

# **To Intervene or Not to Intervene: Is That the Question?**

*H. Martin Rumscheidt*

## **Introduction**

This essay seeks to assist the churches with the theological quandary that the “doctrine”— for lack of a better term – of the responsibility to protect vulnerable people puts them in. In addition, it aims to provide a theological approach to the dilemma that especially confronts those who espouse an ethic of nonviolence in searching for how to respond to the plight of people threatened with aggravated harm and crying for protection. The obligation to come to the neighbor’s assistance in such times, as formulated in the biblical commandment to love one’s neighbor, also creates quandaries for those seeking to keep a similar commandment not to take another’s life that appears in nearly all of humanity’s sacred texts. The theology of this essay holds that it is the neighbor in need who matters, and not the quandary of intervention or non-intervention.<sup>1</sup>

After briefly clarifying the issue to be addressed, and acknowledging that the search for a nonviolent world embraces diverse and at times opposing positions, all of which must be honored rather than judged, I will discuss the “doctrine” of the responsibility to protect (R2P). The World Council of Churches’ invitation to its member churches to develop theological responses in accordance with their understanding of the Christian faith and tradition is highlighted. As a member of the United Church of Canada, I approach this invitation from the perspective of the Reformation tradition and especially from the theologies of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The reality of the destruction of vulnerable peoples by Germany’s National Socialists, in particular neighbors of Jewish descent, stimulates my reflection on intervention with or without armed force.

In what follows, both intervention and non-intervention in relation to R2P, if depicted as ethical virtues or obligations, are identified not as moral choices between good and evil, right and wrong, but as courses of action that render their actors guilty. There is, as will be argued, culpable violence

and culpable nonviolence; neither can claim the moral high ground when it comes to how vulnerable people are to be protected.

The theological-ethical orientation presented here maintains that the people crying for protection have ethical priority over the ethical principles of those who may or may not intervene. Or, as the essay will develop the point, the commandment to love the neighbor overrides the morally equivalent commandment not to murder. The final part focuses on Bonhoeffer's reflections, during the course of the "final solution of the Jewish question" and the planning of the coup d'état and murder of Hitler, on how freely chosen action to intervene with violent force or not opens the door to accept culpability freely and to give ourselves over utterly to the judgment of God's mercy, knowing we can live before God with our guilt.

In relation specifically to the R2P "doctrine," this essay seeks to assist churches in responding theologically to the stipulation that under clearly defined circumstances nations may be called upon to deploy military forces in order to aid people in aggravated harm's way. The ethical issue for the churches is whether they should or should not call on their national governments to deploy their armed forces in military interventions. For churches related to other churches in ecumenical relationships, this means working through with one another the implications of following Christ in the situations R2P speaks about. This is where the matter of guilt before God *and* the neighbor must be addressed with urgency.<sup>2</sup>

The essay wants to move the R2P dilemma away from the moral decision-making process, based on the rigidity of firmly held principles of right and wrong, good and evil, to the more flexible space of discerning what the responsibility of religious persons and communities is *before* God and *to* the endangered neighbor.<sup>3</sup> I argue that the exercise of regulated violence as proposed by R2P can be given theological and moral support by the churches in calling on a nation's government to send the troops to protect people.

Yes, "[w]ar is to be avoided, the use of force is to be minimized, and conflict is to be resolved as much as possible in the interests of justice and without resort to violence."<sup>4</sup> This statement by Dr. Ernie Regehr, the co-founder, former executive director and now senior researcher of the Canadian ecumenical coalition *Project Ploughshares*, is accepted without

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reservation in this essay. In addition to this clear formulation of what is demanded of churches and Christians in their discipleship, the obligation to prevent conflicts from erupting and, should every effort to prevent them fail, to rebuild the conflict-torn communities, are equally affirmed here. It may be useful, therefore, to state at the outset that neither war nor the theory of just war is at issue in this essay. What is at issue are the cries for protection of vulnerable peoples in aggravated harm's way and how those cries are to be answered by Christian communities and individuals. Is the answer to be given in terms of the use of force and as a matter of Christian conscience, or in terms of pacifist nonviolence or a contextual decision to delay intervention until it is clearly a last resort?

What is proposed here fully acknowledges and respects that in the Church there are different and indeed opposed positions based in the same embrace of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and in the same determination to follow him. These positions are not rejected but honored as fully valid and faithful. An "either-or" approach is not at work here.

### **WCC 2006 Assembly and R2P**

Meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006, the World Council of Churches adopted a report entitled "Vulnerable populations at risk: Statement on the responsibility to protect." The Assembly approved the report's resolutions through consensus.<sup>5</sup> Its understanding of what R2P means is that the concept

shift[s] the debate from the viewpoint of the interveners to that of people in need of assistance.... This innovative concept focuses on the needs and rights of the civilian population.... Hence, the shift from intervention to protection places citizens at the centre of the debate.... The churches are in support of the emerging international norm of the responsibility to protect.... [T]he responsibility to protect and serve the welfare of its people is central to a state's sovereignty. When there is failure to carry out that responsibility, whether by neglect, lack of capacity, or direct assaults on the population, the international community has the duty to assist peoples and states, and in extreme situations, to

intervene in the internal affairs of the state in the interests and safety of the people.<sup>6</sup>

This passage spells out the “what,” the substance of the assertion that it is an ethical duty to respond to the cries of the vulnerable. It is in the “how” or the form of the kind of “intervention” described here that the diversity in the churches’ support of the R2P norm becomes apparent. Behind a subsequent statement on the WCC report lie different and opposing positions about the use of force or, more accurately, the application of violence. That statement says:

In calling on the international community to come to the aid of vulnerable people in extraordinary suffering and peril, the fellowship of the churches is not prepared to say that it is never appropriate or never necessary to resort to the use of force for the protection of the vulnerable. This refusal in principle to preclude the use of force is not based on the naïve belief that force can be relied on to solve intractable problems. Rather, it is based on the certain knowledge that the objective must be the welfare of the people, especially those in situations of extreme vulnerability and who are utterly abandoned to the whims and prerogatives of their tormentors. It is a tragic reality that civilians, especially women and children, are the primary victims in situations of extreme insecurity and war.

Even in its careful phrasing, declaring that “the fellowship of the churches is not prepared to say that *it is never appropriate or never necessary to resort to the use of force [= violence] for the protection of the vulnerable*”<sup>7</sup> is a challenge, to put it gently, to principles of pacifism or nonviolence held by many of the “fellowship” of Christians as matters of faith if not as matters of *status confessionis*. But the Assembly of 2006 clearly recognized and affirmed – felicitously, in my view – that “some within the churches refuse the use of force in all circumstances. Their form of responsibility is to persist in preventative engagement and, whatever the cost – as a last resort – to risk non-violent intervention during the use of force.”<sup>8</sup> And, in acknowledging this form of Christian witness, the Assembly added three clear deeply theological/ethical convictions.

The churches do not ... believe in the exercise of lethal force to bring in a new order of peace and safety. By limiting the resort to force quite specifically to immediate protection objectives, the churches insist that the kind of long term solutions that are required ... cannot be delivered by force.

The use of force for humanitarian purposes can never be an attempt to find military solutions to social and political problems, to militarily engineer new social and political realities. Rather, it is intended to mitigate immediate threats and to alleviate immediate suffering while long-term solutions are sought by other means.

The force that is to be deployed and used for humanitarian purposes must also be distinguished from military war-fighting methods and objectives. The military operation is not a war to defeat a state but an operation to protect populations in peril from being harassed, persecuted or killed.<sup>9</sup>

In these statements, the WCC acknowledges that the difficulty contained in the “doctrine” and practice of R2P derives from its calling for a decision between two unpleasant and wicked issues, not between clear-cut good and evil. In his article “Culpable Nonviolence: The Moral Ambiguity of Pacifism,” Ernie Regehr calls it “a devil’s choice . . . because it is not a simple choice between nonintervention that abandons people in perilous circumstances and military intervention that liberates them. The choice for military intervention, even for explicitly humanitarian purposes, runs the risk and the likelihood that peril will be expanded rather than alleviated.”<sup>10</sup>

The issue is which kind of force is to be employed: the force of nonviolence, such as that used by Mahatma Gandhi, or the force of violence such as that used by NATO forces in the Balkans? If we want to be involved at all, how do we make an ethical decision or present a theological case when the schemata of “good vs. evil” are not the point but instead the murky question of which of the sinful options to go with?

From a theological perspective, to intervene or not to intervene with military force [= violence] is not the question. When striving for a model of the churches’ conversation that says “No” in principle to resorting to

violence but addresses our responsibility in a world where violence is being used, we find the question becomes how does faith in God, following God's commandments, shape our understanding and hence our actions of responsibility before God and to the neighbor? What concrete and contextual shape does discipleship call for, when the cries of vulnerable people are heard and to be acted upon? How do we stand *with* them before God?

It may help to cite an actual case here. Reporting on an international assessment team's fact-finding tour to the southern Sudan, Regehr writes:

When the Sudanese [internally displaced persons] asked why the churches were not calling for immediate military intervention to stop the bombing and expulsion, one articulate young man, discovering that I was a Mennonite, pressed the point even harder. Mennonites, he argued, have a reputation for compassion and peacemaking, and if they really were for putting people first, wouldn't they be leading the call for just such relief? Military intervention to protect those who are utterly without protection would surely be a supreme act of compassion, he challenged. I explained that our refusal to call for military protection was not evidence of callous indifference but was part of a principled commitment to nonviolence. He wasn't impressed. How, he asked (as I knew he would as soon as I had uttered my stock answer), is the principle of nonviolence honoured by the international community's refusal to lift a single finger against ceaseless, egregious violence directed at unarmed and unprotected people in southern Sudan?

The failure of the international community to bring protection to the vulnerable of Sudan makes them, in their own eyes and experience, victims of inaction – and for them, whether that inaction is the product of indifference or of a principled commitment against military intervention amounts to the same thing.<sup>11</sup>

What responses are open to Christians in face of such cries for help and neighborliness?

The theological argument I am presenting refuses to approach this question in terms of the false dichotomy of nonviolence versus justice. Seeking God's justice and doing it is as integral to those whose faith in and obedience to God rejects military intervention on behalf of vulnerable populations as it is to those whose faith in and obedience to God supports it. As well, the argument does not approach the Bible, to which Christian faith appeals, as the referee for our stories, positions, and decisions; it maintains instead that, in our diverse concrete situations and contexts, we regard and use Scripture as the deep source of those stories, positions, and decisions.

“Using” the Bible means appealing to its language and spirit as the authority for thinking and acting appropriately and responsibly in following Jesus. The controversy of God with the people of Israel, addressed in the sixth chapter of the prophecy of Micah, has a classic statement to which churches today readily appeal: “It has been told to you, my people, what is good; and what does the Holy One require of you other than to do justice, to love in kindness, and to go humbly with your God?”<sup>12</sup>

### **The Bible and Principles**

An excursus here will provide the biblical basis of the theological insistence that the neighbor has priority even over strongly affirmed principles. Throughout, the First (aka “Old”) Testament wrestles with the question of how justice is to be done, how love is to be exercised in kindness, and how people are to walk humbly with God. Further, it commands readers and hearers “Do not kill!” or, as I prefer to translate the Hebrew, “Murder Not!” In the Second (aka “New”) Testament, Jesus provides a further formulation of how the people of God are to walk in the way of justice, kindness, and humility. Asked what is the first and greatest of God's commandments, he replied: “Hear, O Israel, Adonai our God, Adonai is one; love Adonai, your God, with all your heart, all your soul, all your might. And love your neighbor who is like you” (Mark 12: 28-31).<sup>13</sup>

Jesus' reply, bringing together Deuteronomy 6:4 and Leviticus 19:18, points to love as the soul of his Bible, the Torah. What has to be recognized is that the Torah's sense of “love” embraces both the love of God for humans and the love of humans for God. This means that in *our* loving God in the manner of the greatest commandment – in doing justice, loving kindness,

and walking in humility with God – God’s *own* will on how to be God to and for us is being fulfilled. Correspondingly, in God’s loving us creatures (and all other creatures!), in blessing, inspiring, healing, forgiving, and guiding us, our desire to be what God wills for us is answered. Thus, God is God and humans are humans only in the mutuality of the love the Bible envisions: in God’s love for us and for our neighbor (who, precisely because of God’s love, is like us) and in our love for God and for the neighbor.

An essential condition for this love to be the love the Bible speaks of is that it is given freely and for its own sake. Thus, to love in freedom is to give ourselves to the neighbors, to be for them before they call upon us and certainly when they do so. And to be for them, as the Bible demonstrates in ever different variation, is to be there responsibly; that is, in their concrete context, in the situation they are experiencing and out of which comes their cry for our appropriate presence. In this understanding of love, priority unquestionably belongs to God’s call on us to be the people of God’s love and equally to the neighbors’ call on us to be the neighbor to them. In God’s covenant-faithfulness to humans, there is, as Scripture testifies, a predilection for the marginalized, the weak and helpless, the abandoned, oppressed, and exploited; recent theology speaks of it as “the preferential option of God for the poor.” There is a “commanding voice,” as Rabbi Emil Fackenheim puts it. For our discussion, the cries of vulnerable peoples for protection are a commanding voice to both God and to us humans.

Ernie Regehr’s account of his conversation with the young southern Sudanese man makes the case for claiming that the cries of vulnerable peoples have priority over commitment to a principle. His experience of that conversation in the context of the internally displaced persons’ camp was an encounter with the commanding voice and its priority over an article of faith. But it was more than that. It was a moment where his faith in God called him into responsibility and into the freedom that faith creates for responsibility. If Mennonites really were putting people first, then calling for military intervention would surely be a supreme act of compassion; that was the challenge to be met. And how is the principle of nonviolence honored if there is no intervening action commensurate to the ceaseless, egregious violence directed at unarmed and unprotected people?

### **Bonhoeffer's View from Below**

In the posthumously published collection of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's prison writings and letters, there is an extended memorandum he composed just before his arrest in early 1943 by the Nazis. Entitled "After Ten Years," it contains reflections for those with whom he was involved in the plot to assassinate Hitler. I draw on two of them in developing the theological argument made here. In "The view from below" and "Who stands firm?" he writes:

It remains an experience of incomparable value that we have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed and reviled, in short from the perspective of the suffering. If only during this time bitterness and envy have not corroded the heart; that we come to see matters great and small, happiness and misfortune, strength and weakness with new eyes; that our sense for greatness, humanness, justice, and mercy may have grown clearer, freer, more incorruptible; that we learn, indeed, that personal suffering is a more useful key, a more fruitful principle than personal happiness for exploring the world in contemplation and action.

Who stands firm? Only the one whose ultimate standard is not his reason, his principles, conscience, freedom, or virtue; only the one who is prepared to sacrifice all of these when, in faith and in relationship to God alone, he is called to obedient and responsible action. Such a person is the responsible one, whose life is to be nothing but a response to God's questions and call.<sup>14</sup>

What Bonhoeffer calls "the view from below" and the biblical conception of "the neighbor" – the late German theologian Dorothee Soelle called the concept of the neighbor the greatest gift, on the inter-religious scale, of the Jewish people to humankind<sup>15</sup> – interpret and shape each other decisively. The former clears the way for seeing the priority of the vulnerable for God's passionate covenant-justice love (Hebrew *chesed*) and, as a consequence, what being a neighbor to the vulnerable demands. The latter

clears the way for the “new eyes” to see that our credibility as neighbors to vulnerable populations is based on accepting the priority of their cries for protection over our reason, principles, conscience, etc.

If we accept the remarkable interpretation of love as it manifests itself in the covenant of God with God’s creatures, namely that in our “doing neighborliness” how God wills to be God to and for us becomes fulfilled, something remarkable happens: the commanding voice of those who suffer becomes God’s voice crying out to us, appealing to us so to act now that God can be God to the vulnerable as well as, if not indeed primarily, to those who bring them help. Our credibility in “doing neighborliness” derives from the appropriateness of our actions towards the suffering neighbor.

If we interpret Regehr’s reflection on his experience in southern Sudan in terms of what Bonhoeffer says in “Who stands firm?” we may say that Regehr’s faith in God was called at that moment into responsibility. Secondly, the sensibility of his faith for the situation – for the actual, concrete reality that the Sudanese people there were living in – freed him for a decision about what to do and for accepting responsibility for that decision and its consequences. The free and responsible action of one who follows Jesus, according to Bonhoeffer, is not to apply an already existing, pre-designed ethical or theological principle or doctrine. For, if it were an action of that kind, it would be “unfree” in the sense of satisfying only the motive of having a good conscience, of feeling justified by having kept a good conscience, of doing what allows one to live with an unsullied conscience.

The explanation that “our refusal to call for military protection was not evidence of callous indifference, but was part of a principled commitment to nonviolence” failed to impress the young Sudanese and, more important, also failed as a justification for refusing to call for such protection on the basis of the principle of acting nonviolently. If we look for “the view from below” in Regehr’s description, we find it in what he writes about watching the burial in “the ever-expanding field designated as the graveyard.” His view from below takes the form of a mathematical calculation related to the estimated two million people claimed by war in Sudan since 1983. “[T]hat comes to about 100,000 per year, and that’s 2,000 per week and 300 a day. ... After September 11, 2001, *The New York Times* ran personal accounts of the victims, at least momentarily rescuing all those who had died from

anonymity, putting a face on the statistic, giving public acknowledgment to loss. For the victims of Sudan to be similarly acknowledged it would take 300 photos and brief biographies each and every day for the next twenty years. And that would do it only if the killing stopped today – *which it won't*.<sup>16</sup>

The expression attributed to Saint Augustine of Hippo, “Love God and do what you will,” signals something of the character of free, responsible action. In loving God and the neighbor as the Bible specifies it, we are set free to decide what is appropriate and necessary action in a given concrete situation without advance assurance that we are justified (or “righteous”) before God in what we will to do. Augustine, like Bonhoeffer, captures the component of “freedom” in the relationship between God and humans and between humans that is implied in the word “love.” It is precisely in God’s freedom that God loves all creatures; were it not for this freedom, the love with which God binds himself/herself to the creatures would be something other than love. Thus, to love God and to do what we will means to decide in freedom what is seen as appropriate and necessary in and for the love we show to God and neighbor.

This is the point Bonhoeffer wrestled with when he composed the essay “After Ten Years” at Christmastime in 1942. The circle of conspirators had concluded that resort to violence was inevitable if Hitler was to be removed from power. But “to kill or not to kill” had become the deeply troubling question. To some of them, the divine commandment was clear and absolute: “*Murder not!*” To others, resorting to the violence of murder would stress conscience beyond endurance; to yet others, the principled commitment to what is honorable, for example not reneging on an oath, was sacred. Bonhoeffer rejects none of those positions but submits them to the perspective “from below,” from how those who suffer see things. Two excerpts from what he wrote at that time suffice to grasp where he is going.

The man of *conscience* has no one but himself when resisting the superior might of predicaments that demand a decision. But the dimensions of the conflict wherein he must make his choices are such that, counseled and supported by nothing but his very own conscience, he is torn apart. The innumerable respectable and seductive disguises by which evil approaches him make

his conscience fearful and unsure until he finally settles for a salved conscience instead of a good conscience, that is, until he deceives his own conscience in order not to despair. That a bad conscience may be stronger and more wholesome than a deceived one is something that a man whose sole support is his conscience can never comprehend.<sup>17</sup>

Not long before composing “After Ten Years,” he had penned these sentences in his study on ethics, a work that remained unfinished. Asking who can endure (i.e., who stands firm), he says:

Only the person who combines simplicity with wisdom can endure.... A person is simple who in the confusion, the distortion, and the inversion of all concepts keeps in sight only the single truth of God.... Because of knowing and having God, this person clings to the commandments, the judgment, and the mercy of God that proceed anew each day from the mouth of God. Not fettered by principles but bound by love for God, this person is liberated from the problems and conflicts of ethical decision, and is no longer beset by them. This person belongs to God and to God’s will alone.... The person is wise who sees reality as it is, who sees into the depth of things. Only that person is wise who sees reality in God.... Wise people know the limited receptivity of reality for principles, because they know that reality is not built on principles, but rests on the living creating God. So they also know that reality can be helped neither by the purest principles nor with the best will, but only by the living God. Principles are only tools in the hands of God; they will soon be thrown away when they are no longer useful.<sup>18</sup>

These astute insights of Bonhoeffer allow us to recognize two important things. One is that what drives much of the debate about R2P, especially as it touches Christians, is precisely the question of how we are to stand before God and the neighbor with a good, bad, or salved conscience. The other is that as long as conscience is the key component in the discussion, the reality of God’s mercy, grace, and forgiveness is obscured, even denied, for what allows us to stand before God is not our conscience but God’s love alone.

The “commandments, the judgment, and the mercy of God” to which simple and wise persons cling are but another way of speaking of God’s love, of the God who loves in freedom. Thus, when it comes to making ethical-theological decisions and acting in accordance with them in a concrete situation, to see reality in God is to throw oneself on God’s judgment and mercy. What simple, wise persons – persons of faith – do here is to open themselves unconditionally to accountability for the actions taken freely and responsibly in that situation. That accountability and responsibility is truly authentic, and therefore truly free, when it is radically open to accepting and confessing guilt.

This is the surprising and amazing turn in Bonhoeffer’s reflection. It helps us to break free from the “either-or” of pacifism and just war, violence and nonviolence, and to accept the claim by both sides seeking to be faithful in following Jesus. It also provides a way of living with the quandaries that arise when God’s commandments are in conflict for those striving to live by them.

### **Liberation for Guilt**

In relation to R2P, the issue if seen in this perspective is not which choice is justified before God and which is not, or whether a decision for one course of action leaves us non-culpable while a decision for another renders us culpable. It is not even a matter of which culpability we choose. The issue is that radical openness to God and willingness for responsibility for the neighbor materializes itself in liberation for accepting culpability.

What bears and sustains such openness and willingness is the knowledge that the world, including the political world ... is accepted, judged and renewed by God. That openness and willingness live in the faith which learns from Christ that the norms of Christ’s commandments are firm, that they call and bear us *and* that, even when we break the commandments in sensitivity for our fellow human beings and their security, thereby taking guilt upon ourselves, *we are not abandoned by Christ . . . .* ‘Free responsibility’ is founded in a God who calls for the free venture of faith into responsible action and who promises forgiveness and consolation to those who on account

of such action become sinners. Here forgiveness relates to the personal guilt that is unavoidable for those who take a stand and act upon it, accepting the risk of free responsibility and thus burdening their conscience.<sup>19</sup>

Liberation for accepting culpability is an elaboration of what is found in both the term and the description of Regehr's "culpable nonviolence." The freeing dimension of that term and its approach to culpability is that it allows different, even radically opposite approaches to genocide and other horrors to live both with the guilt arising from, as the young Sudanese put it, the international community's refusal to lift a single finger against ceaseless, egregious violence directed at unarmed, unprotected people, and with the guilt arising from taking military action, knowing that people will be killed and that peril might be expanded rather than alleviated.

What a recent interpreter of Bonhoeffer called "liberation to accept guilt"<sup>20</sup> is a direct consequence of seeing reality in God. It characterizes those who, because they know and have God, cling to God's commandments, judgments, and mercy alone; they belong to God and to God's will alone.

Transposed into the context of "the responsibility to protect" and its inclusion of the option to resort to military intervention in order to protect vulnerable peoples as an appropriate and necessary action, belonging to God and to God's will alone enables us consciously and freely to burden ourselves with culpability in the actions we deem responsible. It lets our accountability to God and to neighbors rest on the covenantal promise of forgiveness made by God and, consequently, lets us know that we can live with our guilt, our culpability before God. In Bonhoeffer's words:

I believe that God can and will let good come out of everything, even the greatest evil.... I believe that even our mistakes and shortcomings are not in vain and that it is no more difficult for God to deal with them than with our supposedly good deeds. I believe that God is no timeless fate but waits for and responds to sincere prayer and responsible action.<sup>21</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper addresses itself to the church as the community of those who follow Jesus, and not to the state or the community of nations. The author assumes that when the churches address the governments of an individual state or of communities of nations, they will do so on the basis of theological conviction and argument.

<sup>2</sup> In a recent private conversation among theologians and peace-workers, a comment overheard by one of the group at a conference on R2P brought into clear focus what forms nonviolent culpability may take. The comment was to the effect that followers of Christ committed to nonviolence may have to put up with the inconvenient fact that sometimes innocent people may have to suffer for the convictions of the nonviolent ones. Such a view clarifies the issue that this essay seeks to address.

<sup>3</sup> This point was driven home at a recent conference of Holocaust scholars whom Father Patrick Desbois, author of *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), was invited to address. He said that we cannot build a world of peace and demand Abel's blood be silent, and that our problem is not the existence of God but how we can stand before God with all the murdered; to stand with them and say to God: here we are! We dare not obliterate the murdered in order for us to believe in God today. The ground under our feet keeps moving with Abel's blood. Here the cries of Abel's blood – a metaphor for victims lacking the protection of their own states and crying for help from the outside – clearly have priority over the principles, however well-reasoned, of those to whom they address their cries.

<sup>4</sup> These words encapsulate the basic convictions of the Project Ploughshares coalition. It is cited in Roger Hutchinson, "The Limits of Ethics in a Militarized World," an address delivered during a Project Ploughshares consultation and cited in *Defence Beyond Borders: A Consultation on Canada's Military Responsibilities in the Emerging World Order*, Ploughshares Working Papers, 93-2 (Waterloo, ON: Project Ploughshares, 1993), 26-30.

<sup>5</sup> The report is available on the WCC website at: [www.oikumene.org/gr/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/international-affairs/responsibility-to-protect/vulnerable-populations-at-risk](http://www.oikumene.org/gr/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/international-affairs/responsibility-to-protect/vulnerable-populations-at-risk)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Italics and insertion added. Here the Assembly appears to acknowledge one of the problematic aspects of ethical or theological systems. Since it is conceivable that such systems so strictly codified as to allow no flexibility will fail in some situations, ethics and theology should demand a combination of guiding principles or rules and allowable exceptions. Thus the statement leaves the door open to flexibility in relation to the R2P component of "reaction" or, specifically, intervening with military force. And instead of capitulating to the inflexibilities of the either-or between absolutist and contextualist approaches, the Assembly invites a distinction between fundamental convictions and conclusions reached about concrete actions required to support people in need, and shows how some of those conclusions could be supported by communities with differing or opposing positions. (I am grateful to Professor Roger Hutchinson for this insight.)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ernie Regehr, “Culpable Nonviolence: The Moral Ambiguity of Pacifism,” in *Voices Across Boundaries*, Summer 2003, 42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>12</sup> Micah 6:4.

<sup>13</sup> This is how the translation of the Jewish Scriptures by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig renders the texts cited by Jesus. See *Die Schrift* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 220 and 149.

<sup>14</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE 8 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 52 and 40.

<sup>15</sup> Dorothee Soelle, *The Mystery of Death* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 33.

<sup>16</sup> Regehr, “Culpable Nonviolence,” 40. Emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, DBWE 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 81-82.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Rumscheidt, “Discipleship between conflicting commandments: Bonhoeffer in the conspiracy against Hitler,” in *Analecta Bruxellensia* 13 (2008): 19.

<sup>20</sup> Sabine Dramm, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Resistance* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 241. The German original has *Befreiung zur Schuld*, which I translate as “liberation for guilt.”

<sup>21</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 46.

*H. Martin Rumscheidt is Professor of Theology Emeritus at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, Nova Scotia.*