

God, Evil, and (Non)Violence: Creation Theology, Creativity Theology, and Christian Ethics

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Introduction: Doctrinal Tradition and Anabaptist Ethics

Creation theology in the doctrinal tradition of scriptural witness and ecumenical creed entails the ontological discontinuity of Creator and creation and, correspondingly, the ontological dependence of creation upon Creator. This discontinuity and dependence is implicit in the first article of the Nicene Creed: “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.” James Reimer contended that contemporary theology needs to reclaim the ontological dimension of doctrinal tradition in order to make sense of the special claims of Christian ethics. When constructed within the modern paradigm of historicist reasoning, Reimer argued, contemporary theology lacks the conceptual capacity to believe in a God whose eternal reality provides a transcendent ground for ethical imperatives.¹ This deficit in contemporary theology, he warned, bodes ill for the peace church: “The Anabaptist-Mennonite emphasis on an ethic of nonresistant love formulated simply in terms of a historicist view of time and reality is just not adequate to meet the present crisis.”² Reimer thus proposed a renewed appropriation of doctrinal tradition for the sake of sustaining that “distinctive trait” of Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, “the normative claim of Jesus’ ethic of nonviolent love.”³

¹ A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001), esp. 30-35.

² *Ibid.*, 198.

³ *Ibid.*, 202, 207-208. Ben Ollenburger critiqued Reimer for inadequately distinguishing between the ontological entailments of Christian confession and the metaphysical theories of Greek philosophy, which gave the impression that Christian confession should be grounded in Greek metaphysics: see Ben C. Ollenburger, “Mennonite Theology: A Conversation around the Creeds,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 66, no. 1 (1992): 57-89. While Ollenburger’s critique warrants taking due caution with Reimer’s rhetoric, whether Reimer actually believed that

The upshot from Reimer for our present concern is that the practical content of ethical norms cannot make sense within just any systematic articulation of theological doctrine. We might conjecture that only a doctrinal structure framed by the confessional commitments of doctrinal tradition and buttressed by the ontological entailments of those commitments can adequately sustain the ethical norms of Christian discipleship.⁴ This prompts a question: Must the gospel norm of nonviolent discipleship be grounded in the confessional commitments and ontological entailments of doctrinal tradition, or could a pragmatic appeal to historical reality suffice to motivate nonviolence?

The theological project of Gordon Kaufman presents a test case for our conjecture.⁵ Kaufman's historicism replaces the ontological discontinuity of God and world with the ontological inseparability of God and world—and in this respect is the antithesis of traditional creation doctrine. Rather than conceiving God as originator and sustainer of the cosmos, Kaufman proposed that we conceive God as the “ongoing creativity” of the cosmic evolutionary process. Kaufman thus paraphrased John 1:1 as “In the beginning was creativity . . . and the creativity was God.”⁶ At the same time, he argued for an ethical commitment to nonviolence motivated by seeing the “Jesus-trajectory” of human history as a “significant expression” of God-as-creativity.⁷

metaphysics is prior to confession is doubtful, I think (see *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 355-71). In any case, I am concerned here with the ontological entailments of Christian confession.

⁴ On Scripture and creed, see Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, “God and Nonviolence: Creedal Theology and Christian Ethics,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 88, no. 2 (2014): 233-69; D.H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 167-71.

⁵ My focus here is Kaufman's theology in three sources from his final decade: Gordon D. Kaufman, “Is God Nonviolent?” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 18-24; *In the Beginning . . . Creativity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004); and *Jesus and Creativity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006). On Kaufman's late work as the last stage of his theological project, see *In the Beginning*, 107-27. For a critical comparison of Reimer and Kaufman, see Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 70-72, 73-75.

⁶ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, ix, 71, 106.

⁷ Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 54.

Whereas Reimer was concerned primarily with “the trinitarian and christological affirmations of the early church,” I want to shift the focus to the creation doctrine of Christian tradition. Previously I have outlined how the *mandate* of nonviolence is grounded in the canonical narrative of the “divine economy” and buttressed by the ontological entailments of Christological confession;⁸ here I will outline how the *motivation* for nonviolence is framed by the canonical narrative of creation-fall-redemption and buttressed by the ontological entailments of creation doctrine. I will compare and contrast creation theology with creativity theology, and then critically consider their respective implications for our motivation for nonviolence in the face of evil. I will argue that doctrinal tradition’s account of “the beginning” and “the end” provides a much more stable motivation than can Kaufman’s historicism for a sustainable commitment to nonviolence.

God: Creation, Creativity, and Cosmos

God the Creator: Traditional Creation Theology

God’s work as Creator encompasses both originating creation (*creatio ex nihilo*) and continuing creation (*creatio continua*).⁹ The world’s existence derives not from any pre-existing matter or form, but entirely from God’s

⁸ See my “God and Nonviolence.”

⁹ This presentation of traditional creation theology is informed by a number of sources that I cite here only once: Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2010); William P. Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010); Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005); Karl Löning and Erich Zenger, *To Begin with, God Created...: Biblical Theologies of Creation*, trans. Omar Kaste (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2000); Ben C. Ollenburger, “Isaiah’s Creation Theology,” *Ex Auditu* 3 (1987): 54-71; “Peace and God’s Action against Chaos in the Old Testament,” *The Church’s Peace Witness*, ed. Marlin E. Miller and Barbara Gingerich Nelson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 70-88; “Creation and Peace: Creator and Creature in Genesis 1-11,” *The Old Testament in the Life of God’s People: Essays in Honor of Elmer A. Martens*, ed. Jon Isaak (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009); “Creation and Violence,” *Struggles for Shalom: Peace and Violence across the Testaments*, ed. Laura L. Brennehan and Brad D. Schantz (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 26-36.

originating word;¹⁰ the world's continuance is due, finally, not to any inherent principle or cause but solely to God's sustaining will. Whereas originating creation witnesses to God's eternal being and all-possible power, continuing creation witnesses to God's constant character and gratuitous goodness.

To elaborate "originating creation": God only is without beginning or end ("infinite").¹¹ God only is uncreated; God exists independently of any other reality—if nothing else existed, or if all else ceased existing, God *is*.¹² All else that exists has a beginning and an end in God ("finite"). All else that exists is created and contingent; the world is entirely derived from and dependent upon God—had God not commanded, the world would not exist. God's originating creation thus entails an ontological discontinuity between God and world, a fundamental differentiation of uncreated-infinite-independent reality (God) and created-finite-dependent reality (world).¹³

To elaborate "continuing creation": God created freely, neither under necessity nor from eternity. God began the world in freedom and thus the world continues, neither by its own necessity nor by God's need for it, but by God's constancy and fidelity to it. And because the world began and continues by God's action and for God's purpose, it remains open to God's continuing work of creation. God's fidelity to the world and the world's openness to God make possible a God-world relation that is interactional but asymmetrical—the world is ever dependent on God.

The originating/continuing distinction is not absolute but approximate, and thus not categorical. God's originating work of creation included not only commanding creation to exist but also establishing it so that it might continue existing, and decreeing an order to sustain its continuance.¹⁴ Likewise, God's continuing work of creation includes not only sustaining what already exists but also initiating a "new thing,"¹⁵ including the Incarnation.

¹⁰ Jonathan R. Wilson, *A Primer for Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 72.

¹¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 45.3-4, in *Festal Orations* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 164.

¹² Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 30.18, in *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 108.

¹³ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 29.4, in *On God and Christ*, 72.

¹⁴ Ps. 148:5-6.

¹⁵ Isa. 42:5-9; 43:14-21; 48:6-7.

The traditional creation doctrine was affirmed as early as the second century in several sources.¹⁶ *Shepherd of Hermas* expressed this doctrine as the first article of Christian faith.¹⁷ Theophilus, in an apologetic treatise, stated it as integral to God's attributes.¹⁸ And Irenaeus, defending Christianity against Gnosticism, stated it as the chief affirmation of Christian faith.¹⁹ This doctrine, a constant element of the "rule of faith,"²⁰ was understood within the early church as a faithful development from and a correct reading of the overall witness of Scripture as well as a logically necessary corollary to a truly Christian confession of God.²¹ That all the Greek schools affirmed matter's eternity, because they repudiated an absolute origin of the material cosmos "from nothing" as contrary to reason, indicates that early Christians affirmed the creation doctrine as a confession of faith and not a concession to metaphysics.

Traditional creation doctrine, then, while it must be corroborated and elaborated by scriptural exposition, is not equivalent to exegesis of Genesis;²² nor does it compete with scientific theories of cosmic origins or natural history.²³ It entails a dual affirmation about God and world: God is ultimately

¹⁶ On the early development of creation doctrine, see J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London: Continuum, 2000), 83-87; Ronald E. Heine, *Classical Christian Doctrine: Introducing the Essentials of the Ancient Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 104-15; Ernan McMullin, "Creation *ex nihilo*: Early History" and Janet M. Soskice, "Creatio *ex nihilo*: Its Jewish and Christian Foundations," in *Creation and the God of Abraham*, ed. David B. Burrell, Carlo Cogliati, Janet M. Soskice, and William R. Stoeger, S.J. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 11-23 and 24-39, respectively.

¹⁷ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandate 1.1, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 29.

¹⁸ *Theophilus to Autolytus*, I.4 (cf. II.10), in Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2*, 137.

¹⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.1.1 (cf. 1.22.1 and 3.11.1), in Philip Schaff, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 592.

²⁰ Everett Ferguson, *The Rule of Faith: A Guide* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 1-46.

²¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 65-102; Tatha Wiley, *Creationism and the Conflict over Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 33-54.

²² Traditional creation doctrine thus allows diverse readings of the Genesis narrative. See Peter C. Bouteneff, *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of Biblical Creation Narratives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

²³ Johnson, *Creed*, 96-97, and Wiley, *Creationism*.

unlimited by the world (there is no reality preceding God that conditions God's being or power surpassing God that obstructs God's action),²⁴ and the world is deeply dependent on God (the world's origin is contingent on God's choice and its continuance is subject to God's consent).

God-as-Creativity: Kaufman's Creativity Theology

Kaufman's creativity theology is in important respects the antithesis of traditional creation doctrine. While Kaufman retained the idea of God as "the ultimate reference point of reality," he proposed conceiving God in natural-historical terms in reference to cosmic-evolutionary process:

It is this mystery of ongoing creativity, I suggest, that today can quite properly be considered as the ultimate point of reference in terms of which all else is to be understood, that in terms of which human life should therefore be basically oriented, that which today we should regard as God.²⁵

Just as traditional creation theology is founded upon the confessional affirmation of a creating God as ultimate reality, Kaufman's creativity theology is likewise founded upon a confessional affirmation about ultimate reality: God—"the ultimate point of reference in terms of which all else is to be understood"—is the "ongoing creativity" of cosmic-evolutionary process. And Kaufman's confessional affirmation—that cosmic creativity is ultimate reality—carries ontological implications that sharply distinguish creativity theology from creation theology.

First, and fundamentally, God is not Creator of the cosmos but cosmic creativity that manifests itself through evolutionary trajectories in natural history and developmental directions in cultural history. The cosmos in turn is "constituted by . . . ongoing cosmic serendipitous creativity. . . ."²⁶ The ultimate reference point of all reality—God—is thus ontologically inseparable from the world-order brought about by the cosmic-creative

²⁴ William R. Stoeger, S.J., "The Big Bang, Quantum Cosmology, and *creatio ex nihilo*," in *Creation and the God of Abraham*, 152-75, esp. 173.

²⁵ Kaufman, "Is God Nonviolent?" 22.

²⁶ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 45; see also x, xii, 42, 45-47, 59. On how he intended "serendipitous" to be understood, see Gordon D. Kaufman, "Response to Critics," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 29, no. 1 (2008): 76-117.

process.²⁷ Kaufman's theology eliminates at once both the ontological discontinuity of God and world and the ontological independence of God from world. Further, God is not eternally existent: because God-as-creativity is ontologically inseparable from the cosmic order, God-as-creativity exists only insofar as the cosmos in which creativity is manifest exists; God-as-creativity is ontologically actualized along with the cosmic order and thus is existentially co-extensive with natural history. Finally, God has no personal reality: God-as-creativity is a natural-historical process not a personal-intentional agent.²⁸

Why exchange creation theology for creativity theology? Kaufman offered two main reasons. First, he averred that we need a contemporary alternative to the anthropomorphic and anthropocentric theology of our ancestors, which he thought is the source of both religious violence and ecological crisis.²⁹ Second, he contended that the traditional idea of God-the-Creator is no longer credible in our modern era of scientific sensibility and thus no longer meaningful to many folks whose world understanding is conceived in scientific terms.³⁰ I will discuss these in turn.

Kaufman claimed that religious violence and the ecological crisis trace to the incoherent theology rooted in the biblical portrayal of God that conceives God as a personal being like creatures and as "utterly incompatible" with creation.³¹ Whether Kaufman's etiology is correct or not, I agree that absolute transcendence generates intellectual difficulties and that crude anthropomorphism is unworthy of faith. It does not follow, however, that the only, or best, alternative is to conceive God in natural-historical terms. Doctrinal tradition in fact offers neither an abstract theology of absolute transcendence nor a naïve theology of crude anthropomorphism.

According to Genesis, God creates both "from outside" creation ("Let there be light . . .") and "from inside" creation ("Let the earth put forth . . .").

²⁷ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 69. Kaufman emphasized a conceptual distinction (not an ontological discontinuity) between creativity and creatures in order to define "idolatry" and thus preserve a parallel with doctrinal tradition (see *In the Beginning*, 50, 69, 103; *Jesus and Creativity*, 8).

²⁸ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, x, 73.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 38-41, 53-55, 105-106.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 33-52; *Jesus and Creativity*, 14-16.

³¹ Kaufman, "Is God Nonviolent?" 19-20; see *In the Beginning*, 4-7.

According to Isaiah, God-the-Creator beside whom “there is no other” is also God-the-Savior who has “called [us] by name” and has promised “I will be with you.” According to John, the Word who “was in the beginning” and through whom “all things came into being” is the same Word who “was in the world” and “became flesh and lived among us.” In biblical tradition, therefore, God is both “beyond” creation and “among” creation: both “before” creation as Creator and “present to” it as Spirit; both “above” creation as Judge and “with” it as Redeemer. In creedal tradition, moreover, God comprises both transcendence and history, both eternal being and dynamic becoming, both immanent Trinity and economic Trinity.³² The doctrines of incarnation and redemption explicitly emphasize and mutually reinforce this sensibility. Jesus is both “fully God” and “fully human,” yet the union of divinity and humanity in no way “confuses” the two natures. Jesus qua human is “of the same substance” as humans; yet Jesus qua God remains always “other” than human (Definition of Chalcedon). Likewise, God’s redemption of humanity through the “economy” of incarnation aims at restoring humanity to its divine destiny of life with God. Yet the destiny of humanity is to become the likeness of God-in-Christ but not to become God—God is always other than humans.³³ Doctrinal tradition neither absolutely distances God from creation nor simply collapses the difference between God and creation.

This traditional sensibility about God and creation is reflected in the doctrine of analogy regarding God and language. In some ways of speaking, we can conceive God only in terms that negate limits on God and thus are incommensurate with the finitude of creatures (e.g., God is uncreated, eternal, almighty, etc.). Such terms, which cannot be predicated properly of creatures, signify the ontological discontinuity between God and creatures.³⁴ In other ways of speaking, we can use terms that refer to both God and creatures even while falling short of God’s perfection (e.g.,

³² Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 153.

³³ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 7, “On the Beginning and End of Rational Creatures,” in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 45-74.

³⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 28, in *On God and Christ*, 37-67, and Oration 38.7-8, in *Festal Orations* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 65-66, and Basil the Great, “Homily on Faith,” in *On Christian Doctrine and Practice* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012), 234-39.

God is wise, patient, just, etc.). Such terms predicated of both God and creatures are meant neither univocally (same sense) nor equivocally (diverse senses), but analogously (senses that vary proportionally in reference to God or creatures). Analogy avoids anthropomorphism because such terms, predicated properly, compare creatures to God and not God to creatures. By analogy, which imperfectly expresses the divine perfection, we may conceive God as being neither entirely different from nor essentially identical to creatures.³⁵

Kaufman acknowledged analogy but argued that it collapses into negation: due to the limits of language, every analogy entails a negation (analogy denies univocity); therefore, all God-talk is really only “not”-talk.³⁶ Although the premise is true, the inference to the conclusion begs the question by assuming a dichotomy: we must conceive God either as utterly incommensurate, or as entirely commensurate, with the world. Whereas Kaufman embraced the latter, tradition rejects the dichotomy.

Instead of a God-idea that he saw as anthropomorphic and other-worldly, Kaufman proposed a naturalized, this-worldly reconstruction. A God who creates the cosmos “at the beginning” and “from the outside,” he thought, cannot be accommodated within the conceptual framework of contemporary science:

The traditional idea of God as the Creator of the world (as is well known) stands in sharp tension with the understanding of the origins of the universe and of life widely accepted in scientific (as well as many other) circles today . . . the notion of a person-like creator-God *at the beginning of things* really cannot be thought in connection with modern evolutionary theory.³⁷

God-as-creativity is a suitable replacement for God-the-Creator, because (1) it preserves a parallel to the mystery of a transcendent Creator in doctrinal tradition and (2) it fits well with the modern evolutionary

³⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.29-34, in *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book One: God*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1991); *Summa Theologiae* I, Q. 13, A. 5, in *Aquinas: Summa Theologiae, Questions on God*, ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 138ff.

³⁶ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 22-23.

³⁷ Kaufman, “Is God Nonviolent?” 21, emphasis in original; see *In the Beginning*, 53-54.

understanding of the cosmos in which novelty is natural.³⁸

Why, though, should we conceive God “in connection with modern evolutionary theory”? Now, I do not suggest that Kaufman’s theology is suspect because it takes evolutionary science seriously. There need not be—and, one might well argue, should not be—any inherent incompatibility between evolutionary science and either scriptural exegesis or doctrinal tradition.³⁹ Rather, I argue that Kaufman’s scientifically oriented reconstruction of the God-idea generates difficulties of its own.

First, although Kaufman presented creativity theology as a scientifically credible alternative to traditional creation theology, his reconstruction risks the very error that he admonished us to avoid:

[I]n our *theological reflection*, when we are seeking to think carefully and precisely about what we mean when we use the word “God,” we must move with great care in our employment of such metaphors or we will end up with a conception of God largely constructed in our own human image.⁴⁰

Kaufman, of course, recast God in the mold of evolution. His theological reconstruction, while prefaced by historical deconstruction of the God-idea,⁴¹ effectively took the evolution-idea as an epistemological given. He utilized the latter idea as a scientifically legitimated concept ready-to-hand for theological construction.⁴² Kaufman’s historicism, ironically, ignored the human history of the evolution-idea.⁴³ Recast in the mold of a human-historical idea, God-as-creativity is still “largely constructed in our own human image.”⁴⁴

Second, having recast God in the mold of evolution, Kaufman characterized evolutionary creativity as not only “ongoing creativity” but also as originating creation:

³⁸ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, x, 42, 53-55, 57-58. On Kaufman’s desire to preserve parallels with doctrinal tradition, see 68-70, 72-74, 100-106.

³⁹ See Wiley, *Creationism*.

⁴⁰ Kaufman, “Is God Nonviolent?” 19, emphasis in original.

⁴¹ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 1-32.

⁴² *Ibid.*, xii, 42-43.

⁴³ Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989).

⁴⁴ See Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 146.

Creativity, in this modern evolutionary sense, remains profoundly mysterious; and the coming into being of the truly new and novel—the totally unexpected, the unforeseeable—suggests a movement *beyond* all specifiable causes and conditions (a movement that really cannot be accounted for); it seems to involve, thus, a kind of coming into being “from nothing,” *creatio ex nihilo* (as the ancient phrase has it).⁴⁵

Kaufman distinguished three “modalities” of God-as-creativity: creativity manifest in the cosmic origin (creativity₁); creativity manifest in evolutionary process (creativity₂); and creativity manifest in human culture (creativity₃).⁴⁶ He recognized that neither creativity₂ nor creativity₃ involves “something from nothing,” strictly speaking; each emerges from and operates on the prior creativity.⁴⁷ Yet, seeking a conceptual parallel with doctrinal tradition, Kaufman did associate creativity₁ with *creatio ex nihilo*.⁴⁸ While acknowledging that cosmological theory and empirical evidence cannot determine an absolute beginning to the physical cosmos—“We are in no position to say that the Big Bang is a preeminent example of ‘something coming from nothing’ . . . ”⁴⁹—he spoke of the cosmic origin as “the naked and unadorned mystery of something coming into being (from nothing).”⁵⁰ To speak of “from nothing” is necessarily to stretch words beyond the limits of space, time, and experience—and thus lacks rational warrant from a historicist perspective. The association of creativity₁ with *creatio ex nihilo*, therefore, is an epistemological overreach that undermines conceptual coherence.

Third, Kaufman’s scientifically credible God-idea seems progressive but is potentially reactionary. A historical lesson is useful here. The Galileo affair was not actually a conflict between theology and science but between contrasting views of the proper relation between science and theology—and

⁴⁵ Kaufman, “Is God Nonviolent?” 22, emphasis in original; see *In the Beginning*, 55–56, 71.

⁴⁶ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 76. Kaufman seemed to retain a kind of naturalized modalistic trinitarianism at the same time as he tried to salvage a kind of *creatio ex nihilo*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 76, 100.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 76, 77, 100.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 80. See Stoeger, “The Big Bang, Quantum Cosmology, and *creatio ex nihilo*.”

⁵⁰ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 100.

especially the interpretation of Scripture in relation to an understanding of nature. Medieval scholasticism had not rejected science as contrary to faith but had integrated faith and reason—the “Book of Scripture” and the “Book of Nature”—into a single system over which theology ruled as “Queen of the sciences.”⁵¹ The Council of Trent confirmed this integration but, in reaction to the Reformation, vested the Magisterium with the authority to judge the true sense of Scripture and thus the prerogative to judge the truth of science in relation to Scripture. Galileo, harking back to an older tradition (e.g., Augustine), advocated a degree of separation between science and theology. Because physical cosmology was both beside the point of Scripture and beyond the competence of theologians, Galileo argued, the church should allow figurative readings of Scripture where necessary to accommodate advancing knowledge of nature.⁵² Cardinal Bellarmine, true to Trent, saw science as subordinate to theology, with truth in science to be measured by the letter of Scripture as interpreted within the church’s tradition. Thus, he maintained, because the church Fathers unanimously supported the plain (“literal”) sense of Scripture concerning the sun’s motion, unless there is conclusive demonstration of the earth’s motion, the plain sense of Scripture must overrule the heliocentric theory of Copernicus.⁵³

Kaufman in effect inverted the counter-Reformation view established by Trent and upheld by Bellarmine. By vesting evolutionary theory with the authority to judge the plausibility of God-ideas, he effectively crowned it the “Queen of the sciences.”⁵⁴ Suppose, however, that the Queen were dethroned by a new theory of natural history, just as Ptolemaic cosmology and Aristotelian physics were supplanted by Copernican cosmology and Newtonian physics. What, then, for God-as-creativity? Facing a scientific revolution, Kaufman would have to defend the outmoded science or give his God-idea a scientific makeover. Kaufman the historicist would opt for the latter, we might expect. Yet, aware that science is fallible and changeable, he warned against “getting too quickly on the bandwagon” of a newly-formed

⁵¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.3-8.

⁵² Galileo, “Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina,” in *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, trans. Stillman Drake (New York: Doubleday, 1957), 175-216.

⁵³ See the several essays in Ernan McMullin, ed., *The Church and Galileo* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

⁵⁴ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 42, 54.

scientific consensus and counseled a “thoroughly critical stance” toward even established scientific theories.⁵⁵ We could thus imagine him reinforcing his God-idea even as the scientific reference for theological reflection shifted. Subordinating theology to science, which seems progressive, might generate an incentive to resist scientific change in order to retain existing theology—and so risks repeating the reactionary choices of the Council and the Cardinal.

Evil and (Non)Violence: Cosmology, Eschatology, and Ethics

The divergences between traditional creation theology and Kaufman’s creativity theology can be readily seen in light of the problem of evil.⁵⁶ The evident existence and stubborn persistence of evil-doing in the world prompts three questions: What is the origin of evil (cosmology)? Will evil ever end (eschatology)? How to deal with evil in the meantime (ethics)? I will now compare and contrast these theologies, directing the discussion toward this question: What motivates nonviolence in the face of evil?

Evil and (Non)Violence: Traditional Creation Theology

The ontological discontinuity entailed by creation doctrine is not a dualism of good and evil but a differentiation of Creator from creation. God *is* good, all that God creates is good, and there is nothing other than God and what God has created. As does creation’s existence, so does creation’s goodness derive from and depend on God.

In Genesis, creation’s goodness is teleological. God creates by forming a world (“heavens and earth”) that is *unordered* because undifferentiated (“formless void”) into a world ordered by differentiation (light/dark, day/night, sky/earth, waters/waters, sea/land, plant/animal/human, male/female). What God creates is good because it is ordered toward God’s purpose (ongoing proliferation of living creatures under human administration). The order that evidences creation’s goodness is just the order that God ordains “in the beginning.” God, deeming each formation “good” and the whole

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 83; see *Jesus and Creativity*, 87-88.

⁵⁶ The focus here is “moral evil.” On creation theology and “natural evil,” see Terence E. Fretheim, *Creation Untamed: The Bible, God, and Natural Disasters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

formation “very good,” judges that the creation in each part and in its whole is properly ordered toward functioning in fulfillment of God’s purpose.⁵⁷

Patristic theologians sharply distinguished the ontological discontinuity entailed by creation doctrine from cosmic dualisms positing an original opposition between good and evil—spirit versus body (Gnosticism) or light versus darkness (Manichaeism)—and identify evil with matter. Over against these dualisms, orthodox Christianity both affirmed the created goodness of matter and denied the primitive reality of evil.⁵⁸ Whence, then, evil? And what is it? Evil is neither an independent power, existing apart from the cosmos, nor the direct effect of God’s power, an original creation in the cosmos. Rather, evil is parasitic on the God-ordained capacities of the created order; it is a corruption of creation. Creatures have improperly used their God-given capacity of choice to pervert what God created; they have *reordered* creation contrary to God’s purpose.⁵⁹ As the goodness of creation is teleological, so evil in creation is *dysteleological*: evil is *disordered* creation.⁶⁰ Creation doctrine, therefore, entails two distinctions—between uncreated Creator (independent reality) and created creation (dependent reality), and between Creator-ordered creation (good) and creature-disordered creation (evil)—that operate in tandem. The reality of evil is thus neither primitive (only God *is*) nor derivative (as is creation) but negative (corrupted creation).

As diagnosed by Paul, the disorder of evil in the order of creation stems from the rebellion of creatures by refusing to honor the Creator as God.⁶¹ Although the Creator alone is worthy to be worshipped, human

⁵⁷ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 51, 149-50.

⁵⁸ Against Gnosticism, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*; against Manichaeism, see Augustine, *City of God*.

⁵⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 40.45, in *Festal Orations*, 140; Augustine, *City of God* (London: Penguin 2004), XII.1-3, 471ff.; Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012), chapters 3-5; and Basil the Great, “Homily Explaining that God is Not the Cause of Evil,” in *On the Human Condition* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 65-80.

⁶⁰ Wilson, *A Primer for Christian Doctrine*, 77.

⁶¹ Rom. 1:18-32. On “sin” in Paul, see James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “The Cosmic Power of Sin in Paul’s Letter to the Romans: Toward a Widescreen Edition,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 58, no. 3 (2004): 229-40; and Simon J. Gathercole, “Sin in God’s Economy: Agencies

beings have worshipped creation instead, thereby inverting created order: by refusing to honor God, even though God's power and glory are manifest in the creation, they elevate themselves above and thereby dishonor God; then, by worshipping human-made images of animals over whom humans were ordained to rule, they elevate animals and artifacts above and thereby dishonor both themselves and God.⁶² This inversion of order symbolizes the displacement of life by death: a lifeless object replaces the living creature which it represents, the living human who made it, and the living God who gives life; idolaters thus become like their lifeless idols.⁶³ Whereas God had ordered creation to bring forth life, the idolatrous inversion of created order begets a cascading sequence of escalating evil-doing that ends in death. The "exchange" of Creator for creature (inversion) leads to the "exchange" of truth for lie and good for evil (perversion), resulting in the "exchange" of life for death (corruption).

The traditional doctrine that evil is not a subsistent thing should not be mistaken for the neo-Platonic view that evil is mere non-being. Evil, as disordered creation, has power to distort and destroy creatures. Disobedience subjects humans to a "dominion of sin" that brings about "the end of death" to us who are "slaves to sin."⁶⁴ Moreover, the sin-laden legacy of humans is correlated with "the whole creation" being "subjected to futility" and "groaning" in "bondage to decay."⁶⁵ Even so, the existence of evil is tertiary—a corrupting of the creation created by the Creator, a disordering of the order ordained by God—such that the persistence of evil is temporary.

God's righteous rule over creation, premised on God's originating act of creating, is rooted in God's fidelity to the good order that God created and is manifest through God's continuing work to preserve, repair, and renew it for its prolific purpose. Violence *deforms* that which God has formed and to which God remains faithful;⁶⁶ and violence unbounded (war) makes a

in Romans 1 and 7," in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, ed. John M.G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 158-72.

⁶² See Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 39.6-7, in *Festal Orations*, 83-84.

⁶³ See Ps. 115; 135; Isa. 44:9-11; Wisd. of Sol. 13:10-15:17.

⁶⁴ Rom. 5:12-6:23.

⁶⁵ Rom. 8:18-23.

⁶⁶ God's original action and final intention in creation is thus the ontological presupposition of defining (non)violence.

wasteland, threatening to return the earth to its *uncreated* state of “formless void.”⁶⁷ The prophetic vision of messianic peace to be established by God’s faithfulness and righteousness thus correlates ceased violence with both righted relationship and renewed creation.⁶⁸ Accordingly, the psalmist imagines creation rejoicing at the coming judgment of the Creator God.⁶⁹

As a function of God’s rule over creation, God’s judgment against evildoing expresses God’s faithfulness to defend creation by acting righteously to counteract violence against the created order.⁷⁰ God’s judgment of evil in defense of creation is thus manifest as resistance to evildoing, which evildoers experience negatively as God’s “wrath.”⁷¹ “God’s wrath against all impiety and injustice” is manifest universally by God’s “giving up” idolatrous humanity to darkened minds and debased desires so that they commit degrading acts and thereby receive “the due penalty for their error.”⁷² God’s judgment may be manifest in the reversal of evildoing, violence turned back on its perpetrators so that it effects its own punishment.⁷³ This judgment may also be manifest in one nation’s violence effecting retribution against another nation’s evildoing.⁷⁴

We should not infer, however, that God’s wrath generates violence. Human violence ruptures God’s creation and frustrates its purpose, thus provoking God’s judgment.⁷⁵ God’s wrath is God’s righteous reaction against human violence in faithful defense of created order and its prolific purpose. It is a mistake to attribute violence to God on account of God’s counteraction

⁶⁷ Jer. 4:11-31.

⁶⁸ Isa. 11:1-10; 32:15-20.

⁶⁹ Ps. 96:10-13; 98:4-9.

⁷⁰ Wisd. of Sol. 5:17-23; Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 45.8-9, in *Festal Orations*, 167-68.

⁷¹ Ps. 75. On God’s “wrath,” see Terence E. Fretheim, “Theological Reflections on the Wrath of God in the Old Testament,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24, no. 2 (2002): 1-26; Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 279-98.

⁷² Rom. 1:18-32.

⁷³ Ps. 7:11-16; 9:15-17; 35:1-9; 37:12-15; Wisd. of Sol. 11:15-16; 12:23, 27; Sirach 27:26-27; see Matt. 26:52.

⁷⁴ Isa. 10; 45; Jer. 25; 50-51; cf. Luke 19:41-44. See W. Derek Suderman, “Assyria the Ax, God the Lumberjack: Jeremiah 29, the Logic of the Prophets, and the Quest for a Nonviolent God,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 44-66.

⁷⁵ Gen. 4:8-16; 6:1-13; 9:1-7; Hos. 4:1-3.

of humanity's violence in order to restore creation's peace.⁷⁶ Nor should we suppose that God's wrath licenses human violence. Judgment belongs to God as Creator, and thus wrath and retribution are off limits to humans.⁷⁷ Indeed, God's vengeance opposes human vengeance.⁷⁸ The ontological discontinuity between Creator and creation entails a moral asymmetry between God and humans: divine prerogative is not mirrored by human permission.⁷⁹

God's historical judgment anticipates the final end of evil. As Paul observed, that the cosmos is subject to evil is not metaphysical necessity but historical contingency, neither describing cosmic origins nor determining cosmic destiny. The beginning of the end of evil has begun through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, by which God has judged the disorder of sin and conquered the dominion of death that enslave humanity and frustrate creation.⁸⁰ The incarnate-crucified-risen-ascended Christ is the proleptic embodiment and promissory note of a renewed creation purged of sin and freed from death, which is even now being realized in the church through the enlivening and sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit.⁸¹ All created realities—"all things in heaven and on earth ... visible and invisible"—are to be reconciled to God through Christ by whom and for whom all things were created.⁸² This reconciliation includes the subjection under Christ of all created-but-fallen powers presently hostile to God.⁸³ The "all things" also includes our bodies, which are to be raised from mortality to the immortality for which we were created.⁸⁴ "Then comes the end," when the "last enemy" of creation—death—is "to be destroyed" by Christ "so that God may be all in all." God's righteous rule will be manifest in all creation and God's prolific purpose for creation will be completed.⁸⁵

⁷⁶ See Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 393-97; Terence E. Fretheim, "God and Violence in the Old Testament," *Word & World* 24, no. 1 (2004): 18-28.

⁷⁷ Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:34-43; Prov. 20:22; Sirach 27:30-28:7; Rom. 12:17-19; Heb. 10:30.

⁷⁸ Gen. 4:15; Sirach 28:1.

⁷⁹ See Snyder Belousek, "God and Nonviolence: Creedal Theology and Christian Ethics."

⁸⁰ Rom. 5:12-21; 8:1-3, 31-39.

⁸¹ Rom. 8:4-17.

⁸² Col. 1:15-20.

⁸³ 1 Cor. 15:27-28; Eph. 6:10-13; Col. 2:8-15.

⁸⁴ Rom. 8:11, 23; 1 Cor. 15:35-53; 2 Cor. 5:1-5; Phil. 3:20-21.

⁸⁵ 1 Cor. 15:20-28, 54-57.

Paul's phrase "all in all" implies that God's righteous-ruling, creation-renewing work in Christ will ultimately encompass the *whole* of creation.⁸⁶ God, having created all things good from nothing in the beginning and having purposed to be "all in all" in the end, will thus render evil into nothing by the renewal of all things.⁸⁷ In God's final judgment, which consummates the divine economy and completes God's kingdom, evil is nullified and creation is vivified.⁸⁸ No matter how inured we are to the violence in ourselves or how overwhelming seems the violence in our world, this remains true: because evil is not what we or the world *were* in the beginning (all was created good by God), it is not fundamentally what we or the world *are* now (all is fallen from God) and, therefore, it is not finally what we and the world *will be* in the end (all will be restored to God).

This traditional cosmology and eschatology carries ethical implications. Evil is neither normal nor necessary in creation. Because evil is originally not God's creation but creaturely choice, evil-doing can be vanquished and innocents vindicated, sinners can be judged for and released from sin; for God remains sovereign over and faithful to creation despite evil-doing. God's promise that evil will be undone and outdone grounds redemption hope that the all-possible God will act climactically to reverse the violence of evil-doers, rescue humanity from its violent ways, and reorder creation toward its prolific purpose.⁸⁹ Indeed, God's promise has already begun to be actualized in the order of creation through the economy of the Incarnation and dispensation of the Spirit even as God's final purpose has not yet been fully realized but awaits "[God's] kingdom come on earth as in heaven." God's "kingdom come" is neither the inevitable culmination of human progress nor the collective result of Christian activism. God's kingdom in a renewed creation will be fully and finally realized not by humanity's perpetuation of history but by God's disruption of history, not by earth becoming heaven but

⁸⁶ Rom. 8:19-22.

⁸⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), chapters 6-7.

⁸⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.18.7, in Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, 745.

⁸⁹ Restoration of creation's prolific capacity is emphasized in "new creation" texts (Isa. 65:17-20; Rev. 21:1-4). Human access to the tree of life (Gen. 2:9, 16), revoked at expulsion from the garden (Gen. 3:24), is restored in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 2:7; 22:2).

by heaven coming to earth.⁹⁰

While human effort cannot suffice to bring forth a “new creation,” at the same time the gospel summons us to action that aligns with God’s coming kingdom. Because God has conquered evil through Christ, Paul exhorts us to actively resist evil by means of our mortal bodies in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are not to resubmit to sin as its slaves but rather, exercising freedom from the dominion of sin received by grace through baptism “into Christ,” we are to become “slaves of righteousness” in service to God.⁹¹ Because this is *possible* by God’s power that raised Jesus from the dead, it is thus *sensible* to stand against and struggle against powers of evil with the armor of God and the gospel of peace, and thereby seek to overcome evil with good.⁹² Because of God’s victory through Christ, “the present evil world-age” is waning and “the age to come” has begun “in Christ,” such that we can *imaginatively anticipate* a new order in which sin and death are no more and so even now *actively participate* in Christ’s cruciform conquest of evil.⁹³ The protology, cosmology, and eschatology of creation doctrine and canonical narrative thus motivate a nonviolent discipleship: human living patterned after Christ’s life, enabled by the Spirit’s power and aligned with God’s plan to renew creation by undergoing and overcoming sin and death through cross and resurrection.

The doctrinal tradition does prompt troubling questions: Why would God allow creatures to despoil creation? Why would God allow evil-doing to the point of innocent suffering? Such questions are poignantly voiced in lament psalms by the righteous sufferer urgently pleading for God’s vindication: “How long, O Lord?” “O Lord, make haste to help me!” “Rise up, O Lord!”⁹⁴ Rather than offer a divine justification for innocent suffering (theodicy), biblical wisdom answers these pleas with an exhortation to fidelity and patience: “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.”⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Revelation 21:1-4.

⁹¹ Rom. 6:1-23.

⁹² Rom. 12:14-21; Eph. 6:10-17.

⁹³ Rom. 12:1-21; 1 Cor. 7:31; 15:51-58; 2 Cor. 5:16-17; Gal. 1:4; 6:14-16; 1 John 2:17.

⁹⁴ Ps. 9, 10, 13, 17, 35, 40, 70, and 94; Rev. 6:9-10.

⁹⁵ Ps. 37; Prov. 20:22; Sirach 2.

Why love enemies and leave judgment to God?⁹⁶ Why not return violence for violence to vanquish evildoers and vindicate oneself? To take up the sword and save oneself is to refuse to take up the cross and follow Jesus.⁹⁷ But why forsake sword and follow Jesus in the face of evil—and possibly lose oneself? The rationale to “Depart from evil and do good” is rooted in faith that the Creator is also the Judge who will act to put all to rights.⁹⁸ Because “we hope for what we do not see”—God’s kingdom coming with judgment to deliver us from evil—“we wait for it with patience” while persevering in prayer and “entrust[ing] [our]selves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.”⁹⁹ The true pattern for patient trust in God’s judgment is the truly human one, Jesus, who did not return violence for violence but “entrusted himself to the one who judges justly” and whom God faithfully vindicated.¹⁰⁰

Evil and (Non)Violence: Kaufman’s Creativity Theology

Kaufman replaced the “traditional idea of God’s purposive activity in the world” (no longer plausible within an evolutionary worldview) with “a more modest conception . . . *trajectories* or *directional movements* that emerge spontaneously in the course of evolutionary and historical developments.”¹⁰¹ Cosmic creativity, he recognized, serendipitously generates evolutionary trajectories of both productive nonviolent creativity and destructive violent creativity in human history.¹⁰² Thus, because God just is “ongoing serendipitous cosmic creativity,” and cosmic creativity generates violence-trajectories of human evolution, God is the origin of violence. Now, as Kaufman emphasized, because God-as-creativity is not a personal-intentional agent, these trajectories are not to be understood as “the deliberate expression of a self-conscious violent will.” Nonetheless, “this violence . . . is deeply connected with the creativity manifest in the world” and thus is linked intimately to ultimate reality, God.¹⁰³ Trading creation theology for creativity

⁹⁶ Matt. 5:38-48; 13:24-30, 36-43.

⁹⁷ Matt. 16:24-26; 26:47-56.

⁹⁸ Ps. 33:14; Ps. 34 and 94; 1 Pet. 3:8-22.

⁹⁹ Rom. 8:24-30; 1 Pet. 4:1-19.

¹⁰⁰ 1 Pet. 2:21-23.

¹⁰¹ Kaufman, In the *Beginning*, 42, emphasis in original.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 61-62, 99; Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 18, 21.

¹⁰³ Kaufman, “Is God Nonviolent?” 23. See Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 46.

theology, therefore, readily explains evil but radicalizes rather than resolves the problem: eliminating the separation of God and world eliminates any gap between God and evil.

Because serendipitous creativity generates violence-trajectories of human evolution, evil is a “native species” in the cosmic order and finds a “natural niche” in human culture. Even so, Kaufman took hope in the fact that this creativity has also generated nonviolence-trajectories (e.g., Jesus and the Jesus-community), which have opened human-historical possibilities for creative development:

The creativity at work in our universe—in the course of bringing us *humans* into being—has brought us to a point where we can entertain the possibility of living in a moral order that is nonviolent, can deliberately choose to work at bringing about such an order, and can train ourselves and our children to live and act in nonviolent ways (however unlikely the realization of such a dream may be). . . . This development, quite unlike what occurred in the interrelations of creativity (God) with many other spheres of the cosmic order, is—at least in the judgment of those who count ourselves as Christian pacifists—of great significance.¹⁰⁴

As Kaufman’s parenthetical hedge (“however unlikely”) suggests, the serendipitous emergence of nonviolence-trajectories is likely inconsequential for human evolution. Because (a) creativity serendipitously generates both violence-trajectories and nonviolence-trajectories, but (b) creativity’s serendipity is effectively indifferent between violence and nonviolence, such that (c) creativity cannot provide an Archimedean leverage point in evolutionary history by which nonviolence-trajectories can counteract and overcome violence-trajectories, therefore (d) creativity will generate violence-trajectories as long as human evolution continues. We thus cannot expect a historical end to violence apart from the evolutionary end of humanity.

That conclusion in turn destabilizes a historical-human rationale for

¹⁰⁴ Kaufman, “Is God Nonviolent?” 23, emphasis in original; see Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 105, and Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 1-26.

nonviolence. From the historicist angle, with no transcendent ground for ethical norms, the only criteria for action are those derivable from history; but history can warrant at most an ethic based on the goal that a certain human-historical trajectory should continue. A historicist ethic is in effect a pragmatic ethic in which the criterion of right is success in prolonging a humanly-preferred present into the future.¹⁰⁵ In Kaufman's theology, because cosmic creativity is the "ultimate reference point" for understanding all else, it is the standard for evaluating human conduct. Yet, because creativity serendipitously generates trajectories of varying value, "Creativity unqualified . . . does not provide an adequate model of how we humans should live and what we should be trying to do."¹⁰⁶ Kaufman thus defined the ethical criterion in terms of productive creativity: "whatever creatively facilitates the forward movement of the evolutionary/historical trajectory of which we are part—and is in relative harmony with the wider ecological order on Earth—is to be considered good, right, fitting."¹⁰⁷ We might then argue on historicist grounds that the nonviolence-trajectory of human development, which emerged serendipitously from human evolution and was modeled creatively by the human Jesus, is right because it is necessary: nonviolence is the only way we can preserve the trajectory of evolutionary history against destructive threats (e.g., nuclear war and ecological ruin).¹⁰⁸

At the same time, from the evolutionary angle, the violence-trajectories of human development are not moral deviations off a normative nonviolence-trajectory but emerge serendipitously from ongoing cosmic creativity—they are "creations," not "corruptions." We can expect that nonviolence-trajectories will always be swimming up the evolutionary stream against an unending current of violence-trajectories. The pragmatic success of nonviolence in human history—humanity overcoming its violent ways—is evolutionarily unlikely.¹⁰⁹ Nonviolence thus seems historically futile because it appears fated to evolutionary failure.

Kaufman's theology, therefore, cannot provide a stable rationale for

¹⁰⁵ See Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 149.

¹⁰⁶ Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 22.

¹⁰⁷ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 66; cf. *Jesus and Creativity*, 8-9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, *In the Beginning*, 37-38, 45, 47-48, 62, 66, 104-6; Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 23-26, 89-114.

¹⁰⁹ Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 46.

nonviolence because it is incapable of eschatology. Because God-as-creativity serendipitously generates violence-trajectories in human evolution, we cannot expect an historical end to violence apart from an evolutionary end to humanity. Although the Jesus-trajectory of creative nonviolence did emerge serendipitously from human evolution,¹¹⁰ such that we can “follow Jesus” by continuing his trajectory with the hope of preserving a human future,¹¹¹ even this trajectory cannot deliver a historical guarantee of humanity overcoming its violent ways.¹¹²

Kaufman’s theology is incapable of eschatology because it offers no possibility of a fundamentally new order breaking forth within evolutionary history. Overcoming violence-generating cosmic creativity requires transcending evolutionary history. But, because there is no world-transcending reality (no ‘God’ of doctrinal tradition), transcending evolutionary history is impossible.¹¹³ That is, *unless* cosmic creativity were serendipitously to overcome itself and generate a “new beginning” of evolutionary history. Any historicist hope for overcoming violence would thus require appealing to a kind of *creatio ex nihilo*, by which cosmic creativity serendipitously generates something new from nothing that has come before. However, such an appeal would be rationally unwarranted within Kaufman’s theology. Because violence-generating cosmic creativity is ultimate reality, there is no cosmos-transcending possibility of a permanently violence-free order that might be actualized historically, not even serendipitously.

Where, then, does this leave the righteous sufferer? Because there is no historical expectation that serendipitous creativity will ever generate an evolutionary reversal saving humanity from a violent end,¹¹⁴ Kaufman’s theology could answer the plea “How long, O Lord?” with the counsel “Wait for the Lord” only in the sense of “Wait for the unexpected.” Facing violence, with humanity’s salvation uncertain and personal survival the nearest hope, choosing nonviolence would be a risky gamble—the likely loss of one’s own future for the unlikely gain of humanity’s future. Choosing

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 91-95.

¹¹¹ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 49-52, 105, and *Jesus and Creativity*, 52-54, 109-14.

¹¹² Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 57-59, 97, 101.

¹¹³ See Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, 189.

¹¹⁴ Kaufman, *In the Beginning*, 46, 48, 70, 106; *Jesus and Creativity*, 58, 98-100, 103.

nonviolence would thus require “a spirit of self-sacrifice for the well-being of all of humanity . . . a spirit that can subdue the instincts for self-preservation and self-defense. . . .”¹¹⁵ Given that God-as-creativity cannot guarantee vindication for the nonviolent, what human-historical rationale could compel such a sacrificial-spiritual commitment to nonviolence?

One could look to Jesus, who, forsaking sword for cross, exhibited self-sacrificial nonviolence as a human-historical possibility.¹¹⁶ Why, though, entrust one’s future to the Jesus-trajectory of human evolution?

. . . commitment to Jesus and *agape*-love . . . is a matter of the weightiness of a long sequence of historical human decisions and consents and the deep conviction that this trajectory is a significant expression of the serendipitous creativity we call *God*.¹¹⁷

This, however, seems insufficiently compelling. Because *every* human evolutionary trajectory—violent and nonviolent—is an “expression of the serendipitous creativity we call God,” there is no human-historical reason why, when one’s life is threatened, one should believe in the special “significance” of *any* evolutionary trajectory other than a trajectory including one’s personal future, even if that trajectory is preserved by violence. In fact, on that account, taking up the sword to save oneself could make much more sense than taking up the cross to follow Jesus, for, after all, nonviolence did not save him.

Conclusion: Back to the Tradition for the Future

Must the gospel norm of nonviolent discipleship be grounded in the confessional commitments and ontological entailments of doctrinal tradition, or could a pragmatic appeal to historical reality suffice to motivate nonviolence? Although the foregoing arguments cannot deliver a definitive conclusion (Kaufman’s is only one variety of historicism), I think a critical assessment of Kaufman’s project indirectly confirms our original conjecture. Traditional creation theology, far better than Kaufman’s creativity theology,

¹¹⁵ Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity*, 35; see 113-14.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 54, emphasis in original.

provides a doctrinal framework within which we may establish a stable ground for a nonviolent stance. For the sake of motivating a sustainable commitment to nonviolent discipleship, the serendipitous movements of God-as-creativity in evolutionary history are a poor substitute for the overarching purpose and ongoing activity of God-the-Creator in the created order. This conclusion bolsters Reimer's contention that Anabaptist-Mennonite theology would be well served by a renewed appropriation of doctrinal tradition, with a renewed appreciation of the ontological entailments of confessional commitments, for the sake of safeguarding discipleship ethics.¹¹⁸

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¹¹⁸ See also Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism*.