoing ruler rather than the incoming one, but that she accepted the principle of sanctifying a given social order at all? (151)

It would be a mistake to see this as merely the anti-Catholic bias of an Anabaptist. Yoder does not anathematize the church in its Constantinian forms; he assumes the church to be the church, albeit disobedient.[66] Nor is he particularly dismissive of the Middle Ages; he points out that with each new stage of Constantinianism, some good or benefit integral to the social imaginary of the Middle Ages was lost, which is not wholly incompatible with Milbank's project (150).

Milbank does not see the post-Nicene church as remiss in its relationship to power and has no reason to; Constantine is not representative of a problem for him so much as an opportunity to shape society toward the proper ends. Milbank's declension narrative located the

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[66] In the same way, he regards Old Testament monarchy as a wrong turn for the Israelites (which also has anarchist overtones) but nevertheless asserts that they remained God's people. See John Nugent, *The Politics of Yahweh: John Howard Yoder, the Old Testament, and the People of God.*

problem at a point where church and world were already largely conflated; "once there was no secular" means in a sense that once there was only Christendom.[67] We can contrast this with Yoder whose rejection of Constantinianism is precisely what connects him to anarchism. Hauerwas rejects the connection between church and state but in doing so ends up almost advocating the church *as* state, a position that affords him some anarchist-sounding rhetoric but is not particularly anarchist. If Constantine is alive in Milbank's project and dead to Yoder's, his ghost still haunts Hauerwas.

Christianity and Violence

This relationship becomes even clearer when we examine the issue of violence. Despite advocating an "ontology of peace," Milbank is not a pacifist, which puts him at odds with both Hauerwas and Yoder in terms of ethics. Milbank writes that "Christianity offers "a creed which rigorously excludes all violence from its picture of the original, intended, and final state of the cosmos" (*Theology and Social Theory*, 288). But he is willing to sanction violence in order to achieve this goal. This, in Yoder's terms, Constantinian. It is strategic and not tactical thinking to assume that the realization of the good takes precedent over a prefigurative politics. If peaceability is the end, then violence cannot be the means. This is the failure of the radical abolitionists, and it is a failure not necessarily of ethics but of eschatology. Violence forecloses on the patience that is necessary for peace. Graeber notes that violence stifles the imagination necessary to seek peaceful solutions (72).

Hauerwas agrees here. In a conversation with Milbank published as "Christian Peace" at the end of *Must Christianity Be Violent?* he responds to Milbank's argument that gazing upon

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[67] To be clear, Milbank does not see the church *as* the state, but desires a state "as far as possible within the body of Christ" (*The Future of Love*, 171).

violence ends up being the ultimate violence (thus rendering pacifism impossible because it constitutes such a gaze – see the previous chapter). Hauerwas asks how Christians are to avoid being spectators of the cross, and suggests that even God was a spectator of the crucifixion. This argument is similar to one that Yoder makes in *The Original Revolution.* He rejects the charge that the pacifist is complicit in evil on the basis that this would also implicate God. Instead, Yoder, argues, the pacifist is participating in the patience of God (61). Milbank responds to Hauerwas by asserting that God was wholly involved in the cross and therefore not a spectator, and that Christians avoid being spectators by participating in the Eucharist. Hauerwas then replies:

> If I am saved from being a spectator of the crucifixion by my participation in the Eucharist, and the Eucharist is where I am included graciously in God's very sacrifice for the world – God's sacrifice for the world is surely about freeing the world from the world's violence – then how can you ever get up from the Eucharistic celebration and do violence? (210)

Milbank counters by suggesting that pacifism too narrowly defines peace in procedural terms, and that true peace is eschatological – it comes from God. Hauerwas is unconvinced: "If you make that move," he responds, "it seems to me that *eschatology* is just another word for *ideal*, and as a result, the kingdom really isn't present." Milbank concedes that the church anticipates the eschaton, but reiterates that peace is also about justice, and that he does not understand why someone concerned for justice would not be willing to fight "the people removing the conditions under which real peace would be possible," or why they would be violating the peace of the Eucharist to do so (211). For Milbank, as we saw in the previous chapter, failure to realize the good is a greater injustice – a greater violence – than the use of force to remove obstacles to the good. At this point, Hauerwas suggests that perhaps the answer is for the pope to deny the Eucharist in places where Christians are committed to killing one another (211). Milbank rejects

this on the basis that it would deny the Eucharist to all indiscriminately, and Hauerwas jokes that

if they are, as Paul says of the Corinthians, eating and drinking to their own damnation, then

perhaps this precisely why the Eucharist *should* be celebrated (212).

At this point we might imagine Yoder taking exception to the presumptions Hauerwas

and Milbank share as to what constitutes the Eucharist. Yoder's ecclesiology seems much more

rooted in concrete social practice over against the somewhat abstracted ritualism of the liturgical

Eucharist. Yoder's Eucharist does not cease to be a ritual or even a sacrament, but there is a

significant difference between the Eucharist as celebrated in traditional Christendom – bread and

wine consecrated by a priest with the exclusive privilege to do so – and the Eucharist as a

metonymy of an economic sharing that characterizes the Christian community. While no social

practice is likely to prevent people from killing each other, it seems even more unlikely (or at

least more absurd) for members of a local community who are sharing their resources to get up

from a common table and kill one another in the name of the state or an ideology. Milbank and

Hauerwas invest existing liturgical practice with social meaning, which they must do because

such practices are an integral part of the tradition they are seeking to maintain. Yoder, too, wants

a place for the Eucharist, but he wants to rethink it (he would say restore it) as economic sharing

– again, this is an etiological issue in that Yoder's vision of the early church is ultimately more

radical in terms of social practice.

In his conversation with Milbank, Hauerwas goes on to stress that his point is the

eschatological nature of peace, with which Milbank agrees (212). When Hauerwas attempts to

delineate their respective positions by saying that Milbank sees peace as a goal whereas

Hauerwas sees peace as a virtue in itself, Milbank clarifies by saying that he, too, sees peace as a

virtue, but a collective one, and with this Hauerwas agrees. But Hauerwas is not necessarily

misreading Milbank. In *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank writes, "Christianity has traditionally seen Christianity as a comprehensive eschatological goal, and *not* the name of a virtue" (408, emphasis original). Moreover, Hauerwas is correct to identify this as the heart of their disagreement. They both agree that the church should school its members in the virtues. For Hauerwas one of those virtues is pacifism, whereas Milbank wants to reserve the possibility of violence as a last resort. He calls for Hauerwas to admit that there are situations in which the peaceful solution does not work and therefore the only viable response is violent, however tragic that might be. This elicits the most pointed response from Hauerwas:

> I don't know why I would want to imagine that. Why would I want, as someone schooled into the peaceableness of God's church, to invite that kind of imagination? Because just at the time I invite that kind of imagination, I become less than what God has made us to be in terms of forcing alternatives on me. I mean, pacifism is to force an alternative on me that I really probably don't like very much. And this is what I think salvation is. Salvation is always doing what I don't like very much. (213)

At this point, Milbank quips, "Doesn't sound very eudaemonistic," to which Hauerwas replies, "Oh, no, you discover, retrospectively, you are happy, John." The transcript indicates that this gets a laugh (213). Milbank retorts that it sounds like a cold bath, which also gets a laugh. The moderator at this point steers the conversation. But this diversion into one-liners masks a more serious element of the conversation. Hauerwas is not exactly joking about discovering in retrospect that one is happy. Hauerwas writes of his desire to be a part of a community strong enough to get him to do what he does not want to do and then "learn to like what I have been forced to do" (*In Good Company,* 75). And despite his "cold bath" quip, Milbank writes in *Theology and Social Theory* that the risk of coercion "is offset by the possibility that the recipient can later come to understand and retrospectively consent to the means taken. Such actions may not be 'peaceable,' yet can still be 'redeemed' by retrospective acceptance (408).

This indicates a remarkable agreement between the two, except that Hauerwas is in the awkward position of suggesting that one of the roles of the church is to coerce its members into pacifism.

Later in the conversation, Milbank addresses forms of coercion present in the raising of children. He assumes such coercion to be a necessary violence, which is why he is not prepared to accept Hauerwas's pacifism:

> I think in those situations, we do exert all kinds of subtle modes of coercion. Teachers do it. People put barriers and goads in people's way because there is something they cannot yet quite see, but which you know they are going to see. Of course, all this stuff is terribly dangerous, but it also seems to me that it is in some way inevitable. And I am just not quite sure what [Hauerwas] is talking about, when he talks about being trained in the life of peaceableness and so on. What Christian tradition is he referring to? I usually think in terms of mainline, creedal traditions, probably also in terms of churches that have a threefold order of ministry and churches that uphold the decision of the ecumenical councils. That's my normative reference point…if I am talking about the Christian tradition. There has been inculcation of peaceableness, of charity, and justice, and mercy, and all these virtues, but this allowance for some measure of coercion has always been in the picture. (214-215)

It is here that Milbank comes out ahead in an argument based on this premise. The "threefold order of ministry" refers to church hierarchy – bishops, priests, and deacons – one that Hauerwas readily accepts. The coercive element in Hauerwas's ecclesiology is not power for the sake of power; rather, it serves an educative function. Members are schooled in peaceability, even in ways they "probably don't like very much," as part of the church's mission in forming a people. But it *is* coercive, and it *is* part of the very framework of the church in Hauerwas's ecclesiology just as much as Milbank's. This makes Hauerwas particularly vulnerable to Milbank's deconstruction of pacifism; there is an extent to which Hauerwas's Aristotelian ethics demands a coercive social body to shape members into proper pacifists, which can be seen as inconsistent. Hauerwas's comment about the pope making an interdiction against celebrating the Eucharist in places that are deemed too violent should be seen as a casual remark and not a considered policy

statement, but the ease with which Hauerwas could make the suggestion speaks to this coercive and hierarchical element in his ecclesiology.

Here, Yoder is less vulnerable. In an unpublished 1973 memo, "Fuller Definition of Violence," Yoder anticipates the kind of argument Milbank is making, arguing that significant redefinitions of violence often become too broad to be useful in ethical deliberations. For Yoder, the test of violence is the extent to which an act violates the dignity of a person; the coercion of children in parenting and education, for instance, borders on violence and can cross the line, but is not violent insofar as it does not compromise the dignity of the child. This is not wholly dissimilar from Milbank's assertion that violence in the service of the good is not evil and therefore not violent, but the lines are drawn differently. For Yoder the pursuit of the good must not pre-empt the patience of God and the allowance God has made for human rebellion; humans cannot take upon themselves the divine prerogative to mete out justice. Furthermore, the idea that there is a necessarily coercive element of certain loving acts would clearly not apply to killing or most forms of overt violence; these always cross the line insofar as they negate the dignity of the enemy that Christians are uniquely commissioned to maintain (3).

By invoking the threefold order of ministry, Milbank is being explicit that his vision of the Christian tradition includes hierarchical structures that Yoder rejects in *Body Politics* and elsewhere. For Yoder this threefold order is part of the Constantinian compromise. This does not mean that the hierarchical church stopped being the church (as Yoder critics sometimes presume) but rather that the adoption of hierarchical structures marks a disobedience on the part of God's people. For Milbank, rejection of this hierarchy – the threefold order of ministry – would be a rejection of the Christian tradition itself. It is, in a word, *too* radical; it goes back to a root of early practice that Milbank does not acknowledge. Milbank's ethics is different from Yoder's,

partially because his etiology is different. His invocation of the threefold order is, therefore, a call for Hauerwas to take sides: does Hauerwas's anti-Constantinianism include this rejection of the tradition (as Milbank sees it)?

Milbank and Hauerwas both have a very MacIntyrian sense of the importance of tradition *qua* tradition, so for Milbank to say "what Christian tradition is he referring to?" is a fairly pointed challenge. Hauerwas, too, wants the post-Nicene tradition largely intact, including the threefold order and other hierarchical structures. He just wants that tradition to be pacifist in terms of its relationship to the rest of the world and to produce Christians who are personally pacifist. To do this, in Hauerwas's ethical model, necessitates an ecclesiological structure that is coercive in its attempts to shape character.

Despite a difference in declension narrative, then, Hauerwas and Milbank agree on important aspects of ecclesiology, which makes Hauerwas to some extent closer to Milbank than to Yoder. Returning to their conversation in "Christian Peace," we see Hauerwas answering Milbank's challenge. He cannot deny that the version of the Christian tradition they are both trying to preserve and reinvigorate as a foil to the liberalism of the West includes this coercive element, and he has anticipated where Milbank is headed with his line of argument. He deliberately distances himself from Yoder, saying, "I have criticized John Yoder because I sometimes think John's language of the voluntary is overdetermined in modernity because it puts too much stress on process separate from the material convictions that you want the process to serve" (215). Milbank is accusing Hauerwas of favoring a kind "procedural" pacifism that serves as a shortcut; the pacifist has already decided ahead of time that violence is out of the question. Hauerwas agrees in principle, which is why he implicates Yoder. He seems to be making an oblique reference to Yoder's emphasis on consensus-based decision-making; this, again, is far

too egalitarian for Hauerwas. It means "too many meetings," which Hauerwas jokes might be its own form of coercion (215). Hauerwas is telling Milbank that he understands the argument because it is one he has made against Yoder, albeit on slightly different terms.

Hauerwas's counterchallenge to Milbank is to reject the latter's insistence that the mild coercion of children and others in the tasks of parenting and education constitutes a violence to which the pacifist has already conceded:

> What I think is worrisome, John, about starting with an issue that begins by saying "If you don't wear your jacket, you don't get to go outside, because it is twenty degrees" is that before long you are saying, "We have to defend the Western world." Among people who want to use the kind of phenomenology of violence that you are insisting upon there has been that kind of slide. (215)

Milbank needs this coercion to be a form of violence so that he can dismiss the pacifist as already assenting to the efficacy of violence. Hauerwas rejects that premise, arguing that once we admit even to exceptional uses of overt violence, we are more inclined to look for those exceptions. Hauerwas cannot cling to the ecclesiological model that he and Milbank agree on and still maintain the pacifist logic he learned from Yoder.

This tension comes out in Hauerwas's reference to "language of the voluntary," which is a criticism of Yoder's free-church ecclesiology. Yoder emphasizes voluntary membership in the ecclesial community; no one should be presumed or forced to be a part of the community. He favors adult baptism because infant baptism is a holdover from a Constantinian order in which everyone is presumed to already be a part of the church, and this he sees as a fundamental denial of human freedom. Hauerwas, on the other hand, sees this as too much of a concession to modern liberalism, and this as we have seen is a point of contention between Hauerwas and Yoder. Hauerwas argues that voluntarism was "prophetic" in the context of Christendom, but now "cannot help but appear as a legitimation of the secular commitment to autonomy" (*In Good*

Company, 73). On one hand, this seems like a "tactical" move, tailoring an *ad hoc* response to specific challenges in a given cultural context; on the other hand, it undermines the connection, apparent in Yoder, between the nonviolence Hauerwas advocates and the need for there to be an "outside" from which people might freely come to the church (or to which they might freely return, or even be sent) in order for the community to be non-coercive. Yoder feels that Constantinianism, particularly the element of the Constantinian compromise in which humans are considered members of the church by virtue of where they are born, forecloses on God's willingness to allow humans to reject the way of Christ, and does not allow for "the world" as the realm in which such a rejection might be lived out ("The Wrath of God and the Love of God," 241). Because Hauerwas's ecclesiology does not recognize this distinction, the church/world distinction is reified in a church/state antagonism.

To help understand this we might compare Yoder's invocation of Constantine to Richard Day's use of "hegemony of hegemony" in *Gramsci is Dead*. After pointing out that "*there is no single enemy* against which the newest social movements are fighting (5, emphasis original), Day identifies neoliberalism with hegemony, which he defines as "a process through which various factions struggle over meaning, identity and political power" (6). Neoliberalism, he claims, is seeking and achieving hegemony on an unprecedented scale (8). The significant question for Day is: how can we fight it? His answer is worth quoting at length:

> The obvious answer is to try to establish a counter-hegemony, to shift the historical balance back, as much as possible, in favor of the oppressed. This might mean a defense of the welfare state in the global North, or a continuation of the battle to enjoy its benefits for the first time in the global South. Or it might mean attempting to establish a *different kind* of global hegemony, one that works from 'below' rather than from 'above.' To argue in this way, however, is to remain within the logic of neoliberalism; it is to accept what I call the *hegemony of hegemony*. By this I mean to refer to the assumption that effective social change can only be achieved simultaneously and en masse, across an entire national or supranational space. Marxist revolutionaries have followed the logic of hegemony in seeking state power, hoping to reverse the relationship between the

dominated and the dominators. Liberal and postmarxist reformism display the same logic, although in a different mode—rather than seeking to take state power, they seek to influence its operation through processes of pluralistic co-operation and conflict. What is most interesting about contemporary radical activism is that some groups are breaking out of this trap by operating *non*-hegemonically rather than *counter*-hegemonically. They seek radical change, but not through taking or influencing state power, and in so doing they challenge the logic of hegemony at its very core. (8)

It is not difficult to see here the similarity between Day's "hegemony of hegemony," May's "strategic" thinking, and Yoder's "Constantinianism."[68] It is also not difficult to see Hauerwas in this light and even some Christian anarchists whose anarchism is still too grounded in classical anarchist anti-statism. To be fair, Hauerwas does not want to take over the state apparatus; he is not necessarily seeking to grab hold of a particular handle of history so that it comes out right. That much he has learned from Yoder. But his project does seem to be defined negatively against the state much in the same way that classical anarchism is. Kerr phrases this in terms of strategies and tactics:

> Whereas for Hauerwas apocalyptic becomes essentially an ecclesiological *strategy* for establishing the church-as-*polis* vis-à-vis the modern liberal nation state, for Yoder apocalyptic remains principally a *tactical* process of negotiating the ordinary (secular) contingencies and particularities of the everyday world and seeking from within them to articulate the truth of the gospel, the divine inbreaking of God's kingdom which is the very historicity of Jesus of Nazareth. (131, emphasis added)

The liberal state is Hauerwas's Death Star, and constructing an alternative is the means to its destruction. For Yoder there is no Death Star. He is not concerned to overthrow the state. He

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[68] Simon Critchley describes this non-hegemonic impulse as "neo-anarchism" in *Infinitely Demanding*, and in terms that are similar to those of postanarchism. He offers a three-fold typology of political response. One he calls "military neo-liberalism," which roughly corresponds to Day's hegemonic, "neo-Leninism," which is counter-hegemonic (146). The third – and only non-violent– response is neo-anarchism, which takes up what he calls an "*interstitial distance* within and against the state," which is non-hegemonic (148, emphasis original). What makes it *neo*-anarchism, Critchley argues, is that it "does not hope to achieve the classical anarchist dream of society without the state" (148). This is somewhat more resigned than Yoder's thinking in which the state "has its place" but there is a similar recognition that overthrowing or dismantling the state is not a live option.

does not want to work *through* the state, either, though he is willing to work *alongside* the state if it is doing something worth doing.

Ultimately, Yoder is more anarchist precisely by being a more consistent pacifist. Yoder would not deny situations (such as parenting or teaching) in which some form of mild coercion seems unavoidable for the good and dignity of the other person and agrees with Hauerwas that this is not violence as such.[69] He advocates personal pacifism (Christians should be pacifists), corporate pacifism (the church should not employ violent means to achieve its ends), and intra-ecclesial pacifism (the church should be non-coercive in its internal operations). Hauerwas is less pacifist and therefore less anarchist: he advocates personal and corporate pacifism but he does not follow the logic through to intra-ecclesial pacifism. Milbank is neither pacifist nor anarchist: he argues for peaceability – even an "ontology of peace" – but denies the very possibility of pacifism in any of these senses.

The irony here is that as Hauerwas tells the story (in *The Peaceable Kingdom,* among other places), he was attracted to Yoder's ecclesiology but was originally put off by his pacifist ethics. What he has ended up with, however, is *not* Yoder's ecclesiology, but a truncated and selective form of Yoder's pacifism. Pacifism taken to its logical conclusion implies more than simply foreswearing overt violence; there are specific social ramifications that Yoder sees and Hauerwas does not. Graeber suggests that consensus-based decision-making is necessary for any society that is not based on violence (35). A church that put the principles of Yoder's *Body*

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[69] Even here, he rejects the attempt to extrapolate from these "natural" forms of coercion a justification for more overt violence or structural coercion: "We know that parents have never done their job until they have learned to let their child free completely, even to make mistakes, even to make *bad* mistakes. We know that teachers have never truly educated their charges until they have left them to struggle with error and even to fall into error" ("The Wrath of God and the Love of God," 242). Yoder's reflections in "You Had It Coming: Good Punishment," also in *The End of Sacrifice*, are germane here as well.

Politics fully in place – particularly consensus-based decision-making and economic sharing – would be arguably anarchist (perhaps, taking into account the economic sharing of the Eucharist, even anarcho-communist). This is not the church Hauerwas has in mind. His ecclesiology is much closer to Milbank's; they share presumptions as to what the Christian tradition must look like that Yoder would characterize as Constantinian. It seems to me that Yoder and Milbank are the more consistent, with Hauerwas stuck awkwardly in the middle.

We should also see this as an eschatological issue. Milbank's rejection of pacifism would be an eschatological failure for Yoder. It is a failure of patience. The resort to violence pre-empts the possibility of God's providential action and usurps the divine prerogative to mete out justice (or to wait). Yoder asserts that the risk of allowing evil to go unchecked (as it appears in the here and now) is part of the very nature of God's love, or *agape* (61). A properly eschatological perspective, he argues, allows this to be seen as patience and not complicity (63). Hauerwas agrees inasmuch as he accepts pacifism in this sense, but his insistence on a coercive ecclesiology is also an eschatological failure; it does not trust God to work patiently through the process of communal decision-making and does not trust an egalitarian politics to shape a people who can love their enemies.

Postanarchist Resonances

In the preceding sections we used Yoder to critique Milbank and Hauerwas by relating postanarchist theories of power to Yoder's pacifist ethics, but this bears teasing out. Postanarchism is not necessarily pacifist – at least not on the personal level – but it is predicated on an ethics of nonviolence. Saul Newman argues in *The Politics of Postanarchism* that violence is "an authoritarian, sovereign relationship, something that violates the autonomy of the other"

and that nonviolence should be the ethical horizon of an anarchist politics (131). The

postanarchists' attempt to make this nonviolence comprehensive leads to a critique not only of

neoliberalism or the state but also of other forms of radical resistance, including some elements

of classical anarchism.[70] The Yoderian critique of Hauerwas and Milbank is similar in this

regard, and Yoder's work can serve as a complement to postanarchist thought. His theology of

the powers shares much with postanarchist theories of power and his account of practices applies

a nonviolent ethics to the dynamics of stable community life. More importantly, Yoder's work

points to the importance of patience in radical politics, which is an important contribution to the

postanarchist critique.

Yoder does not directly engage the poststructuralist thinkers that inform postanarchism to

any significant extent.[71] David Toole compares him favorably to Foucault in *Waiting for Godot*

in Sarajevo. Daniel Barber reads him alongside Derrida in "The Particularity of Jesus and the

Time of the Kingdom" and Deleuze in *On Diaspora.* Nonetheless, Yoder's own work,

particularly as collected in *A Pacifist Way of Knowing*, establishes him as a postfoundationalist

thinker who saw the epistemological ramifications of an ethics of nonviolence.[72] But Yoder does

not begin with a poststructuralist critique and then explore the political possibilities (May), nor

does he begin with anarchism and then interrogate it in light of poststructuralist developments

(Newman and Koch). He also does not begin with activist practice and later find a connection to

the poststructuralist critique (Graeber and Day). None of these ways in which thinkers have

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[70] It is tempting, though probably too far, to suggest that postanarchism is in some sense an attempt at a more comprehensively nonviolent anarchism. It is enough to say that as anarchist discourse has sought to be more consistently anarchist, it has also become more nonviolent.

[71] Curiously, Milbank's "postmodern nihilists" – Nietzsche, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, etc. – are precisely the poststructuralist thinkers that postanarchists appropriate in service of anarchist theory.

[72] In fact, epistemology would be a sixth "E" worthy of exploration.

arrived at postanarchism can be applied to Yoder. He did not consider himself an anarchist, and

to some extent Christoyannopoulos is correct not to consider him one, especially since Yoder

argues that our eschatological situation is one "in which nonresistance is meaningful and in

which the state has its place" (*The Original Revolution,* 64). Christ's reign does not obliterate

evil, but channels it – even vengeance is used by God (through the state) to mitigate chaos (59).

Still, we have seen anarchist implications to his thought, and while it would be a distortion to say

that Yoder *is* an anarchist or postanarchist, some of the ways in which he diverges from

"classical" anarchism actually bring him closer to postanarchism.[73]

Yoder's theology of the powers runs very close to postanarchist theories of power, as we

have seen.[74] In his exousiology, Yoder does not counter May's "strategic" with an equally clear

articulation of what May calls the tactical; he effectively drops the question once he feels he has

satisfactorily discredited strategic thinking – particularly its tendency to equate efficacy and

morality (*Politics of Jesus*, 236). May's articulation of the concept of power in tactical thinking

does, however, share features with Yoder's theology of the powers:

There are many different sites from which [power] arises, and there is an interplay among these
various sites in the creation of the social world. This is not to deny that there are points of
concentration of power, or, to keep with the spatial image, points where various (and perhaps
bolder) lines intersect. Power does not, however, originate at these points; rather, it
conglomerates around them. Tactical thought thus performs its analyses within a milieu
characterized not only by the tension between what is and what ought to be, but also between
irreducible but mutually intersecting practices of power. (11)

This image of multiple and perhaps shifting sites of power bears similarity to Yoder's use of

"Powers" in the plural and to his recognition that this designation includes religious, intellectual,

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[73] Actually, to insist too strongly that Yoder is either would be to engage in the kind of
representation postanarchism seeks to critique.
[74] In her contribution to *The Wisdom of the Cross*, Marva Dawn connects Yoder's work on the
powers to that of Christian anarchist Jacques Ellul.

moral, political, and economic structures. (145). In *For the Nations* Yoder makes this even more explicit:

> The notion that "power" is univocal and unilinear is one of the mythical dimensions of modernity. That myth has served us (or we have served it) for some generations, but it is increasingly refuting itself as our economy bumps up against the ceiling of our physically finite globe…. The Pauline vision according to which the "powers" which frame our lives are at one and the same time *both* creatures of God for our good *and* oppressors is increasingly seen to describe reality more adequately than the univocality myth. (35)

Here we can clearly see Yoder's conception of power as decentralized, in concert with May's articulation of tactical thinking.

Yoder's theology of powers is also helpful in understanding the role of the state. Newman writes that the state is oppressive "not only in the form that it takes, but in its very structures…it has its own prerogatives, its own logic of domination, which intersect with capitalism and bourgeois economic interests but are not reducible to them" (50). That the state has its own logic is suggestive of the language of the powers. The state is not inert; it is possessed of a particular kind of spirit. The state is not, however, just another one of the powers in Yoder's thinking, and we can see this in Yoder's etiology as it relates to the Fall. Many of the powers, in Yoder's theology, are necessary elements of human existence that are fallen. Their relationship to human life has a tragic character; we need them, but that very need is subject to exploitation. The state is not an original good but a further corruption or metastasization of other powers – a need for order, perhaps, or organization.

As John Nugent explains in *The Politics of Yahweh*, Yoder sees the powers as part of the created order, but that he "locates the powers in the prelapsarian order precisely because he does *not* locate the state there" (20). The state has a place, given our fallen condition, but it is constitutive neither of our primordial past nor our ultimate future (21). In the meantime, God uses the state –

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often in spite of itself – to accomplish relative good (34).[75] This allows Yoder to arrive

theologically at a trenchant critique of the state without presuming that the abolition of the state

is imperative or even possible.

We can see this in *The End of Sacrifice*, where Yoder challenges capital punishment and

anticipates the argument that what he is suggesting, taken to its logical conclusions, might lead to

anarchy.[76] His response is that taking things to their logical conclusions would actually lead to

the Kingdom of God, but to expect this prior to the eschaton is utopian nonsense. "The world, by

the very fact of its rebellion," he explains, "has guaranteed that the Christian social critique will

not lead too far; at most, the world can be challenged, one point at a time, to take one step in the

right direction, to move one more notch in approximation of the righteousness of love" (47-48).

We need to read this in light of Yoder's eschatology, which O'Leary calls a "tragicomic"

apocalyptic frame: Yoder does not believe that the world will be made right by human effort, but

by God's intervention in history. Challenging the world "one point at a time" is undertaken not

with the thought that this will bring about the eschaton but with the recognition that the final

outcome is not contingent upon any particular success in the here and now. Yoder's

eschatological assertion of a place for the state recognizes that a direct overthrow of the state is

probably not practically possible by nonviolent means and not ethically desirable by violent or

counterhegemonic means.

Both Milbank's acquiescence to the use of state power and Hauerwas's posturing against

state power are caught up in the logic of what Day calls the "hegemony of hegemony." They are

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[75] Nugent narrates Yoder's etiology in a way that suggests considerable overlap with the anarcho-primitivist critique.

[76] "Anarchy" here signifies a breakdown of the rule of law and not anarchism as a political theory – though Yoder also calls the latter "philosophically extreme" (155).

both strategic. They are both Constantinian. Yoder, by contrast, offers what we might call a

structural indifference to the state: it is not that the state is unimportant or inconsequential on a

practical level, but that neither the existence of the state nor the particular shape it takes is the

primary locus of the community's political considerations. This comports well with

postanarchist thought, but it is also close to the thinking of Colin Ward, who saw the anarchist

vision not as a goal to be reached by any means necessary but a source of guidance for action in

the present (*Anarchy in Action,* 130-133).[77] This, too, bespeaks a kind of tragicomic

eschatology. One hallmark of this thinking is that it does not presume that history is moving in

one particular direction. Graeber writes that anarchists "presume no inevitable course of history"

and that "one can never further the course of freedom by creating new forms of coercion" (11).

Another point of connection between Yoder and the postanarchists is an emphasis on

practice. May regards practices or groups of practices to be primary points of analysis in

postanarchist thought and advocates a "micropolitics" (*Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 95). Graeber

calls anarchism "an ethics of practice" (95). The practices Yoder identifies in *Body Politics* – the

rule of Paul (consensus decision-making), binding and loosing (nonviolent conflict resolution),

the Eucharist (economic sharing), the fullness of Christ (non-hierarchical organization), and

baptism (initiation into an egalitarian order) point to a fertile ground of social interaction at the

intersection of radical pacifism and radical egalitarianism, and this seems both consistent with

and complementary to postanarchist thought.

The connection between this group of practices and a comprehensive violence has to do

with the cultivation of patience. In "Patience as Method in Moral Reasoning," Yoder lists

nineteen varieties of patience as a way of arguing against the characterization that he was an

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[77] Ward predates postanarchism, but Todd May draws upon his work favorably in *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*.

absolutist. Patience as an epistemological principle mitigates the temptation toward absolutism. Patience in practice is the outworking of a pacifist ethics. In what Yoder calls the "Rule of Paul," for instance, everyone has the opportunity to speak. Consensus is important because, as Yoder puts it in *Body Politics*, "a quick majority vote may reach a decision more rapidly but without resolving the problem or convincing the overpowered minority, so that the conflict remains" (70). This consideration is not only practical and political, but also epistemological; patient listening even to one's adversary is part of the process of seeking knowledge (69). This is connected to pacifism insofar as a violent response bypasses the listening process. As Graeber describes it, "if you have the power to hit people over the head whenever you want, you don't have to trouble yourself too much figuring out what they think is going on, and therefore, generally speaking, you don't" (72). Even groups that do not or cannot employ physical violence on their members inevitably enforce decisions through recourse to authoritarianism or the force of law.

The other four practices also relate to patience. Economic sharing in the Eucharist calls the rich to forgo the accumulation of wealth, thereby disabusing them of the notion of buying their way into power. It also calls the poor to forgo all romantic dreams of wealth and power themselves. Everyone becomes fiscally committed to the time-consuming process of community formation. Universal gifting, the conviction that every member of the community has some specific contribution to make, calls for patience in discerning each person's particular gift and resists the temptation to invest an especially talented group with power as a more efficient means of getting things done. Baptism implies the patience of creating a voluntary group that does not expect everyone else to be ready for their particular ethical commitments. Yoder believed that a nonviolent ethics was the way of the future and thus ultimately binding on everyone, but did not

believe it could be forced on those who did not or could not choose it. Nonviolent conflict resolution calls for the patience to allow the involved parties to work out their differences on their own terms, only invoking the community if that process breaks down, even though authoritarian arbitration would be much more efficient. Even the ultimate sanction in the face of irresolvable conflict, dismemberment from the group, requires patience in the form of a willingness to wait for the offending party to come back on his or her own.

Political theorist Romand Coles, though not a Christian theologian, sees the importance of patience in Yoder's thought.[78] In "The Wild Patience of John Howard Yoder," he finds in Yoder a model for community that involves "very particular and powerful practices of generous solidarity precisely *through* creative uses of conflict and a vulnerable receptivity to the 'least of these' within the church and those outside it" (306). This "vulnerable receptivity" Coles calls patience, alluding at least partially to "Peace as Method." Yoder's ecclesiology is fluid, Coles suggests, because it is open to critique and because the multiplicity of gifts helps to shape the church through time (312). Consensus-based decision-making in which everyone has the floor is central to making sure the various gifts are honored (312). Coles describes the body metaphor used by Paul as having a nonhierarchical connation in Yoder by way of a displacement dynamic we have already seen in chapter two: if Christ is the head, then no human can occupy that place of leadership. Coles sees a potential problem here, which he poses as a question:

> Yet if practicing and discerning the meaning of nonviolence, uncoerced community, eucharistic sharing, and the priesthood of *all* believers is to occur at the dialogical edge between order and unanticipatable emergence, between the intelligible and the visceral, is there not still a way in which "Jesus as Head" privileges the body of believers in such a

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[78] Coles is interesting because he is not a Christian – he describes himself as "a member of no church" – and because his articulation of "radical democracy" is informed by some of the same sources and faces some of the same questions as postanarchism. See his *Beyond Gated Communities* and also his book with Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*.

way that, however exemplary relations are to be *within* the church, relations with people outside it would be structured around a rigid hierarchical privileging of Christian vision with effects antithetical to the politics of Jesus just described? (313)

Coles narrates Yoder's response to this in etiological terms: "Jesus and the early communities gathered around his memory teach that *to be possible at all*, practices of *caritas* must be inflected toward vulnerable engagements with those emerging in margins within the church body *and* those *beyond* it" (314). Coles describes this as a "reaching back," which we have been calling "etiological"; it refers to the process of allowing the example of Jesus and the early church to inform and challenge the present (311). It is a constant reminder for the ecclesial body to remain open to other voices.

The ecclesial practices advocated by Yoder are porous, Coles argues. Eucharistic sharing implies hospitality. Nonviolence means not just refusal to engage an enemy but commitment to extending love and reconciliation. Patient listening to the "least of these" within the church is a means of being schooled in receptivity to marginalized voices outside the church (314). Coles points out that Yoder's call for patience means that developments outside the church can give rise to voices that remind Christians of something intrinsic to their story that they had forgotten or strayed from – even something they had never fully grasped (315). "The fullest conditions of possibility for *caritas* themselves might *emerge* historically in ways that exemplify this fullness before it fills the church in the form of disciplined practices or intentional awareness," he explains. (316). Yoder considered this a form of grace, and Coles argues that vulnerability to the voice of the other is constitutive of what it means to be the church (318). "Epistemological nonviolence," he writes, "aims toward practices in which the possibility of giving and receiving are inextricably intertwined" (319).

Coles adds that Yoder advocated patience as "suspension of the socially and existentially engendered pressures upon time to *summarize* judgment and engage others in *summary* fashion" (322). Yoder saw Jesus as victor and God as sovereign. Coles explains how these function for Yoder:

> They are to powerfully inspire and orient the church to resist "the *principalities* and *powers*" that would subjugate creation to idolatries of "power, mammon, fame, and efficacy." They call believers to resist as mythical these closures of history, and begin (again and again) to practice an alternative body politics, confident that the future belongs to *caritas* – even in the face of powers that seek to externalize subjugation and seem to exhibit enormous capacities to assimilate or brutally crush opposition and alternative hopes. (323)

Coles goes on to note that Yoder's radical patience extends even to an unwillingness to represent other subjugated peoples to themselves; he did not claim to know ahead of time that the Christian "good news" was the best news for the oppressed in any and every circumstance (324). Yoder arrived at a suspicion of representation – a conviction at the heart of the postanarchist critique – through a conviction that allegiance to Jesus as Lord calls for a radical patience. Still, Coles warns, there is a potential weakness inherent in the "jealousy" of claiming Jesus as Lord in this way. There is a potential temptation to close off dialog. He points out that Yoder's personal engagement with certain marginal voices was limited. He does not fault Yoder for this, considering the breadth of Yoder's other engagements, but suggests that those following Yoder's work might continue to bring it into dialog with other voices (327).

Finally, Coles offers a list of "challenges and questions Yoder poses to radical democrats" that apply equally well to postanarchists:

1. The church as body. To what extent and in what fashions can radical and pluralizing democrats theorize and develop enduring corporate practices of resistance and exemplary alternatives?
2. The discipline of the church body. How might we develop disciplines that empower without becoming "disciplinary" in the pejorative senses of this word we have identified quite well?

3. The jealousy of the discipline. Yoder shows compellingly how a certain jealousy might aid resistance to odious forms of power. What are the possibilities of enduring resistance in absence of this or a similar jealousy?
4. The generosity of the jealousy. Is there not a jealousy infusing and partly enabling every generosity; certain refusals, certain relatively rigid limits to any "yes"? Has this been sufficiently acknowledged by neo-Nietzschean democrats? Sufficiently acknowledged to draw from this condition its highest possibilities and respond to its dangers (as Yoder does in his rendering of patience)?
5. The pacifism of the generosity. In the critique of a certain "perpetual peace," and in the embrace of a certain agon, have we not avoided more sustained inquiries into war making as such, even as genealogists have contributed in important ways to critical illuminations of numerous specific war making practices? Is killing congruent with receptive generosity? (328)

For Yoder, patience is part of the character of God: "We love our neighbor because God is like that. It is not because Jesus told us to that we love even beyond the limits of reason and justice, even to the point of refusing to kill and being willing to suffer – but because God is like that, too" (*The Original Revolution,* 52). In *The War of the Lamb* he writes that those who follow the patient and peaceful way of Christ are working with "the grain of the universe" (62). We might call this an ontology of patience. Patience is the connection between the radical pacifism of nonviolent witness and the radical egalitarianism of consensus process. The group that does not have the patience to make decisions that honor all members is not cultivating the patience necessary to resist resorting to violence to achieve its political objectives.

The Postsecular Kernel

To suggest that Yoder's critique overlaps that of postanarchists is not to say that they are different ways of saying the same thing. Postanarchism is largely about theorizing contemporary activist movements; Yoder's work has more to do with calling the church to particular forms of community and witness. It does not seem that Yoder's project would be able to entertain the deconstruction of the human subject implicit in poststructuralism or its rejection of

transcendence. Postanarchism does not have the metaphysical framework that would make Yoder's ethics intelligible at its logical limits. We must admit a certain measure of incommensurability. Nonetheless there are points of possible dialog. Yoder has theological resources for answering questions within postanarchist discourse. Consider this passage from May:

> Traditional anarchism, in its foundational concepts – and moreover, in the fact of possessing foundational concepts – betrays the insights which constitute its core. Humanism is a form of representation; thus, anarchism, as a critique of representation, cannot be constructed on its basis. Poststructuralist theorizing has, in effect, offered a way out of the humanist trap by engaging in non-foundationalist political critique. Such critique reveals how decentralized, nonrepresentative radical theorizing can be articulated without relying upon a fundamental concept or motif in the name of which it offers its critique. However, one question remains which, unanswered, threatens the very notion of post-structuralism as a political critique. If it is not in the name of humanism or some other foundation that the critique occurs, in what or whose name is it a critique? How can the post-structuralists criticize existing social structures as oppressive without either a concept of what is being oppressed or at least a set of values that would be better realized in another social arrangement? In eliminating autonomy as inadequate to play the role of the oppressed in political critique, has post-structuralism eliminated the role itself, and with it the very possibility of critique? In short, can there be critique without representation? (43)

May concedes that there is no politics without values – without something in the name of which the political critique is being made – but argues that values (which imply representation) are not antithetical to the anarchist project (43). Yoder finds these values from within the Christian tradition, particularly in the person of Jesus. This is part of his etiology, and it invokes a universal that is problematic for poststructuralist thought. But it is precisely Jesus's *particularity* – namely, the way of the cross – that allows Yoder to navigate the dangers of representation. As we saw in chapter two, Yoder's political theology works by way of displacement: Christ is king, but he is a king who serves rather than dominates, and is present in the egalitarian deliberations of the community rather than over them as an absentee landlord. Newman describes a way in which this makes sense for postanarchism:

When a particular signifier stands in for the empty universality of the political space, causes and struggles can achieve some form of coherent meaning and unite with one another. There is nothing necessarily authoritarian about this sort of symbolic representation. Indeed, without this function of the "stand-in" there can be no real hope of radical politics. However, where this argument becomes problematic is when representation seems to translate into political leadership – into the idea that a radical political movement needs the figure of the leader to hold it together. (55)

This displacement dynamic in Yoder's thinking allows Jesus to be a "particular signifier" that disallows the translation of representation into political leadership by a person or vanguard.[79]

Additionally, the practices Yoder advocates are available, *mutatis mutandi*, to radicals outside the Christian tradition. In fact, some version of each already exists elsewhere. Activist groups are already practicing consensus process. The nonviolent conflict resolution of "binding and loosing" is practicable in any community, as is the mutual collective honor called for in recognizing universal gifting. Economic sharing is the hallmark of socialism and communism. Initiatory rites can be found in a wide array of groups from motorcycle gangs to the Rotary Club, though not all such rites imply the same level of egalitarianism as does Yoder's articulation of baptism. This is not to suggest, as Paul Martens does, that Yoder reduces theology to social theory, nor is it to assume that Yoder's theology can even be reduced in that way.[80] There is an irreducible theological context in which these practices cohere for Yoder. A group that did all of them would not be the church in Yoder's estimation. Moreover, reductionism is not unidirectional: Yoder could claim that if these practices "worked" or were worth doing, it was because God had intended things that way, and God does not magically render them otherwise

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[79] For an intriguing exploration of particularity and Jesus in Yoder's work, see Daniel Barber, "The Particularity of Jesus and the Time of the Kingdom: Philosophy and Theology in Yoder." We might also note that Milbank, too, sees the figure of Christ and its function as a signifier in light of poststructuralist concerns for representation and universality, and does so much more explicitly than in Yoder. For him, of course, this involves a participatory *analogia* that inscribes hierarchy ontologically as a condition of possibility.

[80] See Martens's *The Heterodox Yoder*. For a response to Marten's position, see Branson Parler, *The Forest and the Trees*.

simply because the practitioners fail to use the proper theological language. Yoder's God is also patient. This sort of reductionism, then is a two-edged sword: if it is possible to suggest that Yoder's theology is another way of articulating a postanarchist politics (for which one does not need Yoder), then it is equally possible to say that postanarchism stumbles upon some truth about the universe that is already known to Christian discipleship (for which one does not need the postanarchists). But this is less an impasse than an opportunity. We might suggest that if both modes of discourse are committed to ethical and epistemological principles that call for patient receptivity, then postanarchism might inform and illuminate aspects of the Christian "good news" just as Yoder's project might help postanarchists grapple with the ramifications of a genuinely nonviolent politics.

This brings us, finally, back to postsecularity. The fundamental insight of the postsecular turn is that all politics is ultimately theological, and I think Yoder helps us see that. The invocation of patience, not generally thought of as a "political" category, suggests this. But the connection runs deeper than that. Patience implies trust.[81] To engage in the consensus process is an act of trust. To forgo hegemonic and counterhegemonic strategies for change is an act of trust. To renounce violence at any level is an act of trust – to renounce it at every level even more so. But this raises the question: what is the object of this trust? Radicals must trust each other, but to trust in others could just as easily lead to trust in a specific leader or vanguard. That seems all too pedestrian. To trust in humanity in general smacks of a naïve and untenable humanism. To trust in the inevitability of history seems teleologically problematic, even Hegelian. Perhaps it constitutes trust in the process itself. Perhaps there are as many names for the object of this trust as there are radical practitioners.

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[81] I am grateful to Michelle Campbell for this observation.

Yoder has the language of Christian theology to draw upon in naming this trust. For him, it was a matter of faith in God, of "waiting on the Lord," of believing there to be a deeper logic to existence in which patient nonviolence might make sense. I am not saying that radicals believe in God whether they realize it or not. Nor can I say that Christian theology gives a name to something we know by other means. I do, however, think that we see here a specific kind of faith structure: a consistently and comprehensively nonviolent politics is inescapably eschatological. Lewis Call recognizes this in *Postmodern Anarchism*, writing that "a great many radical political visions – including most anarchist visions – contain an eschatology that is recognizably 'religious' in its structure, if not its content. If anarchist theory is to move beyond critique towards the articulation of a positive social, political, and ecological agenda, then the messianic element is perhaps unavoidable" (19).

The positive political agenda that Call advocates cannot be formulated in only one mode of discourse or as the prerogative of a privileged group. Yoder's call for patience is a call for Christians to recognize the voice of the other as a possible means of grace, a way of receiving as a gift what God has revealed to those outside the Christian tradition. Likewise, we might challenge postanarchists and other radicals to be open to what Christian theology might teach them. Yoder, Hauerwas, and Milbank are just a few thinkers exploring the radical implications of the Christian gospel, and these implications might be further illuminated by anarchist and postanarchist theorists, just as political theology should be seen as contributing to political theory. Our postsecular condition is an opportunity for dialog, but there are limits: Christians may not be able to fully embrace aspects of anarchism or postanarchism, and (post)anarchists may find certain theological resources unavailable or unintelligible without conversion. But we should not pretend to know ahead of time what those limits might be. The legacy of the radical

abolitionists suggests that the way forward is neither hegemonic violence nor counterhegemonic

resistance. The challenge for the radicals of today is not just to confront neoliberalism, but to

work patiently toward a constructive politics that can also face the slaveries of tomorrow.

APPENDIX

Transcript of Neikeisha Alexis-Baker Interview

Mark Van Steenwyk: Jesus Manifesto, for several years, has been kind of asking the question: "Well, wait a second. There might be some competing spiritual allegiances here, between life in the United States, or Western Civilization, and the call to Jesus. There's competing values— Jesus lays the smackdown on all sorts of Roman Imperial values, and Jewish religious values, that were really provocative, and no less provocative for us today. Jesus, inasmuch as he was subverting religious and social norms of his day, he resists ours even more, I think, because I don't think we've grown more faithful and more just over 2,000 years. People will probably disagree with that, but I think we're really up shit creek, proverbially, without a paddle, right?

Joanna Shenk: Right

MVS: We might have to edit that word out, it's a naughty word. It might offend Christian sensibilities. But so, like, what do you do about that?

JS: Right, right. And that's one of the reasons why I was so interested in having Nekeisha Alexis-Baker as our first interviewee because she brings a perspective that is from the edges but not for the sake of being "radical" or from the edges but because that's what she knows to be true, and that's the journey that her life has taken her on, being a black woman who is both a Christian and an anarchist, and so I think in that sense it helps to set the stage, like you're saying, or like I was saying, for the kind of conversation we want to have, that this is people who are in the midst of a lot of work, a lot of organizing, and a lot of life-giving interaction on multiple levels. So I think talking with Nekeisha really sets the tone, and sets the bar high for how we want to continue.

[interview fades in over theme music]

Neikeisha Alexis-Baker: Well, I'll try to keep it really brief then: I'm originally from Trinidad, grew up in New York City for most of my life, currently living in Elkhart, IN where I was a student at Associated Mennonite Seminary, have a master's degree in theology and ethics, and I currently work here doing graphic design, and in addition to being married to a really good guy, I do a lot of work with Jesus Radicals, and some local work here, and I'm really happy to be the first guest on your podcast – so I'll throw that into my bio for you.

MVS: Yay, thank you.

JS: Woo-hoo!

MVS: So you mention Jesus Radicals. Jesus Radicals, for those who don't know, is kind of a network, or a gathering together, of people that are interested in both Christianity and anarchism and maybe how they relate. Is that a fair description or is there anything you'd like to add to that?

NAB: No, I think that's a pretty good description.

MVS: Maybe you could tell us a little bit about where Jesus Radicals came from.

NAB: Sure.

MVS: Your origin story, if you will, of Jesus Radicals.

NAB: It's kind of funny how it came together, I mean , whenever I look back on the 7-8 years we've been in existence, it's interesting. I'm always like "wow, how did we end up here?" The first iteration of Jesus Radicals was basically a tribute website to students at Wheaton College that had gone to the School of [the] Americas protest, and a way of putting up the photos, and telling that story. I think it was the first time that Wheaton students had done that, and Andy Alexis-Baker, who was an acquaintance at the time, had helped to organize that. And so the first iteration of the website just, you know, "Wow, this radical thing has just happened in this

particular place; how do we chronicle that?" And from that point the website sort of grew. We thought it would be interesting to have a library on topics related to Christianity and anarchism— I was not an anarchist at the time, but came to learn more about that politics and to adopt it for myself —and in conjunction with the website sort of getting a life of its own, we ended up having a gathering at our congregation, at our church in New York City, just to talk about it. And 50 people showed up. Most of them weren't people from our church; they were people who had heard about it other places and so it was like "okay, this is interesting." There are people who are curious about these two topics, and that gathering has continued for about – this will be our eighth year.

MVS: Wow.

NEB: So, totally kind of out of our hands as far as what it started out as and what it has become.

JS: Would you mind saying a little bit about you and Andy and how you work together on this, and as much as you want to about your background and how you all connected in the first place?

NEB: [Laughs] Oh, that's an interesting story. I would have to check with him before I got into the finer details of how we met, but as far as religious and political kind of affiliations, I think Andy has always been anarchist, and adopted Christian faith—he came from a Christian background but really adopted it for himself as he matured, and I kind of grew up within a Roman Catholic background, was re-baptized in an African-American church, and became Mennonite kind of later on in life through meeting him. So he was a Mennonite at the time, and Anabaptism has a pretty radical history, and so within learning about those things and being introduced to anarchism and those two things sort of coalesced for me. Hopefully that helps with that.

MVS: So, tell me a little bit about your anarchist journey. I mean, how did this intrigue you? It's

not the normal story, perhaps, the typical story for people to, as part of their faith journey maybe, to wrap that up with anarchism. That's a scary word to people.

NEB: I think as a person of color coming into a US context from a context that was a Caribbean Island, primarily people of color, and being introduced quite forcefully to the politics of race here and the politics of injustice, I think I've always kind of cared about where the underdog sort of fits in the scheme of things but coming into a context in which that became more apparent made me intrigued about justice issues. My high school experience as well: I went to a kind of pseudo-experimental public high school, where we were reading Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* for our history textbook.

MVS: Awesome.

NEB: That has the tendency to radicalize you…

MVS: A little bit, yeah.

NEB: … and, really, I think one of the critical things was really being introduced to the Bible again. I remember reading the Sermon on the Mount for what felt like the first time and feeling like "Geez, who put that in there when I wasn't looking?" like, "Where did that come from?" So the journey into anarchism really has grown out of my own concerns about justice and my own sort of reformulating thinking, my relearning what Christian faith is about, the liberatory aspects of that, the justice aspects of that, and the non-dominating aspects of that, and through meeting someone who was already anarchist, who had begun formulating those things together and seeing the connections. Those kind of conversations opened me up to that.

JS: So, I'm interested in going off of that background, what it's been like working with specifically the Jesus Radicals group, as a person of color, as a woman, when from what I know of the Jesus Radicals, being at the conference this past year, it's a lot of white people—Anglos—

and I don't know what the ratio is male to female but often I feel like it's more white men, white males that are writing a lot of the anarchist materials—so what has it been like to navigate that territory?

NEB: I think it's been a little bit different in the sense that because it's something that I am doing—maybe not necessarily leading, but because Andy and I are working on it as partners and I'm sort of, for a lack of a better word, "in charge," or the one doing the organizing around some of this, that makes it a little bit different than entering into it as someone who maybe just shows up at the conference. So I do realize that there are some power dynamics there, as one of the organizers of it. I would say, though, that over the years we've really become more and more intentional, particularly in the planning of the conference, about saying that we need to have voices of people of color, we need to have voices of women present, we need to have voices of secular anarchists there, because there are a lot of us who are entering into this that have a lot to learn from people who have being doing this kind of thinking and political engagement for awhile. And so, in terms of planning the conference we will hold and say "okay, we've got too many white male speakers on our slot; we're not proceeding until we start to get more voices from people of color, more voices from women," and that has felt empowering to me. I think it's kind of interesting that black women aren't usually the poster children, quote-unquote, for anarchism, much less Christianity *and* anarchism. So I realize I'm in a peculiar kind of place. 13:18

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