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Foreword

This issue offers us an opportunity to present selected papers from two recent “Mennonite Scholars and Friends Forums.” These events are regularly held in conjunction with meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature. The Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre and the Institute of Mennonite Studies (AMBS) jointly oversee the forums and a rotation of institutional hosts.

We’re using the 2002 conference title, “Radical Reformation and Radical Orthodoxy” for material from that event, and “Anabaptist Witness in the Public Square” to capture the overall theme of the 2004 gathering. The 2002 session focused on Radical Orthodoxy, particularly the work of theologian John Milbank, and considered points of contact with the Radical Reformation. The 2004 gathering centered on Anabaptist Faith and American Democracy — that is, the argument developed by Ted Grimsrud in a challenging article published earlier that year in *MQR* under the same title. Milbank and Grimsrud actively participated in the respective events, which featured papers specially prepared for the occasion and produced a very lively exchange of views.

We thank everyone who helped collect and shepherd the Forum papers through our production process, especially Jim Reimer, Jeremy Bergen and Thomas Reimer. We invite new contributors and subscribers to enter *CGR*’s own long-established forum for the thoughtful, sustained discussion of spirituality, ethics, theology and culture from a broadly-based Mennonite perspective.

C. Arnold Snyder, *Academic Editor* Stephen A. Jones, *Managing Editor*

Acknowledgment

In our Winter 2005 issue we neglected to credit the artist who created the graphic for the 2003 Women Doing Theology conference. Teresa Pankratz of Chicago is that artist, and she also drew illustrations for the Women's Concerns Report for many years.

Note on Panelists

John Milbank, now Professor in Religion, Politics and Ethics at the University of Nottingham, was formerly the Francis Meyers Ball professor of philosophical theology at the University of Virginia. He received a Ph.D. from Birmingham University and a Doctor of Divinity from Cambridge. While at Cambridge, Milbank emerged as the leader of “Radical Orthodoxy,” a movement in revolt against liberalism and dedicated to meeting the challenge of postmodern and deconstructionist thinkers on their own territory. He is the author of *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (1990); *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (1997); co-editor of *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (1999); and co-author with Catherine Pickstock of *Truth in Aquinas* (2001). He is working on a trilogy (Gift and Sacrifice) and on other books. Advance chapters of the first volume of that trilogy, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*, were sent to the Forum panelists, who were free to deal either with these chapters, a theme arising out of them, or some other aspect of the author’s work. Milbank’s own account of the program of Radical Orthodoxy is found in *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Inquiry*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming (2000).

A. James Reimer, organizer of the Milbank Forum, is founding Director of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre and a professor at Conrad Grebel University College. He is the author of *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (2001), *Paul Tillich: Theologian of Nature, Culture and Politics* (2004), and numerous articles published in *The Conrad Grebel Review* and other venues.

Malinda Elizabeth Berry is a student in the doctoral program at Union Theological Seminary (New York). Her advisor in Systematic Theology is Dr. James Cone, and her primary research interests are the authority of scripture and theological anthropology.

Chris K. Huebner, assistant professor of Theology and Ethics at Candian Mennonite University, is a graduate of Duke University, where he studied under Stanley Hauerwas. His Ph.D. dissertation, *Unhandling History: Antitheory, Ethics, and the Practice of Witness*, attempts to develop a nonviolent epistemology, drawing on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, John Milbank, and John Howard Yoder. He is co-editor of *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honour of John Howard Yoder*, and has published in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, *MQR*, and *CGR*.

P. Travis Kroeker, a professor of Religious Studies at McMaster University, received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. His teaching and research focus on the place of theology and ethics in western thought and culture. His books are *Remembering the End: Dostoevsky as Prophet to Modernity*, with Bruce Ward (2001) and *Christian Ethics and Political Economy in North America* (1995). He has written articles on such topics as Luther and the radical reformers, Oliver O'Donovan and John Howard Yoder, spirituality and therapy in secular culture, and the theological politics of Plato and Isaiah.

Laura Schmidt Roberts is on the Biblical and Religious Studies faculty at Fresno Pacific University. She is currently on leave, completing a doctorate in systematic and philosophical theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA. Her paper was not available for publication.

Gerald W. Schlabach is associate professor of Theology at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota. In the 1980s he worked with the Mennonite Central Committee, including five years in Nicaragua and Honduras. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Notre Dame, and has taught at Bluffton College. His most recent book is *For the Joy Set Before Us: Augustine and Self-Denying Love*. He is co-chair of a steering committee called "Bridge Folk: A Movement of Grass Roots Dialogue and Unity Between Mennonites and Roman Catholics."

Introduction to the 2002 Forum

A. James Reimer

This year marks the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre (TMTC), a research and teaching center for advanced degree studies at the Toronto School of Theology. One of the Centre's goals is to foster ecumenical dialogue, which has recently been extended to inter-faith conversations, and to engage theologians and topics from a wide range of traditions. This issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review* illustrates this commitment. It contains the proceedings of two events sponsored by TMTC: a 2002 conversation with British theologian John Milbank, and a 2004 discussion of Mennonites and American Democracy. (The encounter with Milbank stands in a venerable tradition of TMTC-sponsored exchanges with distinguished theologians, including Gordon D. Kaufman, John H. Yoder, Miroslav Volf, and Stanley Hauerwas. Plans are underway for conversations with Princeton theologian Robert Jenson in Winter 2006.)

Milbank has taken the academic world by storm with his *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (1990); *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (1997), and *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (2003), the pre-published manuscript of which formed the basis of our conversation. It's not often that a new theological or philosophical movement, especially a traditionalist one, sweeps over the academy. The full impact of Milbank's thought for theology is still not clear, but he, with several colleagues, did start a theological movement which, like that of Yoder and Hauerwas, has had a powerful impact even though it goes against the mainstream.

"Radical Orthodoxy," as this movement is now known, has a number of names associated with it, primarily those of Cambridge theologians Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, editors of the 1999 volume, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. (See the review, "The new orthodoxy?" by David S. Cunningham, in *Christian Century*, Nov. 17-24, 1999.)

Unfortunately, in my 2001 book *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics*, I did not take Milbank's thought into account. This was because I had not yet read him. I have since become acquainted with his work, and I will respond to it and to his critique of my position in a future article. My own agenda is also to recover classical themes, foremost the Christian doctrine of God as three and one (the Trinity), particularly for Mennonites. Our basic theological concerns are similar yet different. We both seek to recover classical orthodoxy in imaginative ways and to combine it with radical social ethics. But we differ on what to keep in classical thought and how to understand radical social ethics. The last chapter of my *Mennonites and Classical Theology* ("The Dynamic of the Classical Imagination"), engaging Thomas C. Oden, Wolfart Pannenberg, and Miroslav Volf, outlines my view on this issue.

Theologically, Milbank and I agree in our critique of modernity, its Enlightenment assumptions, and social-scientific forms of reductionism, and on the need to recover a theological-trinitarian basis for all of reality, including law, order, and public life. My critique of Milbank is close to that of Lois Malcolm (see her "Recovering theology's voice: Radical, orthodox," *Christian Century*, October 25, 2000): in his emphasis on "harmonious difference" (rather than primal chaos and conflict) as being at the heart of reality, and on the participation of creation in divine life, Milbank is in danger of overlooking the distinction between the divine and the human, nature and grace, reason and revelation, law and gospel, truth and beauty, and the radicality of grace in the face of human sinfulness. For me, Milbank's revisionism of classical thought is too great, leaving him more modern and postmodern than he would like to think. In his critique of all forms of universal reason and law, he goes too far in the direction of postmodern anti-foundationalism. By contrast, I seek to recover an older form of "foundationalism" — universal, mystical, or contemplative reason in the sense of the second-century apologists and the wisdom literature of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

Ethically, I agree with Milbank that social ethics without theology is reductionistic and lacks moral power. His attempt to defend a radical, nonviolent social ethic firmly founded in the incarnation, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and the church as a witness to divine reconciliation, is to be applauded. One wonders, however, whether his commitment to nonviolent social justice

is radical enough. Milbank conceptualizes his social ethic as coming out of the Church of England, while I argue for one consistent with the Radical Reformers of the sixteenth century. This difference in perspective led to the topic of our forum: “Radical Orthodoxy and the Radical Reformation: What is Radical about Radical Orthodoxy?”

The panel comprised five presenters, four of whom are published below, and myself as chair. Participants were sent five chapters of Milbank’s about-to-be published book, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*: “Evil: Darkness and Silence,” “Violence: Double Passivity,” “Ecclesiology: The Last of the Last,” “Politics: Socialism by Grace,” and “Culture: The Gospel of Affinity.” The presenters, all shaped by the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, offer a critique of Milbank from the perspective of a different kind of “radical orthodoxy,” one informed by a robust tradition of nonviolence going back to the sixteenth century and beyond. Milbank’s ethical radicalism is not radical enough for these thinkers, one of whom carried on a correspondence with Milbank after the event (printed below). Milbank’s rejection of violence wavers at crucial points, as becomes clear in his chapter, “Violence: Double Passivity.”

On first reading Milbank the complexity of his style and argument is overwhelming and appears to obscure what he wants to communicate. On further reading, however, one is rewarded as one enters a new world of poetic imagery. Like Martin Heidegger (with whom he profoundly disagrees), who in effect invented a new language for philosophy, Milbank occasionally rises to breathtaking poetic heights. Here is an example from *Being Reconciled*: “The Incarnation and the hypostatic descent of the Spirit inaugurated on earth a counter-polity exercising a counter-sovereignty, nourished by sovereign victimhood. . . . In heaven it [this counter-polity] is perfect, but on earth its sway is not utopian; for now we glimpse dimly its perfection within a process of reconciliation that is but fragmentally realized – like a fleeting passage of an aerial creature amongst the trees, which we are scarcely sure we have glimpsed at all. . . . It is rather that this descent [of the Son and Holy Spirit] inaugurates an altogether different possibility: it opens a narrow chink of light, allowing, albeit inchoately, a certain counter-movement of advance and of progress for the few (intensely) and the many (dispersedly) towards the source of this light.”

What Should Mennonites and Milbank Learn from Each Other?

Chris K. Huebner

Introduction

The movement known as “Radical Orthodoxy” springs from a recognition that much contemporary theological reflection, let alone first-order Christian speech, is theologically vacuous. In particular, it suggests that theology ceases to be theological when it becomes an attempt to make the world safe for theology and theology safe for the world. In doing so, it seeks to diagnose the “false humility” of such an approach as another violent attempt to identify an appropriate realm for the possession of power in a secular landscape of barren positivities. By contrast, Radical Orthodoxy presents itself as an audacious attempt to reclaim the world for theology and theology for the world. Breaking out of the narrow confines theology imposes on itself in its characteristically modern moments, it seeks to recover the entire world as the appropriate subject of theological investigation, and thus to articulate a new vision of hope for the world. The scope of its vision is daunting, as it seeks a comprehensiveness – “a commitment to all or nothing”¹ – that passes beyond the universal, which it regards as but a moment inscribed within a larger dance with particularity, a duality meaningful only against the background of an economy of scarcity, mastery, and control. As it seeks to “read the signs of the times . . . in terms of the grammar of the Christian faith,” Radical Orthodoxy is unashamedly bold and daringly ambitious.²

As Radical Orthodoxy flies in the face of liberal “safe-making” techniques, this is said to be a decidedly risky endeavor, because it refuses to anchor theology to a self-legitimizing ground of some sort. But this is not a “reactive” riskiness that assumes conflict to be ontologically basic, and that seeks mastery and control in order to gain security in a dangerous situation always threatening to overwhelm us. Rather, the riskiness is understood on grounds internal to theology itself. It follows from the logic of creation *ex nihilo* that theology, to be theology, must unhook itself from any external non-theological vehicle designed to guarantee its successful arrival upon some

pre-given scene. The theology of Radical Orthodoxy radically refuses all positivities, all strategic and regulative reductions, whether rationalistic or fideistic, ecclesial or psychological. Any attempt to ground theology on a neutral footing is the expression of a possessive, territorial drive to secure power that contradicts the gratuitous exchange of gift-giving and receiving which is the logic of creation. This attempt to refuse to tame or domesticate the essential contingency and riskiness of theology is what makes the work of Radical Orthodoxy bold. Its purported radicalism is perhaps best seen in how it brings comprehensiveness and riskiness together as a master discourse that is at the same time a discourse of non-mastery.³

How, then, might Mennonites engage this project? Boldness and audacity are not terms usually associated with Mennonites. Yet Mennonite theology also grows out of a vision of theological radicalism that resists the temptation to absolutize itself in a given conception of space and/or time. In the following discussion I shall reflect on what Mennonite theology – if there is such a thing – could learn from Radical Orthodoxy. I shall suggest that Milbank can be used to identify certain problematic tendencies associated with contemporary Mennonite theology, but I shall also identify a few critical counter-gifts to be offered in return. Not only is it instructive to read Radical Reformation against the background of Radical Orthodoxy, it is equally important to read the latter against the background of the former. The conception of theological radicalism claimed by both positions is best understood only when they properly receive and return each other's critical gifts.

Milbank's Lessons for Mennonites

Perhaps the most striking feature of contemporary Mennonite theology, when read against the background of Radical Orthodoxy, is its almost systematic evasion of theology. While defenders of Radical Orthodoxy, along with Stanley Hauerwas and others, have warned against the dangers of distinguishing between theology and ethics, so-called Mennonite theology often appears based largely on a choice of ethics over against theology. It is reduced to an ethic of pacifism, appropriately described in the terms John Rawls used to summarize his theory of justice, namely that it is political and not metaphysical. The category of peace is abstracted from its larger theological home, idealized, and turned into a criterion for adjudicating all subsequent reflection, theological

or otherwise. This does to peace what Scotus and the late medieval nominalists, on the Radical Orthodoxy reading, did in elevating “being” to a higher status than God. Mennonite theological reflection is developed as though it is secondary to a prior non-theological concept – in this case, peace – and therefore ceases to be theological in any meaningful sense. Peace is reinterpreted as a univocal concept, as Mennonites seemingly latch on to any reference to peace, with little or no apparent appreciation of how its meaning differs markedly from one variety of pacifism to another. From this perspective, Mennonite theology could be said to go wrong when it focuses too exclusively on the question of peace and violence; in doing so its discourse on peace is evacuated of any theological content.⁴

At the same time, one often gets the impression that peace is reified and treated statically, as a possession that Mennonites have privileged access to and are charged to distribute effectively to others. In Milbank’s terms, this is to understand peace as if it exists in an economy of scarcity and is “in short supply,” so that peace becomes interpreted as a more secure investment or insurance against a prior danger.⁵ This is to miss the sense in which Christian theology presumes an economy of generous plenitude and excess. To assert the ontological priority of peace is to see it as an excessive and freely given charitable donation. Christians are thereby called to “cease to be self-sufficient in the face of scarcity,” and instead to embody an exchange of gift-giving and receiving that flows out of the excessively gracious self-giving of God. Mennonite theology often seems to operate under a conception of peacemaking that names a process of bringing order to what is disordered in *this world*, whereas for Milbank peace names a fundamentally different *ontology*. Christian worship, and particularly the forgiveness of sins, thus constitutes the interruption of a new order – simultaneously a counter-politics and counter-ontology – into the world of the secular.⁶ Most important, this means that a theological conception of peace is not reactive. It is not primarily a response to a prior situation of conflict, and so we should not speak as if violence is something to be “overcome.” Instead of viewing peace as a reaction to a pre-existing situation of violence, Milbank reads the story of creation *ex nihilo* as an alternative vision of the world that hinges on the idea of originary peace. Peace is thus ontologically prior to violence. It cannot be secured, and thus cannot flourish in a capitalist economy of self-interest, debt, scarcity, and

contract. Rather, it is at home in an economy of charitable donation and thus exists only as unnecessarily given and received. To participate in Christian worship is to be inscribed within a logic of gift-giving and receiving, and within a conception of generosity seen as participation in the gracious self-given excessive reality of God.

Closely related to this, Mennonite theology might also learn much from Radical Orthodoxy's re-reading of the so-called "tradition." Milbank notes that "Radical Orthodoxy, if catholic, is not a specifically Roman Catholic theology; although it can be espoused by Roman Catholics, it can equally be espoused by those who are formally 'protestant', yet whose theory and practice essentially accords with the catholic vision of the Patristic period through to the high Middle Ages."⁷ Mennonite theology too often skips directly from the New Testament to the sixteenth century. Or when it does engage the catholic vision, it often categorically rejects it as involving no more than an elaborate legitimization of violence. We should recall that patristic and medieval sources are part of our tradition – if there is such a thing – too. We might further learn from Milbank and others that we do not have to read patristic and medieval theology as it has been read against the background of the Reformation (or, perhaps more accurately, against the background of the Enlightenment invention of the distinction between natural and revealed religion, or between reason and tradition). In particular, it is not to be read in a way that projects onto it a series of dualities, such as faith and reason, nature and grace, or the spiritual and the political. Milbank suggests that before the Enlightenment, faith and reason were not the names of essentially distinct realms but were rather differing degrees of intensity of participation in the mind of God.⁸

In a similar vein, Milbank shows that the common interpretation that attributes to Aquinas a two-tiered account of nature and grace as distinct stages must give way to an appreciation of the sense in which Aquinas saw nature as always already graced. More generally, the medieval metaphysics of participation and analogy might help resist the tendency to overemphasize peace so that it becomes non-theological, an object or possession to be secured and distributed. Discipleship could then be seen not as a simple copying of Jesus' acts but as a participation in the very body of Christ itself that is simultaneously metaphysical and political.

The third lesson Mennonites might learn draws on Catherine Pickstock's suggestion that Radical Orthodoxy is not to be regarded as "a discrete edifice which purports to be a stronghold" but as "a hermeneutic disposition and a style of metaphysical vision; and it is not so much a 'thing' or 'place' as a task."⁹ It is a hermeneutic of doxological dispossession or theological deterritorialization, resisting any strategy of "spatialization" that might reduce the gifts of knowledge understood as divine illumination to an objectified "given" that must be secured and protected through a policing of borders.¹⁰ Similarly, it is equally important to view the Radical Reformation as naming a hermeneutic or style rather than a distinct entity or thing. This point has already been made by John Howard Yoder, but its significance is often missed. In particular, Yoder suggests that Radical Reformation names a certain habit of thinking, a kind of dialogical vulnerability, which cultivates a "constant potential for reformation and in the more dramatic situations a readiness for the reformation even to be 'radical'."¹¹ This is equally a style of metaphysical vision perhaps best described as apocalyptic, as Stanley Hauerwas seeks to show by building on Yoder's claim that "people who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe."¹² Both Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation name a theological style that refuses the rhetoric of spatialization or self-absolutization and ceases to think of theology as an entity or territory to be policed and secured by boundaries. One implication of this is that it becomes rather odd to speak in terms of such a thing as Mennonite theology at all. The characteristic styles of Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation challenge the assumption that Mennonite theological distinctiveness rests on concentric habits of thinking, or on an underlying territorial conception of theological enquiry.¹³

Mennonites' Lessons for Milbank

I now want to identify three critical counter-gifts Mennonites might give to Milbank. Each could be interpreted to suggest that Mennonites are equipped to learn from him in ways surpassing what he appears to have learned from himself. The first centers on the voice of the theologian. Despite his call to recast theology as an ecclesial practice, Milbank privileges the theologian's voice in a way that implies a residual commitment to specialization and professionalism, and to a kind of reactive heroism he otherwise calls question as an instance of a secular economy of security and possession.

Let me develop this claim by contrasting two statements by Milbank. First, in *Theology and Social Theory* he writes that “in a rhetorical perspective, the story of the development of the tradition – for example, in the case of Christianity, a story of preachings, journeyings, miracles, martyrdoms, intrigues, sin and warfare – really *is* the argument for the tradition.”¹⁴ Second, in the opening lines of *The Word Made Strange*, Milbank says “today, theology is tragically too important,” so that “the theologian feels almost that the entire ecclesial task falls on his own head: in the meagre mode of reflective words he must seek to imagine what a true practical repetition would look like.”¹⁵ This second claim strikingly cancels out the insights of the first. It gives the impression that theology is brought *to* Christian practice and not found anywhere *within* it. For all his talk of ecclesial practice, Milbank implies that theology is an intellectual exercise overseen by the theologian, that authority is not internal to practices themselves but imposed externally from the perspective of an authority figure who inhabits a theoretical space transcending the practices.

By contrast, the Radical Reformation attempts to avoid such a privileging of the voice of the theologian or any such turn to theory, emphasizing instead the many members making up the body of Christ. To quote from Yoder again, “the agent of moral discernment in the doxological community is not a theologian, a bishop, or a pollster, but the Holy Spirit, discerned as the unity of the entire body.”¹⁶

This conception of the unified body turns crucially on the practice of patience. Here is a second lesson Milbank might learn from Mennonites: a vision of the church as a counter-epistemology that is not preoccupied with epistemic justification, but one that practices the epistemological virtue of patience required for genuine engagement with the other in a process of open conversation, often referred to as the Rule of Paul. It is a mode of knowledge slowly proceeding in fragments and ad hoc alliances through the hard work of a conversation whose parameters cannot be defined in advance of actual encounter. It seeks to hear all the relevant voices, and resists the violent tendency to silence anyone by the way the debate is constructed beforehand. It is an epistemology that resists closure, refusing the lie of the total perspective and the search for a purified idiom of speech, and recognizing that language about God is not limited to our current vocabularies. Moreover, it encourages the active pursuit of dialogical conflict in its willingness to engage in self-

criticism. In short, it is a conception of theological enquiry that lingers timefully and patiently as a way of resisting the temptation to self-absolutization.

Milbank sometimes implies something similar, as when he writes that “consensus happens, unpredictably, through the blending of differences, and by means of these differences, not despite them.”¹⁷ Yet his work equally exhibits a rhetorical preoccupation with speed of delivery that suggests the overcoming of patience. This is perhaps best exemplified in how he differentiates a Christian counter-ontology of peace from a secular ontology of violence by means of sharp, almost over-general contrasts between their competing logics. It is also exemplified in his tendency to trace everything to the one basic mistake of the Scotist elevation of “being” over God. I do not suggest that Milbank fails to identify theologically problematic claims. But it is important to see how the development of his interpretation as a kind of unrestrained rhetorical hypernarrative reveals a preoccupation with speed, efficiency, and possessive mastery that he otherwise calls into question. It is also possible to read his understanding of pedagogically justified violence from the same standpoint. Milbank defends the possible necessity of recourse to violence in “bringing a defaulter to his senses” rather than risking this will not happen in ongoing, timeful “open conversation.” The value of Mennonite theology – if there is such a thing – is that it proceeds patiently, entering vulnerably into the world of another rather than employing an accelerated, possessive hermeneutics of mastery and control.

These lessons might be combined to suggest there is a lingering commitment to instrumental causality in Milbank’s work, despite his rejection of instrumentalism as a defining feature of secular reason. This appeal to instrumental causality tends to appear precisely at those moments where Milbank argues that an ontology of peace does not entail a commitment to pacifism. For example, he writes that “the *purpose* of ecclesial coercion is peace” and says that violence can be justified in so far as it “contribute[s] to the *final goal* of peace.”¹⁸ Such claims imply that pedagogic coercion is justified because it is effective in bringing about an independently specifiable end. Accordingly, there is a sense in which Milbank’s rhetoric underwrites a securing of ecclesial agreement or consensus that conflicts with his account of consensus arising through an exchange of difference. At these crucial points in his argument Milbank is strikingly rather silent about the activity of

God. As noted above, much of his theology depends on an account of *poesis* as human participation in God's creative activity. Yet when discussing the possibility of ecclesial violence and the "cultivation" of peace, it sounds as if the "fate of the counter-kingdom" falls squarely on human shoulders.

Milbank argues that "one way to secure peace is to draw boundaries around 'the same', and exclude 'the other'; to promote some practices and disallow alternatives. Most polities and most religions characteristically do this. But the Church has misunderstood itself when it does likewise."¹⁹ In this he is exactly right. However, his discussion of pedagogical coercion and other forms of "legitimate violence" sounds too much like just this kind of ecclesial failure. A commitment to nonviolence need not be to "fetishize freedom," as Milbank appropriately worries it might.²⁰ Rather, it is best read as an attempt to take more seriously the possibility of participating, however imperfectly, in God's gratuitous economy of peaceable plentitude and excess.²¹ It is one thing to recognize retrospectively that we are always already implicated in some form of violence, and to struggle collectively to disentangle ourselves – or, rather, open ourselves to the possibility of being disentangled – from it. It is quite another thing to justify prospectively the forward-looking enactment of violence as bringing about a certain desired effect, even one as important as the truth about God. For the most profound truth about God – and that which Christian nonviolence most significantly turns on – is that God is not dependent on us to ensure his continued survival. So the Mennonite commitment to nonviolence might serve as a third lesson, even though it has so often been interpreted in a manifestly untheological way. It represents an ongoing commitment to just the kind of ecclesial practice that could itself be seen as the most profound argument for the tradition, an argument that is significant precisely in not seeking to secure itself by invoking the heroic voice of the theologian.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I return to the question of comprehensiveness and riskiness. Mennonites have often taken themselves to be necessarily at odds with boldness and comprehensiveness. But we have misunderstood ourselves when we have done so. On the contrary, it might be suggested that a Mennonite commitment to practising nonviolence exemplifies an even more thoroughgoing

commitment to the comprehensiveness of “all or nothing,” since it does not have the safety net of an appeal to coercive violence when consensus does not happen through the unpredictable blending of differences. Similarly, it more appropriately embodies the essential riskiness of a theological vision. Its appreciation of riskiness can be seen in its refusal to make Christianity necessary, and its corresponding embodiment of an ethos of dialogical vulnerability that cultivates a readiness for Radical Reformation.

Thus, in a sense, Radical Reformation turns out to display just the kind of radicalism called for by Radical Orthodoxy, sometimes in a way suggesting it has the resources to more adequately learn the lessons of Radical Orthodoxy than do the latter’s own defenders. But the apparent sense of accomplishment captured in such claims comes at a price. For such a reading of the Radical Reformation can only be sustained when it stops focusing too exclusively on violence and peace, and understands peace in more substantively theological and ontological terms. This, among other things, calls into question the very idea of a distinctive Mennonite theology to be articulated and defended in the first place.

Notes

¹ John Milbank, “Violence: Double Passivity,” unpublished manuscript, 29.

² Graham Ward, “Radical Orthodoxy and/as Cultural Politics,” In *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 103.

³ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 6.

⁴ See John Milbank, “Violence: Double Passivity,” 3; and John Howard Yoder, “Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics,” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 109.

⁵ John Milbank, “Can Morality Be Christian?” in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (London: Blackwell, 1997), 224-25.

⁶ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 411.

⁷ Milbank, “The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy,” 35.

⁸ See John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 19-59.

⁹ Catherine Pickstock, “Radical Orthodoxy and the Mediations of Time,” in *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry*, 63.

¹⁰ Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (London: Blackwell, 1998), 62-64.

¹¹ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 5.

¹² Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001). The Yoder passage is from "Armaments and Eschatology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 1:1 (1988): 58. See also John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 246; and, programmatically, "To Serve Our God and to Rule the World," in *The Royal Priesthood*, 128-40.

¹³ I have developed this argument at greater length with respect to the work of J. Denny Weaver in a review essay of his *Anabaptist Theology in the Face of Postmodernity: A Proposal for the Third Millennium* in *Preservings: Journal of the Steinbach Historical Society* No. 18 (June, 2001): 145-48.

¹⁴ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 347 (Milbank's emphasis).

¹⁵ Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 1. I thank Peter Dula for drawing the significance of this to my attention.

¹⁶ Yoder, "To Serve Our God and to Rule the World," 139.

¹⁷ John Milbank, "The Name of Jesus," in *The Word Made Strange*, 155.

¹⁸ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 418 (emphasis added).

¹⁹ Milbank, "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism': A Short *Summa* in Forty-two Responses to Unasked Questions," *Modern Theology* 7.3 (1991): 225-37 at 229.

²⁰ Milbank, "Violence: Double Passivity," 27.

Educative Violence or Suffering Love?

Radical Orthodoxy and Radical Reformation

P. Travis Kroeker

I

If there is one thing orthodox Roman Catholics and orthodox mainstream Reformers agreed on in the sixteenth century, it was that the Anabaptists and so-called radical reformers were radically heterodox. They also agreed that these heretical Christians, who proposed creating a visible church that seeks to enact the lordship of Christ through a literal following of his teaching and example, were disturbing the peace and should be coercively restrained, and indeed executed, as heretics and subversives. Thus the radical reformers became the accidental victims – to use John Milbank’s terms – of the more physical but more measured exercise of violence of the pre-modern church in both mainstream forms that were pursuing the peace of Radical Orthodoxy. One may read about this accidental, measured violence in that classic of the Radical Reformation, *The Bloody Theatre or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians Who Baptized only Upon Confession of Faith, and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus their Savior*. Anabaptists therefore may have something at stake, literally, in questioning Milbank’s sweeping assertion that modern liberal enlightenment is less generous, less benevolent and indeed more violent, than the educative violence of pre-modern Christian orthodoxy.

However, what is at stake here is not that the radical reformers were victims who might have been saved under more liberal political authorities. What is at stake is how radical reformers might understand Milbank’s claim that Christianity leads to violence because (a) it is a universalizing religion, and (b) it aims so high. The Radical Reformation would agree with Milbank that violence is indeed “entirely unavoidable insofar as it runs the educative risks of redemption,” but it would suggest that such violence is unleashed by unredeemed, fallen intuitions and desires when they resist the apocalyptic claims and reconciling overtures of divine love such as are displayed by the servant Christ and visibly imitated by the body of Christ in temporal existence. There is no question here of “pious neutrality” even though the option of “violent defense” is rejected. But this issue cannot be critically clarified by

pointing to examples for imitation such as Jeanne d’Arc – a female lay warrior whose ethic is equally attractive to cyberculture, Hollywood, and Milbank, it seems, because it risks the embodied erotic enactment of the militant battle for relative goods – a very mysterious and fragile charity indeed (not least because it is dying for France, *pro patria mori*). We have other examples for imitation, no less engaged politically and erotically – though much less romantic and much more challenging both for individuals and for communities. The claim of the radical reformers that evoked such violent orthodox fury in their mainline opponents was that the example for imitation is the servant Messiah, who rules not through educative domination but through suffering love. This example, moreover, is not of peaceableness as an individual virtue but as a communal gift that can only be received and shared through the spiritual disciplines of the eucharistic community as enacted in the service of the larger good of the culture.

I want to challenge Milbank’s Radical Orthodoxy account of ecclesiology with reference to a Radical Reformation account which, no less than his, understands the church as the eucharistic community that is also a “counter-polity exercising a counter-sovereignty.” This counter-sovereignty is authorized by the cosmic rule of the slain Lamb that rejects the politics-as-usual conditions of human rule, both psychic and political – including that of educative violence. The point of this apocalyptic counter-sovereignty is to embody politically in the world the divine process of reconciliation, and Christian theology must understand itself to be accountable to this process.

II

Let me begin with Milbank’s agreement with Jean-Luc Marion that theology is authorized by the Eucharist. In *God Without Being* (1995) Marion shows how a truly educative theological hermeneutic is a eucharistic hermeneutic, through a wonderful interpretation of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). Marion points out that the disciples recognize Jesus when he enacts the Eucharist; then he vanishes from their sight, and they say to each other: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” Marion comments:

In fact, the Word, at the eucharistic moment, does not disappear so much as the disciples, who eating his body and drinking his

blood, discover themselves assimilated to the one whom they assimilate and recognize inwardly; the Word does not disappear to their sight so much as they themselves disappear as blinded individuals, literally astray on paths that lead nowhere. They enter into the place of the Word, and now, like him, they go up to Jerusalem (151)

Did the disciples go up to Jerusalem to become bishops? Unlike Marion and Milbank, I do not think this passage authorizes the formulation that the bishop, as the presider over the Eucharist and thus invested by the *persona Christi*, is therefore the true theologian. At least Marion, unlike Milbank, does two important things: (1) he develops his account in relation to a biblical interpretation (Milbank only ever refers to Nicholas of Cusa's ecclesiology of the *corpus mysticum*, which has no biblical tradition;¹ and (2) he suggests that this assimilation to the *persona Christi* entailed in theological hermeneutics aims at the referent, aims to express the Word, not only discursively but existentially by reduplicating Christ's holiness in one's own life. "He who claims to go beyond the text as far as the Word must therefore know whereof he speaks: to know, by experience, charity; in short, 'to have learned from what he suffered' (Heb. 5:8) like Christ" (Marion, 155). What Christ has opened to these disciples in the scriptures is the difficult teaching, the foolish wisdom of God that causes everyone to stumble (1 Cor. 1), namely that the Messiah enters into his glory only by suffering (Luke 24:25f.). So also does the messianic community, according to the radical reformers, since this is the very power of God made visible in the world, but not in lofty words of wisdom or persuasive rhetoric out-narrating all rivals (to say nothing of the aristocratic hierarchies of the medieval *corpus mysticum*).²

This takes us from theologians to political theology, the mediation of the peace of Christ to the whole human community. This too is closely tied to the liturgical meaning of the Eucharist both for the Radical Reformation and for Radical Orthodoxy. Again, the implications are vastly different and turn on very different interpretations of Christ's "real presence" in the Eucharist. Where Milbank focuses on such formulations as "absolutization of self-critique without absolutization of the self making the critique" and on a recondite retrieval of Nicholas of Cusa's aristocratic hierarchical democracy as a model for a neo-Christendom socialism, the radical reformers seek the restoration

of true humanity in the image of Christ made possible only in the “penitent existence,” as Menno Simons calls it. For Menno the truth of this image and existence is discerned only with reference to the “slain Lamb” who rules in the heavenly city, a rule mediated on earth in the suffering servant church. To awaken and remain attentive to this truth requires rebirth into a new creation and the existential practice of the disciplines of the penitential life. It is a truth that is transparent neither in the intuitions of the fallen human heart nor to the rulers of this age with their false ontologies.

Suffice it to say that these examples confirm that this is neither simply an inner matter of the heart nor an individualistic experience. It is a being reborn into the true nature of divine love that becomes visible in the world, through embodied conformity to the mind of Christ in the body of Christ that imitates the spiritual motion of serving love displayed by the divinely human Christ. If the pattern is true, then its nature cannot be an abstract, formal, or “supernatural” ideal; it must hold in all aspects of existence. That is the premise of existential Radical Reformation theology: the Gospel is not an unattainable ideal presided over by the church as the custodian of orthodox doctrine and otherworldly hope while the realities of worldly justice are addressed by other more attainable means. The body of Christ therefore must be interpreted as the real presence of this pattern of suffering love as a new mind and a new nature. Baptism represents “the true new birth with its fruits” of obedience to the inner word.³ The Lord’s Supper conforms the outer sign to its true referent – the body of Christ in which participants become “flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone” and incarnate this kenotic messianic pattern in all of life.

There is therefore, as John Howard Yoder suggests in his “Christian Case for Democracy,” a retrieval of New Testament realism about the nature of political power in the fallen world, combined with an ethic of messianic discernment proposing a radically different paradigm. In Luke’s gospel this too is dramatically revealed in a eucharistic setting (Luke 22). Immediately after Jesus utters the words of eucharistic institution, a dispute (*philoneikia*) arises among the disciples about who will betray him and who will be regarded (*dokein*) as the greatest. Jesus says to them: “The rulers of the nations lord it over them,” a factual description of worldly authority as dominion, “and those who exercise authority (*exousia*, power) let themselves be called (*pace* Milbank, the middle voice of the Greek is not always to be trusted) benefactors

(*euergetai*, doers of good works)” – a factual description of their claims to moral legitimacy and righteous intention. “But,” says Jesus, “it shall not be so among you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves (*diakonia*). . . . I am among you as one who serves.” The parallels in Matt. 20 and Mark 10 link greatness to the question, “Can you drink the cup I am about to drink?” This is the cup of suffering, the violence unleashed by the Messiah’s unwillingness to reconcile through educative violence, and whose display of God’s image and authority in serving love offends the norms and instincts of nature that seeks another way.

III

Just to end on a provocative metaphysical note: In 1 Cor. 1:28 Paul links the *kletos* of the *ekklesia*, the calling of those called to embody the *nous* of Christ in holiness, to a vision of radical humility, the foolish power of the cross that itself is tied to the divine power and wisdom depicted not as plenitude but as emptiness: “God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not (*ta me onta*) in order to bring to nothing *ta onta* (the things that are).” God makes this ontology nothing so that flesh (*pasa sarka*) may not boast in God’s presence. Indeed, the divisions plaguing the church Paul attributes to the *sarkikoi* desires and ideologies plaguing the body of Christ. The pattern of reconciliation that he sets out radically relativizes all human noetic claims to orthodoxy (chapter 8), and replaces them with a eucharistic pattern of eating that does not eat and drink self-condemnation by betraying Christ into a doctrine to be imposed through aristocratic educative coercion. Rather, says Paul, imitate me as I imitate Christ. This becomes a warrant for the radical non-imposition of good. All things are lawful, but not all things build up: “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of the neighbor.” Thus Paul points to the kind of radical affinity modeled also by the Messiah who loves the least of these, and indeed the enemy, but never by employing the tragic violent means of a merely fleshly enemy.

The nature of this divine love into which Christ’s followers are reborn is no mere natural affinity. Rather, it radically transforms natural erotic affinities in a direction culminating in the celebratory assembly of the marriage feast of the slain Lamb. This language of holy erotic divine love pervades the writings of the sixteenth-century radical reformers, but I will end with something taken

from the *Martyrs Mirror*, another female lay exemplar by the name of Jeanne, not “of Arc,” but Janneken Munstdorp. While awaiting execution for heresy in Antwerp in 1573, she writes to her soon-to-be-orphaned infant daughter (born to her in prison), also named Janneken:

And now, Janneken, my dear lamb, who are yet very little and young, I leave you this letter, together with a gold coin, which I had with me in prison, and this I leave you for a perpetual adieu, and for a testament; that you may remember me by it, as also by this letter. Read it, when you have understanding, and keep it as long as you live in remembrance of me and your father. And I herewith bid you adieu, my dear Janneken Munstdorp, and kiss you heartily, my dear lamb, with a perpetual kiss of peace. Follow me and your father, and be not ashamed to confess us before the world, and this adulterous generation. Let it be your glory, that we did not die for any evil doing, and strive to do likewise, though they should also seek to kill you. And on no account cease to love God above all, for no one can prevent you from fearing God. If you follow that which is good, and seek peace, and ensue it, you shall receive the crown of eternal life; this crown I wish you and the crucified, bleeding, naked, despised, rejected and slain Jesus Christ for your bridegroom.

Notes

¹ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 195.

² *Ibid.*, 195.

¹ The meaning of baptism is given as follows in the first article of the Schleithem Confession (1527): “Baptism shall be given to all who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and wish to be buried with him in death, so that they might be resurrected with him.” Hence what is often referred to as believers’ baptism might just as well be called repenters’ baptism, as Timothy George suggests. See “The Sprituality of the Radical Reformation,” in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 346.

Milbank, Theology, and Stories of the Marginalized

Malinda Elizabeth Berry

I want to begin by expressing appreciation for this forum and its intentional design of creating a space for a conversation taking us into uncertain and even unknown places. The opportunity to engage with one of the important figures of Radical Orthodoxy is also a good thing, even if some of my feelings about its mode of reflection are less than positive!

I find much of what Radical Orthodoxy has to offer quite appealing. Concerns for worship and liturgy (which we understand as the performance of our faith) are clearly given prominence when John Milbank writes, “The Christian God can no longer be thought of as a God first seen, but rather as a God first prayed to, first imagined, first inspiring certain actions, first put into words, and always thought about, objectified, even if this objectification is recognized as inevitably inadequate.”¹ Moreover, I share Milbank’s concern that Christian theology find an effective way to assert itself in the vast multiplex of discourse, because “If theology no longer seeks to position, qualify, or criticize other discourses, then it is inevitable that these discourses will position theology.”² At the same time, this approach does not cut theology off from other disciplines but rather seeks engagement without allowing discussion partners to marginalize *theological* discourse.

However, the kind of theology and discourse that I stand behind is not very similar to that of Milbank and/or Radical Orthodoxy. I am in a setting where black liberation theology and womanist theology are actively shaping discourse. At this meeting of the American Academy of Religion alone, two sessions are dedicated to responding to the challenges James Cone issued to white theologians in his plenary address to the Academy last year in Denver. Likewise, two panel presentations here in Toronto celebrate the work of Delores Williams, especially her landmark text *Sisters in the Wilderness*.³ Their theological work comes from their common experiences of being cast out, cast down, and disenfranchised, and ultimately knowing this was not God’s idea of justice. These theological systems, along with feminist theology, are based on the black freedom movement, the women’s liberation movement, and the discourse of womanism.⁴ The need for liberation is real (by “liberation”

I mean a release from the bondage of white and male supremacy). The need for the elevation of additional views, or at least for equalizing some of *these* modes of theological discourse, is also real.

The three modes of theologizing to which I have referred argue that part of the theologian's task is to bring the historical into a new focus, so special care and attention is given to history because it has so often been a tool of dominators. Just like we Mennonites lament that history books are written by winners who justify their actions based on a belief in the redemptive power of violence and acts of war, so to do African Americans lament that the history of blacks has been written by whites. This means that recovering the oral traditions of slave communities and slave narratives is important, because they are a vital source for theological reflection. The story of black/slave Christianity is just as normative for black liberation theology as tradition that has been interpreted by white, Western Christians.

History is a powerful tool. I remember my eighth grade history teacher telling our class that he had recently read a persuasive account of slavery in the United States and now believed slavery was not as bad as people made it out to be. Slaves were property, and why would someone misuse and mistreat their property? As the only student of color with African ancestry in the class, I was quite certain there was something very wrong with what my teacher was saying.⁵ I had always understood slavery as a bad and evil thing, and the Emancipation Proclamation and the Southern Freedom Movement as important events in my life because without them I would not be alive. The way we portray history in our theology must be seriously considered by all of us engaging in the theological enterprise.

Black theologians have written extensively on how slaveholder Christianity dehumanized enslaved African peoples until it was brought to the system's attention that Christianity could also be used as a tool to keep slaves in check. But there was a problem: How would white Christians re-humanize blacks so that they could invite them to receive the love of Christ? Blacks needed to be elevated to something above animals. Enter the curse of Ham. The curse of Ham became the mark of dark or darker skin, and thus explained why blacks were both lower than whites and in need of salvation. Moreover, whites unabashedly published volumes like *Selections of the Holy Bible for Negro Slaves*, but there was no Exodus story in those selections, no story of

Ruth and Naomi, lest slaves encounter the linchpins whose removal from slaveholder Christianity would bring white Christianity tumbling down.⁶

I believe with Cone and others that theology comes from our working out the deep contradictions between what we have experienced in the world and what dominant theological systems urge us to do with those contradictions. Theology is a question of where we feel tension, where what we see just does not sit right with us when we compare those experiences or facts with what Jesus points to as he proclaims the reign of God in the gospels.

In the following commentary, I will respond to the first chapter of the Milbank manuscript we received. This chapter is concerned with the theme of evil. It opens by challenging those who would say that evil is not privative of being. Milbank writes, “The main objection of the postmodern Kantian to privation theory” is that “it provides an ontological excuse for evil which diminishes the responsibility of freedom.” Surely this kind of evil must possess the force or quality of being. This becomes “radical evil,” where evil is understood “as a pure act of perversity without ground.”⁷ Milbank traces various developments of this position – which he calls “postmodern Kantian” – relating to both the theory and practice of evil, with the ultimate goals of offering “a further exposition and defence of the view of evil as privation and banality” and showing that the “modern, positive theory of evil *is* in a measure responsible for the modern actuality of evil.”⁸ In opposition to postmodern Kantians, he uses Pauline and Augustinian understandings to argue for viewing evil as privative.

He dedicates part of his discussion to more fully describing the modern theory of evil as positive – the radical evil that has power and will and desire for the systematic extermination of entire groups of people. As he listed examples where US liberal democracy is implicated in perpetuating this kind of evil, I was disappointed that slavery, Jim Crow, and lynching failed to make the list alongside colonialist dealings in our foreign policy, both in places from the Philippines to Hiroshima and in more contemporary conflicts including Vietnam, the Gulf War, and Afghanistan. Then I became frustrated when he observed that, unlike the enslavement and forced labor of the *Shoah*, “previous slave economies still preserved some sense of the human status of slaves.”⁹ What really took the cake for me were his comments in the concluding portion of the chapter.

After dialoging with Kantians and radical evil – making the case for privative and banal evil – Milbank extends the argument to discuss accidental

evil. This is where his arguments fall apart beyond repair. Let me read directly from his manuscript:

One can extend [Hannah] Arendt's theory of banality by arguing that the quasi-Satanism of the perpetrators of State horror is usually prepared by an incremental piling up of small deficient preferences which gradually and "accidentally" [accumulate] (... However, by this they mean that pursuit of a too limited good 'accidentally' causes the lack of good that should ensue. This is an odd sort of accidentality, since it really brings nothing about, and involves not merely a non-intended consequence, but also an overlooked one.)

To give an example of this "accidental" process: in the seventeenth century English colony of Virginia, female servants proved at once unruly and over-dependent on their masters in circumstances of instability and great reliance upon women's labour. It proved harder and harder to grant them relative independence after their apprenticeships, and also harder and harder to ensure the legitimacy of their offspring. Gradually, their servitude drifted into slavery, and inheritance for slaves was directed for obvious reasons of convenience through the female line. . . . Soon, with the expansion of the African trade, there were more black female servants and slaves than white. . . . Soon after that, there was a preponderance of black female slaves . . . and then their children, female and male, were all members of a black slave class. In 1662, all this was finally codified in law. Although it is true that a slave trade and embryonic racist ideologies – including the idea that black women were more suited to outdoor labour – preceded these developments, the legal confirmation of *de facto* slavery and the exclusive linking of a slave class to race (initially defined, though, more in terms of religion than of colour), nevertheless came about through the incremental effect of a series of petty puritanical and disciplinary approaches to a very real chaos, rather than from any fully-fledged ideological programme. The later only emerged in the wake of sedimented events.

Such a stress upon the “accidental” factor in this case alerts us to the truth that a full-fledged slave economy was less a diabolical aberration in the recent history of the west, than something that many typical features of western modernity (disciplinary puritanism, enhanced patriarchalism, neo-republican dreams) could gradually engender in certain extreme circumstances.

Troubled by this reading, I discovered from my modest collection of texts on women’s history that Milbank’s reading of colonial Virginia does not fit with that of reputed scholars, namely Sara Evans, Darlene Clark Hine, and Kathleen Thompson. Evans notes that part of indentured servitude’s insidiousness was the widespread belief that unless properly exercised, women’s reproductive organs would wander around in their bodies, making them prone to bouts of hysteria. Thus, it was a master’s obligation to ensure that women were being impregnated, or at least that the attempt be made to impregnate them, so that such emotional outbursts would be avoided.¹⁰

As for Milbank’s assertion that defining slavery had little to do with race, I offer the following from *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America*:

Defining slavery was not an easy task in a democracy, or rather, a group of democracies. . . . Essentially, slavery, as a legal category, defined certain people as part people and part property. In the half century or so following 1641, hundreds of laws would be passed clarifying the position of these “part-people” socially and economically. But the most significant laws were those that defined exactly who could be classified as a slave and who could not. The white men in power decided right from the start that white people – with a very few exceptions – could not be enslaved. They could enter indentured servitude, which we have seen was a form of slavery, but they could not legally be slaves.¹¹

Clark Hine and Thompson continue,

[T]he situation was soon complicated. Children were born who were black *and* white. Or black and Native American. This was a completely natural result of the living conditions at the time, as enslaved Africans and indentured white servants often worked

side by side. They relaxed together, rebelled against their situation together, became friends, and created families. This mixed population was problematic to the lawmakers. Could they be enslaved? Did their white blood protect them or did their black blood condemn them?

It took a while to answer these questions, and different colonies answered them differently for a time. Then, in 1662 Virginia, the fateful and fatal law was passed. In most places, at most times in history, children have been blessed or cursed by the social positions of their fathers. The son of a gentleman was a gentleman. The son of a serf was a serf. The mother's status, while it might be a spot of tarnish on the family crest or a source of curdled pride to her déclassé children, was essentially irrelevant. But in the early 1660s – beginning with 1662 Virginia law – the American colonies without exceptions passed laws stating that “all children borne in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother.”¹²

Finally, my own reading and others' readings of the text Milbank cites, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Race, Gender, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, does not affirm his summation of author Kathleen Brown's argument. The following is illustrative of reviews I consulted and captures my sense of what this text offers in terms of a radical reading of history:

[Kathleen] Brown has an extraordinary complex view of culture and process of cultural change. . . . the colonial elite ultimately managed to deny the historical process that created Virginia by insisting that constructions of race and gender reflected an eternal natural order. For historians to separate the political lives of Virginia's male elite from a concept of masculinity rooted in race and gender, Brown maintains, is to be complicit in their own scheme of dominance: “Without a more organic view of the relationships between gender, race, and power, we cannot begin to grapple with the legacy of colonial Virginia for the new nation, the antebellum South, and our own time” (p. 373).¹³

Milbank correctly reads Brown's concern that gender and race be seen as part of a complex of factors at work in U.S. history. He does not correctly read her concern about the larger patriarchal and socio-religious ideologies at work. There is, and was, *nothing* accidental about any of that process.

Why does this matter? It matters because whenever women's realities – or those of any marginalized group – are misrepresented, we must ask why this is happening. I am not accusing Milbank of intentional misrepresentation; I am simply admonishing him for not knowing his *herstory*. My concern has deep theological relevance. Now, you may think I am refusing to see the forest for the trees, and you would be correct, although to be precise, I am actually unable to see the forest for a *particular* tree: the one from which Eve plucked the pomegranate. By absenting Eve and thus marginalizing women's experience from the story of the Fall, Milbank effectively misses an important theological anthropological theme. Ivone Gebara puts it well:

I am persuaded that, if we are to probe into the question of evil, we have to develop a new anthropology. . . . I propose some principles of anthropology that are different from those developed in Christian tradition and are bound to new hermeneutical tools. Some rather complicated questions can be raised about the philosophical anthropology that supports Christian theology in general. . . . Evil, as far as men are concerned, has always been viewed as some "thing" that happens, that takes hold of human beings, surrounds them, attracts them. Furthermore, for men, evil is not inherent to human nature; rather, it results from freedom – limited freedom, of course, but free will all the same. In the case of women, however, certain Scripture texts and a number of theological commentaries by church fathers state that female beings are more evil than male beings.¹⁴

To characterize the plight of women – black, white, and in between – in colonial America (and thus beyond) as the consequential product of a series of *incidental* moments, created by attempts to control a chaotic context, does not deal with the fallacies of the Christian theological tradition's understanding of women as evil and therefore subjected to social and theological controls. When we theologians fail to capture the nuances of the

stories of the marginalized that lead to a misreading of those on-going realities, our theologizing is not radical in any sense of the word.

Notes

¹ John Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short *Summa* in Forty-two Responses to Unasked Questions," in *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, ed. Graham Ward, *Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1997; reprint, 1998), 267.

² John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 3; Debra Dean Murphy, "Power, Politics, and Difference: A Feminist Response to John Milbank," *Modern Theology* 10. 2 (1994): 132.

³ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

⁴ This is a mode of theologizing based on a concept of women's identity articulated by Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1983).

⁵ Interestingly, the teacher would often remind us that his grandmother was a full-blooded Tuscarora Indian. One would have thought this heritage would dispose him to being more judicious in what he told his students about American history.

⁶ Sylvester Johnson's dissertation, "The 'Children of Ham' in America" Divine Identity and the Hamitic Idea in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, 2002), is an extensive discussion of how both blacks and whites worked with this myth, and it adeptly explores the complex of theological ideology and ontology surrounding blackness in America.

⁷ Milbank manuscript, "Chapter 1: Evil: Darkness and Silence," 1-2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7, emphasis Milbank's.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰ Sara Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 22-23.

¹¹ Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 15.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Theda Perdue, review of *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* by Kathleen Brown, in *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (1999): 897.

¹⁴ Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*, trans. Ann Patrick Ware (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 4.

Is Milbank Niebuhrian Despite Himself?

Gerald W. Schlabbach

With an intellectual debt to Catholic Augustinianism and a practicing commitment to Mennonite pacifism, I probably have as much sympathy for John Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy as anyone on this panel. But someone here must respond to Milbank's critique of pacifism, so I will endeavor to address the chapter in his forthcoming book that deals most directly with violence and pacifism.¹

Milbank's earlier presentation of what he called an "ontology of peace" in his groundbreaking book *Theology and Social Theory* might have led readers to expect him to advocate some version of Christian pacifism.² Perhaps Mennonites, Hauerwasians, and Catholic Workers might be hopeful about this possibility. Meanwhile so-called Christian Realists and others who have arguably hijacked Augustinian orthodoxy would have been ready to pounce on such a development. In any case, Milbank has declined to comfort Christian pacifists. In chapter two of his forthcoming book, he attempts to explain why.

Milbank's argument has two parts. In part one, he accuses pacifists of averting their gaze from violence. This comes after he develops an intriguing intuition that something about gazing upon violence as passive spectacle is more violent than violence itself. The point is well taken when applied to the endless consumption of media violence in our culture, and with reference to how twenty-first century moderns look smugly back on the violence of previous centuries, given that the modern era has proved far more brutal than anything the crusades or inquisitions ever served up. But Milbank then goes on to argue that to *avert* our gaze from violence without responding through counter-violence is *also* covertly violent, because it leaves us complicit in violence. This move gives him a way to reject pacifism.

Christian pacifism is doubly suspect, in Milbank's view, because it is a counter-intuitive doctrine. It does not just challenge the intuitions of our *fallen* nature but runs counter to our good and God-given *created* nature, in particular our desire to protect our young and the innocent. Part two of Milbank's argument follows from this view. Pacifists, he contends, have "de-laicized" the Christian laity.³ For Milbank, lay people live the Christian life in a way

that is embedded in embodied, biological, warm-blooded animal life in time. Embedded in ordinary time, the life of the Christian laity thus resists any cheap and easy participation in the eternal, thereby eschewing false claims to approximate the angelic life prematurely. Pacifists de-laicize the laity by asking Christians not to protect the innocent. Thus they delegitimize the created order itself.

What should Christian pacifists in the Mennonite or other Radical Reformation traditions say to this? In response to part one of Milbank's argument – that pacifists allegedly avert their gaze from violence – I can only respond bluntly: his critique is in some ways so ill-informed it is almost not worth dignifying with a response.⁴ Perhaps his critique does apply to certain bourgeois liberal pacifists scattered through the twentieth-century academy, though even here he may be constructing straw men. If Milbank thinks Christian pacifism leads its practitioners to avert their gaze and settle easily into sectarian communities,⁵ then he simply does not know enough about the practices that living peace church traditions have engendered. Even in the most sectarian communities where “nonresistance” would be the term of choice rather than “*active* nonviolence,” peace church people have been led to look longer, harder, and with deeper engagement upon situations of human violence than most Christians who have weapons available to obscure their gaze. Surely a little attention to empirical evidence is not a concession to secular social science.

The relevant fact is that historical peace churches have sent more people per capita into risky, uncomfortable mission and service assignments than mainline churches. I am tempted to ask a show of hands here in this gathering in order to indicate how many people have done service work in war zones, national security states, or military dictatorships – precisely out of their commitment to pacifism. Admittedly, the Mennonite track record is still not as good as Mennonite theology would have it, since that theology would call *all* Christians to risky discipleship. At least in the last decade or two, Mennonites have lost ground to many of the same phenomena of consumer capitalism that Milbank criticizes. Still, Mennonites are their own harshest critics in this regard, another sign this is not about averting one's gaze from violence, responding on the fly, or continuing to look at situations of violence merely as spectators.

Part two of Milbank's argument – that pacifism de-laicizes the laity – is somewhat stronger. If the claim is that pacifism is simply too much for ordinary Christians to take on, Mennonites may contest some of the assumptions behind that claim, but it is at least worth contesting. Mennonites are of course dubious about the very category of the laity, because they are dubious about an “angelic” clergy not rooted in the same soil, the same humus, as the whole Christian community. A single ethic of discipleship should apply to all believers. Yes, leaders, pastoral leaders, and others are called out of congregations; but since all believers are also called into ministry, the distinction between the leadership and other Christians is more functional than ontological. Perhaps Mennonite skepticism about the clergy/laity distinction will only confirm the problem Milbank thinks he sees in Christian pacifism. So let me take another tack, and suggest that the argument he makes over pacifism can be joined in a couple of different ways from within his orthodox framework.

Negatively, Milbank's discussion seems to suggest an uncharacteristically Niebuhrian form of putative Augustinianism. Milbank seems to render peaceable community life, in accordance with the ontology of peace, as what Reinhold Niebuhr called “an impossible possibility” at best. For Niebuhr, the transcendent, the eternal – the realm wherein an ethic of pure mutuality through pure self-sacrifice could function – was like Kant's noumenal realm. It was ultimately real, but currently inaccessible to all but a very few; even for them, Jesus' ethic constituted a “tangent toward eternity”⁶ – and out of history.⁷

In Milbank's discussion of pacifism, the ontology of peace is in danger of the same fate. Yes, peaceableness is ultimately who we are, but not now, not for now, and not for most. Instead, it becomes an eschatological or teleological end, and not really a means at all; it is an ontology of peace devoid of an ethic or methodology of peace.⁸ To make this essentially Niebuhrian move could be devastating for Milbank's entire project. As Eugene McCarthy has cogently argued, Niebuhr was the prototypical theologian for the emerging managerial class in twentieth-century America.⁹ Milbank's Niebuhrian move risks turning over the secular realm precisely to that modern bureaucratic management that Milbank so despises and so well exposes.

More positively, I suggest it is possible to argue for pacifism even from within the framework of Thomas Aquinas's three basic precepts of the natural law.¹⁰ At the first level, according to the natural inclinations we share with all

creatures (even inanimate objects) the first precept is self-preservation. Second is the precept that corresponds with the inclination we share with animals, that of procreation, and of care for the young, education of the young, and so on. Third, and specific to rational animals, is the inclination to know the truth about God, to live in society, and to pursue whatever knowledge pertains to these.

Now, what if we superimpose upon these three levels the lessons from a thought experiment known as the Prisoner's Dilemma, set up so that two co-conspirators interrogated in isolation have incentives to rat on each other but will get the book thrown at them if they both confess? This thought experiment counters the ethical egoism that so many take as dogma from figures like Adam Smith. For it turns out that pursuing self-interest does not necessarily lead to the common good or even to self-preservation. One thing we most need to know in order to pursue Aquinas's third precept and live together in society is what we learn from the Prisoner's Dilemma, namely that the way to preserve ourselves, and perhaps by extension the way to care for the young, is not to preserve our lives at all costs or even those of our loved ones. For those seeking to save their lives are more, not less, likely to lose them.

Admittedly, when Aquinas considered the question of killing in self-defense, he did turn to the first precept (self-preservation) to make his argument.¹¹ But if read through the Prisoner's Dilemma, this is hardly self-evident. Arguably, the natural law is far more cruciform than the natural lawyers have generally allowed. Milbank sometimes seems to recognize this. For example, he knows his J.R.R. Tolkien, in whose works the most that the many battles can accomplish is to buy time. The real plot – the key to survival, the key to history – is what the little people, the laity of hobbits, do by renouncing the ring of violent and domineering power. (As in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, so too in Yoder's *Politics of Jesus*.) More seriously, Milbank's new book contains a running critique of the post-9/11 fallacy of attempting to make ourselves more secure through a war on terrorism. I suspect, also, that as a Brit living in Virginia, down the road from the headquarters of the National Rifle Association, Milbank has noticed Americans are trying to make themselves more secure by putting handguns in their bedrooms. Statistics say it does not work.

Milbank would be more consistent to follow the lead of Stanley Hauerwas by exploring the hints that John Howard Yoder left us. The cross

runs with the grain of the universe.¹² To unpack this claim, which is ultimately the unexpected good news of Christ's revelation but which discloses the deepest truth of our lives, is to contest the meaning of natural law and of capital-R Realism. Mennonites have generally avoided the whole area of natural law, since nonpacifist Christians have so often used it to trump the ethical teachings of Jesus, the thoroughgoing example of his nonviolence, and his nonviolent victory over evil in the cross. Milbank opens fresh possibilities but also confirms old doubts. He too would allow the natural to trump Jesus in some ways; even so, the natural does turn out to be more contestable than Mennonite theologians have thought.

Meanwhile, Hauerwas has picked up on Yoder's tentative reopening of this question; he has begun to elaborate on just how it is that the cross runs with the grain of the universe. My appeal to Milbank is that he reconsider his rejection to Christian pacifism, picking up where Hauerwas left off in his Gifford Lectures. I would ask him to help Christian pacifists, in other words, to contest the meaning of self-preservation, care for the young, and natural law, just as he has already won back ontology, orthodoxy, and Augustinianism for peaceable practices. Would not the project of Radical Orthodoxy be stronger and more consistent if Milbank showed how cross-bearing runs – now, already, in the only time anyone has available for doing so – with the grain of an ontology of peace?

Appendix: A Further Exchange

10 December 2002

Prof. John Milbank
Religious Studies Department
University of Virginia

Dear Prof. Milbank:

The irony – perhaps tragedy – of our blunt exchange at the Mennonite scholars event at the AAR is that of all the panelists and many of the people in the room, and as one who calls himself a “Catholic Mennonite,” I undoubtedly

agreed with far more of your arguments and points than did most. Out of a deep conviction that catholicity-from-above and catholicity-from-below need each other desperately I am actively working to create and nourish conditions that might eventually allow for Mennonites et al. to reconnect with the historic episcopacy in some unexpected way. My current work includes a project that explores whether “just policing” might not be a point of convergence between just war folks and pacifists. I am even known to let the words “authority” and “hierarchy” pass favorably across my lips.

In fact, had it not seemed important for someone on the panel to address the question of pacifism forthrightly, I would have been prepared to do a far different presentation, directed instead at Mennonites. In it I would have briefly reminded them of a century-long story that some prominent Mennonite intellectuals have been telling themselves – for purposes of apologetics and group survival – about how their Anabaptist ancestors were harbingers of religious freedom, voluntary association, social equality, participatory democracy, and other Enlightenment ideals. I would then have suggested that while this strategy has been comprehensible and in some ways appropriate, it is time for Mennonites to pay the piper, for we cannot have it both ways. If we want to take credit for the cultural extension of principles of free choice and voluntarism, we have to take responsibility for having helped make the world safe for free market capitalism, infinite advertising, the degradation of land and waters, the intrusion of marketplace mechanisms into every sphere of life, the devolution of public discourse into contests of will-for-power, and the corrosion of stable, organic, bonds of community. I would have then closed by urging Mennonites that before they get hung up on whether Milbank’s project means a return to Christendom, they had better come to terms with his critique, because they are hardly dealing with problems like freedom and voluntarism much better.

The irony I name will in fact be a tragedy if the AAR exchange has irreversibly damaged prospects for a constructive response to your opening invitation to forge links between heirs of the Radical Reformation and proponents of Radical Orthodoxy. To the end that we might savor the irony rather than suffer the tragedy I am wondering whether we might begin some qualitatively different kind of exchange. I will shortly be coming to UVA to participate in one of the workgroups of the Project on Lived Theology.

Schedules permitting, I would be glad to arrive in time to allow us to meet. I am not proposing any particular agenda, but in order to allow you to identify additional points of contact, I am sending you two pieces of writing – my book on Augustine and the current draft of my paper on “just policing.”

Grace and peace,
Gerald W. Schlabach

From: John Milbank
Sent: December 16, 2002
To: Gerald Schlabach
Subject: your visit

Dear Gerald Schlabach,
Many thanks indeed for your letter. Yes, I think your comments are absolutely right. I had not really wanted the discussion to focus on pacifism and I hoped I had headed this off by talking about the issue briefly. Just policing is the way to go – it is a species of just war theory, but certainly the way to develop this [is] now beyond the nation state and in circumstances where most war totally violates non-combatant immunity. Of course, the idea of the “non-combatant” itself has become a problem; ultimately if one condemns modern war, one condemns the modern mode of totalising politics.
Certainly we must meet . . .

Yours,
John Milbank

Notes

¹ Panelists had received this and other chapters in manuscript form. The chapter in question here, “Violence: Double Passivity,” now appears in John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*, Radical Orthodoxy Series (London/New York: Routledge, 2003), 23–43.

² According to Milbank's Augustinian "ontology of peace," the universe was created for an ordered harmony of mutually giving relationships, not for endless antagonism, competition, and manipulation – whether in the guise of a Hobbesian war-of-all-against-all, the marketing of "eyeballs" gazing at video screens, or myriad practices in the capitalist marketplace.

³ See *Being Reconciled*, 41.

⁴ At this point in the presentation Milbank interrupted: "Just to chip in: I don't just say that pacifism is only a matter of averting your gaze; it's an aporia [a confusing puzzle or insoluble paradox that leads to amazement and inquiry, within which one can only maintain oneself through a rhetorical pose]. If you go on looking, can you really sustain the pacifist response?" Cf. *Being Reconciled*, 39–40, where Milbank writes that pacifism "is aporetic because both gazing and averting one's gaze from violence are intuitively complicit with its instance. Christian pacifism then, has to erect itself as a counter-intuitive doctrine." Though I must obviously concede Milbank's textual point, I would insist that whether pacifists are allegedly gazing upon or allegedly averting their gaze from violence, Milbank makes essentially the same point coming and going – that pacifists are simply passive and do nothing in the face of violence. Thus he writes on page 42: "Standing aloof, not intervening when you might – this mere gaze – is also an act: it *opposes* the violent person by violently leaving him to his violence and not trying to stop him in his tracks" [emphasis *sic*; also see p. 29]. This all-too-standard equation of pacifism with passive-ism seems strikingly ill-informed, particularly from so literate a scholar. The only way to maintain it is to make yet another tellingly Niebuhrian move, that of pulling even the active nonviolence of someone like Gandhi into the ranks of the violent by arguing that nonviolent coercion through social means is really of a piece with violent coercion. Cf. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, reprint ed., (New York: Scribner's, 1960), 252–55.

⁵ Note intimations to this effect in *Being Reconciled*, 29.

⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Human Destiny*, vol. 2 of *The Nature and Destiny of Man* [1943], reprint ed., (New York: Scribner's, 1964), 68.

⁷ Here Milbank interjected: "It's collectivist, which is not like Niebuhr. I think we can become absolutely peaceful and totally reject Niebuhr's stoicism, Machiavellianism, and all that." To this I responded: "Well, I know [that Milbank's thought as a whole is not Niebuhrian]. But this is why I'm worried that turning over the realm of the laity to the possibility of violence is going to undercut and devastate Milbank's entire project."

⁸ Cf. *Being Reconciled*, 42–43.

⁹ Eugene McCarragher, *Christian Critics: Religion and the Impasse in Modern American Social Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 90–91, 103–08.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II 94.2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, II-II 64.7.

¹² See John Howard Yoder, "Armaments and Eschatology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 1, no. 1 (1988): 58; John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, second ed., 1972, reprint (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 246; and Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*, Gifford Lectures delivered at the University of St. Andrews in 2001 (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001).

FORUM WITH JOHN MILBANK

Radical Orthodoxy and the Radical Reformation: What is Radical about Radical Orthodoxy?

Participants

A. James Reimer, Conrad Grebel University College
and Toronto School of Theology, *Chair*
John Milbank, University of Virginia

Panelists

Chris K. Huebner, Candian Mennonite University
Laura Schmidt Roberts, Graduate Theological Union
Gerald W. Schlabach, University of St. Thomas
Malinda E. Berry, Union Theological Seminary (NY)
P. Travis Kroeker, McMaster University

Jim Reimer:

Today's conversation with John Milbank on Radical Orthodoxy is another instance of the attempt of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre to further ecumenical dialogue. We are pleased and honored that John Milbank is with us, to talk and converse with us, about the relation of Radical Orthodoxy to the Radical Reformation.

John Milbank:

It's a great pleasure and honor to be with you this morning. My remarks are going to be of a very general and suggestive nature – nothing terribly well worked out, and I'm going to base them largely on a response to Jim Reimer's own book on the Mennonites and classical philosophy [*Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (2001)]. The first thing, and perhaps the most important thing, to say is that I completely agree with the comments by Stanley Hauerwas on the back cover of Jim's book: that one of the most important issues facing theology and the Church today is the relationship between Catholicism, in the broadest sense, and the Radical Reformation.

I'd like to make a footnote, from somebody coming from a British perspective. I think there are two things that are interesting. One is the idea that there's a sort of dialectic between the Radical Reformation and Catholicism. This is actually borne out socio-historically in Britain. The very Yorkshire

valleys where the pilgrimage of people marching down in protest against the dissolution of the monasteries (this is also associated with social radicalism) – those very valleys that produced that reaction by the end of the seventeenth century were dominated by Quakerism. It's as if they completely rejected the individualism of the magisterial reformation. First of all it's Catholic, later it's a Radical Reformation. So I agree about this dialectic.

The second comment from a British point of view is that for a long time such a dialogue has existed in Britain. . . . The Catholic wing of the Anglican Church at the end of the nineteenth century developed a radical socialist wing. Perhaps the most famous among the members was the great Sinologist, Joseph Needham, who was an Anglo-Catholic and for some time a communist, and always a socialist and always a supporter of Chairman Mao. But Needham was also very interested in the British radical reformation, and wrote articles about the Levellers and Diggers and the relationship between science and radicalism in the English Civil War. So already there's that tension and dialogue between Catholicism and the Radical Reformation; it's very much in the tradition that I come out of and it ultimately lies behind Radical Orthodoxy.

Why, though, is this relationship now important? I think that it's best illustrated by Reimer's work itself. On the one hand, we need to recover the idea that classical orthodox doctrine has the most radical implications for human transformation and social transformation; on the other hand, we need to conjoin that to a radical practice. We need to find almost a kind of monasticism for everybody, a way for the laity more to manifest, in a radical, social, and personal practice, the implications of Christianity. Reimer is right to slightly modify at times the utopianism of the Anabaptist tradition, the idea that somehow now suddenly on earth there is already realized the perfect kingdom at the end of time. He's also right to insist on a little less duality between utopianism and eschatology. Augustine certainly does allow that progress is possible, but he's sometimes a little too static about the possibilities of actually transforming social and personal structures that embody sin and fallenness. We need a little more of the idea of an anticipation of the eschaton, and at this point we can learn from the Radical Reformation.

So I broadly welcome the direction that Reimer's work is taking, and it represents the work of other people as well. I'd certainly like to see an even stronger engagement with modern Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox

thought in its best representatives. That's a little more [valuable] than attention to Tillich. I understand the reasons for attending to Tillich, and why Reimer wants to balance Barth in that way. I would rather get authors other than Tillich, but that's a relatively minor point.

Much more important, and one of the main challenges I intend to pose, is this: If you're going to say, We're going to appropriate the mainlines of the tradition and accept the formulas of the Church councils, the mainlines of Christian belief, Anselm and Aquinas and so on, is it really consistent with that to remain non-Episcopalian? I want to suggest that it isn't, and that the best road forward for a movement like the Mennonites is to rejoin the main Episcopal tradition. The reason it's inconsistent is that embracing doctrinal orthodoxy is linked, in Reimer's thought, to a recognition of the importance of what is always being believed everywhere, and therefore to a kind of democracy of time, if you'd like to put it that way. Therefore, it is related to what I call the "educative hierarchy of time." Christian hierarchy, the hierarchy talked about by Dionysius, is not a kind of static, spatial hierarchy. We're born as children, we have first to learn. If we're going to be good democrats in the end, we have to first learn virtues; that's why education is linked to democracy. There's something about transmission through time that is linked to this idea of hierarchy. Really, that's what episcopacy is about, although it's been distorted. That's what it should be about. Also, if you don't embrace episcopacy, you don't embrace the hierarchy that's actually linked to the Eucharist. It's like Jean-Luc Marion says: *the bishop is the true theologian*. Why? Because the bishop celebrates the Eucharist, not because Marion is some kind of authoritarian.

The point, then, is that it's the Eucharist, the sacramental signs, that are at the top of the hierarchy. The bishop's position is linked to the celebration of the Eucharist, the fact that he represents a particular place, the Cathedra, the seat of tradition, and continuity in time and place. He stands for that, and then it's an interplay between the democracy of time and the transmission and, finally, the authority of the congregation. By far the best place to look for all this – I think Oliver O'Donovan agrees with me – is Nicholas of Cusa's great work, *The Catholic Concordance*, where he blends this traditional Dionysian hierarchy with a kind of proto-modern democracy in a most remarkable way, so that in the end it's always the whole church that's most authoritative (from a point of perspective, because human beings in body

rank below the angels). Within that, there's a certain guardianship of the real whole unity of humanity in time, by the bishops and by the church hierarchy.

One of the great problems about radical thought is that we don't think through the problem of hierarchy. In liberal societies, in socialist societies, hierarchy never disappears. It can't disappear. So, if you don't think through the positions for a good hierarchy, you always get bad hierarchy, and Presbyterianism and Congregationalism tend to generate worse tyrannies. What we really need is a right thinking through of the role of episcopacy. You have to understand the Radical Reformation historically. By the end of the Middle Ages, the whole business of episcopacy and so on had been totally debased into a formal hierarchy. The whole primacy of the Eucharist . . . had been lost sight of. In those conditions, one needed to make that protest.

The direction of Reimer's thought is towards understanding the contextuality of the Radical Reformation. But once you've done that in relation to doctrine, then you have to do it in relation to church hierarchy and sacrament mentality. It's also quite significant that in Britain and Europe you increasingly find movements like Methodism have moved back. Most Methodists like myself (I was brought up a Methodist) have rejoined the Anglican church; my parents became *both* Methodist *and* Anglican. In Europe, where secularization has gone further – and that's the way it's going eventually here (don't be deluded by people who tell you otherwise), you get more realism. Sometimes America is like a museum, a museum of Thomism, a museum of Anglicanism, a museum of the Radical Reformation, a museum of whatever. . . . Because it's so big and wealthy you can afford all those kinds of luxuries. But in the end secularization will get worse and Christians will have to unite. I suspect that the direction of unity is going to be the rejoining of the episcopal churches, the churches with a threefold order of ministry. You're [now] getting a kind of duality between the mainline churches all catholicizing and outside that, the house churches and mega-churches, and so on.

I welcome Reimer's interest in the relation of the Radical Reformation to questions of univocity, nominalism, and voluntarism in the later Middle Ages. . . . Just a quick remark about Oliver O'Donovan's interest in Wycliffe: The really significant thing about Wycliffe is that he wasn't a nominalist; he was a realist but also a very Platonic thinker. Wycliffe's social thought, which was also very radical, had him saying things like you could only have property by

grace but if you stop acting charitably, your property could be taken away from you. He thinks of grace in terms of participation, and his belief in universals is strongly linked to his belief in commonality. So, [there is a] link of a kind of social radicalism, a kind of continued neo-Platonic legacy, and at the same time a radically integrous theology of grace in Wycliffe. . . . He is another interesting aspect of the complexity of the reformation legacy, both in Britain and in Czechoslovakia, where you get the Wycliffe-Hus influence. You get a great qualification of the total nominalism. The mainline reformation is nominalist and voluntarist from beginning to end. It is qualified by elements in the Radical Reformation, and it also picks up on this older Wycliffe-Hus legacy.

Let me wind up with a few remarks about pacifism. Reimer's view about the need to accept policing is absolutely right, but here again I suggest you need to shift a little further. I agree that most modern wars can't be justified as police actions, they're way beyond that. Just War Theory is going to rule out-of-bounds most modern wars, not quite all of them. But in the Middle Ages, war often was really and truly a police action. I don't think the close distinction between war and policing holds up in the end. Once you've accepted some sort of coercion, you're no longer a pure pacifist. A pure pacifist is an anarchist. And that is an illogical position.

Of course, war is dangerous, it goes totally to the limits, but so does policing! The same dialectic is in danger in relation to policing. One of the problems (if you endorse policing) is that *war* is being described by our masters as "policing." So we need a discourse about minimal justified violence. If we don't have that, we won't be really radical. We have to stick to the idea that violence should be always minimized, that we need to develop nonviolent codes of resistance. Without the discourse of the minimal justification of violence, we don't really have a radical handle for criticizing what's going on at the moment.

I must say that the slight overdominance of peace in American radicalism, as compared to justice, is linked to American individualism and slight American over-purism. It's about the purity of individual motives in the end. . . . It seems that the thrust of Reimer's thought is away from these dangers, and I'm just urging him to push a little further. In some ways this whole pacifist thing is a kind of non-issue. I don't think that the early church or Jesus were pacifists in our sense; this is an anachronism. They don't really even pose the question. It's important to push further here. The first Quakers [and] the Münsterites weren't pacifist. In many ways, pacifism was for the

radical church – let’s be frank – a tactic of survival. It was safer, if you were going to be so radical and go your own way, to say you were pacifist. That allowed people to leave you alone. So, I have a real problem. A real radicalism can’t be dogmatically pacifist. Here it needs a little push in the direction Reimer is already going.

In what follows, Milbank was responding to presentations by panelists Chris Huebner, Laura Schmidt Roberts (a paper not printed here), Gerald Schlabach, Malinda Berry, and Travis Kroecker. –Editor

Reimer:

I’d like to allow Professor Milbank to take fifteen minutes to respond, which is almost an impossible task, I grant you. So do your best and select what you need to select, and then we can maybe have a few questions from the audience.

Milbank:

Thanks very much indeed to all those profound engagements with my book and the thought of some other people. . . . Obviously, as you can imagine, I tend to agree with some of the responses more than with some of the others.

First of all, [Chris Huebner’s] question about **the voice of the theologian**. I now think the opening to [*The Word Made Strange*] is too hyperbolic, but I did say there that I thought it was tragic theology had become too important. In the Ecclesiology chapter in my new book, I try to explore the kind of aporia the church has legitimated by theology. Yet theology is always a reflection of the practice of the church. I’m unapologetic about trying to go beyond an over-simplistic priority of practice.

The point was raised that I don’t say enough about **the collective authority of the church**. I talk about reason and tradition and the scripture. However, in fact I’m at pains to insist, especially when I’m talking about Nicholas of Cusa, that reason can only be collectively possessed in the end, that it is embodied. Also, my point about tradition is linked to the authority of the community. Community always exists in time as well as in space, and this has certain social and political implications. So I am trying to say a lot about the voice of the community.

The question about **continuity**. I fully accept I need to talk more about discontinuities and the need to link to, and to look back to, the origin.

[The issue of **consensus**.] I agree that you shouldn't too easily go for consensus. . . . Sometimes one individual who's really thinking clearly is the embodiment of the ecclesia rather than the apparent democratic consensus. The point about individual protest is very important. It's quite difficult to think all that through, and I'm not pretending I've done it adequately. Perhaps I could have said more about the sort of interaction between the official hierarchical guardians and protesters like the Franciscans or Dominicans, for example, calling the church back to its authentic vocation.

[In reference to Gerald Schlabach's criticism of Milbank's **stance on pacifism**.] I thought [those remarks were] an oversimplification of my critique of pacifism, which had many more strands. . . . I don't think anybody's a pacifist, to be really honest with you. It is important to look at the situation where somebody is threatened who should be protected, where somebody is being threatened in an unjust way. You don't stop to think. Nobody does. You intervene, even though at some level you know that if you can't control your intervention, it may go too far. My point about looking/non-looking is that if you go on looking, you do in fact intervene. If you don't, it becomes monstrous, and there's no way you could then have community afterwards with this innocent person whom you have not intervened to defend. Obviously, one can't turn away. You mustn't be sentimental. This has nothing to do with the real, strong record of the radical churches in all kinds of fields, and they may well have made a much greater contribution than mainline churches. I salute them for it. It doesn't effect the tough intellectual argument that I'm trying to make.

Another part of that argument is that I try to qualify what I said earlier in *Theology and Social Theory*, that it's absolutely true you can't really fight for the ultimate; in the end, you have to go the way of the cross. The things that we fight for are in a sense not the ultimate things, they're not worth defending— this is a point made by Augustine. On the other hand, all of the ultimate is only mediated by utterly fragile things. . . . To deny that we need to protect the fragile is like iconoclasm, so there's an exact parallel between pure pacifism and iconoclasm. [They both] miss the point that everything is always mediated. Yes, it's true that the unbreakable is what matters, and that's why it's ultimately the witness of the cross that counts. But the unbreakable for us is always mediated through the fragile.

Nobody who has read Charles Peguy's Christian Socialist treatise about Joan d'Arc, an incredibly serious engagement with the difficulties and the

ambiguity of this [issue], can make the sort of slightly self-righteous, pietistic comments we heard at the end. You cannot upbraid Peguy's *Mystery of the Charity of Joan d'Arc* – it's one of the profoundest Christian works written in the twentieth century. It also engages profoundly with the question of the relation of Christianity to Judaism, and the critique by Judaism of Christianity. One thing Peguy does is ask, Would Christ have been rejected in every age? On the other hand, would Christ have been accepted by anybody than the Jews? What he's engaging with here is the radical contemporality and contingency of the situation. He says we can't say a priori the way of the cross would be the right way in every circumstance. It is tied radically to history.

Donald McKinnon made rather similar points about this: There is a moment when the right way is the way of the cross. Yes, it's the ultimate eschatological moment, but in time you have to judge, you mustn't turn it into a Kantian a priori. This is why pure pacifism will too often take the mode of a kind of Kantian formalism. I'm not a Niebuhrian in any way. There aren't these two options. . . . This tends to be an American perspective: either pacifism or Machiavellian realism. I'm not saying like Niebuhr that there's no possibility of ever overcoming the necessity for violence. Collectively we can do that, in theory at least, and in fact we can get rid altogether of the necessity for violence. We can produce a perfect peace.

[Schlabach's] point about **the laity** was about what happens in the meantime, where people are not just involved in war but are [for instance] judges, or engaged in trade, or in policing processes. In the Middle Ages it was often said that by doing these things you're imperiling your soul and the safest thing is to stay outside them, in the monastery. Lay critics – people thinking about codes of chivalry, for example – said, You can't say there can be just wars yet people fighting these just wars are imperiling their souls more than monks. What kind of God sets things up that way? They made the same argument about sex. How can you say it's superior to be chaste, but it's okay to be involved in sex and you need it for the perpetuation of the human race? The argument of the chivalric writers is, How can God both will the perpetuation of the human race and say the way of celibacy is superior? This is my point about the laity's being mixed up in the bodily, in the erotic, and also at times – what the church is admitting – in the need for the coercive.

I was a little puzzled about getting into the details of **the history of slavery**, because I wasn't sure Malinda Berry's comments really ran against

what I was saying. I was trying to stress the role of gender in all this. Unless you see the role of gender and see that slaves have been defined in America as children of black women, you're missing how this came into being. One of the writers cited, Kathleen Brown, says that initially the definition of a slave has more to do with religion and the apparent rejection by Africans of Christianity than with color. The switch towards the color factor was strongly going on in the later seventeenth century. My point is something like this: There are awful things going on; the Klu Klux Klan wasn't there originally; and the fully-fledged most extreme and terrible racist ideology is something that emerges incrementally. The same applies to Nazism. I agree . . . that to ignore the fact that imperceptible steps may not seem so bad in themselves but [lead] to something really horrific is to ignore the links between the really terrible and our everyday awfulness. To mystify this as an unimaginable positive evil that's completely out of continuity with how we ordinarily behave – that's the point I'm getting at.

If evil is privative, obviously women cannot possibly be evil by nature, because that would be one example of a positive theory of evil – unless you're thinking of femaleness as itself a privated condition, a notion inherited from Aristotelian biology, which we should absolutely forget and reject. The interesting thing is that Aristotle asks, Is being male and female just like being like black and white? Is it accidental to humanity itself? Then he says the problem is that all animals are either male or female, or maybe a mixture of the two. So it seems as though sexual difference is generic. At that point he should become like Luce Irigaray and develop an ontology of sexual difference [as] I allude to near the end of my book.

[In reference to Travis Kroeker's remarks,] which I had some problems with, I nonetheless profoundly agree with the idea that the contribution of the Radical Reformation is that we have to think about our social organization and practice in this world in totally theological and christological terms.

Questions from Panelists and Audience

Tom Finger:

I'd like to go back to a point you raised at the beginning, that if Mennonites are into appropriating classical theology and the creeds, this leads, if we're consistent, to the acceptance of the episcopacy. For many of us that is the

problem with the creeds. . . . In a Mennonite understanding of the church, the church comes more from love, not just through people but the movement of the Holy Spirit, which moves where it will. This is often in continuity with tradition but not always, and sometimes rejects or rebukes what's in the tradition. This is where it comes from. So, if we do appropriate classical theology in some way, it is sometimes for different reasons. For instance, Nicea and Chalcedon [are] in many ways subversive of hierarchy. If Jesus is the normative human being, this means that his entire way of life, including his pacifism, is normative for everybody. One can say that in other ways. One can say that in Eastern Orthodoxy, one can recapitulate Lordship as kenotic lordship that subverts all other kinds of lordship. . . . A great deal of classical theology can be appropriated but, I think, critically.

Milbank:

I think hierarchy is kenotic. Even the neo-Platonic hierarchy is somewhat kenotic, because it's not our modern idea that [hierarchy means] you're a kind of "ruler." On the contrary, the idea is that to rule is to give the gift of ruling, that you have to share. This is the way Aquinas thinks; it's a gift. You have to delegate. The only real way to rule is to give ruling. This is, if you like, a kind of kenotic descent. . . . You can say, Hierarchies sound awful. But there are always going to be some kind of hierarchical structures. . . . I agree that all this is very paradoxical: the more you think about God, the more hierarchy is also levelled, totally levelled. It's relativized in relation to God.

Finger:

I'm not critiquing all hierarchy [but only when taken as] an ontological principle. . . . I believe that since Jesus was raised, he is Lord of all. It is a hierarchy, but a very different hierarchy, of a servant Lord.

Milbank:

I totally agree.

[Unidentified Questioner]:

I'm not sure you escape Niebuhrianism when you say no one is a pacifist. To be sure, I don't think pacifism in that sense is an ontological state. Pacifism is a practice. So, no one is a pacifist; people try, as it were, to live peaceably and

engage in peaceful practices. On the other hand, you go on to say we must intervene. . . . It seems you have a notion of intervention that is so thin and univocal you can't imagine an intervention that might be something other than coercive.

Milbank:

Oh, yes. The principle of absolute minimum coercive means is important.

[Questioner]:

But don't you see yourself setting up these opposite purities? You say no to the pacifist, but then your countervailing state of facts says you must intervene. These seem to me totally pure opposites.

Milbank:

Only in extreme circumstances. In circumstances of immediate crisis, and these paradigmatic examples do have a certain valency, this is where I disagree with Stanley Hauerwas.

[Another Questioner]:

You commented that there's an exact parallel between iconoclasm and pacifism, and you went on to say that everything is always mediated with the fragile. I was struck by Travis Kroeker's example of the letter of the martyr to her daughter, and I'm puzzled as to why the martyr does not have iconic value for monasticism. You started out saying we need a kind of monasticism for everybody. In the early church, the monks did regard the martyrs as having iconic values, and I'm not quite sure how you can have a monasticism today that doesn't recognize the iconic value of martyrs in the church.

Milbank:

There are many different kinds of martyrs, but you could say that all martyrs are dying for the truth in some way. Like the cross itself, it's an interesting sort of an icon because it's a breaking of the icon. This is exactly why it's the ultimate icon, because it's a picture of *both* a fragile human life, Christ's life or the life of a martyr's, *and* the breaking of that life in witness. The witness says there is something beyond the fragile human things to which they point. The icons of the martyrs aren't the only kind of icons, they aren't the only

kind of pictures. That the martyr is a martyr because he has lived a fragile human life in a certain good way points back to the importance of fragility. If you take the position, dogmatically and a priori, that no fragility is worth defending, sometimes with a relatively necessary degree of coercion, because this fragile thing is not of ultimate importance (God can do something else) – even though there’s a truth in that – it is indeed like iconoclasm. . . . If someone is going to destroy all the parish churches in Britain and the cathedrals, would there be no point at which you should defend them, even with arms? I would say you should, because there is something irreplaceable about the mediation of these little buildings. You can’t just say if we lost these things, it will be all right. This is to despise time. I’ve got a much more radical valuation of temporality than some of the criticisms that have been thrown at me.

I do want you to ask yourselves, Why is pacifism so dominant in America? [Audience murmurs: “It’s not, it’s not.”] No! No! Listen to me! You’ve got to listen! You’re taking this too simplistically. Amongst American radicals, it’s more dominant than among European radicals. There’s something significantly American about it.

Katrina Poetker:

It seems to me that there’s a conflation of pacifism and passivity. In my understanding of pacifism, another word might be “peacemaking,” and that is almost the opposite of passivity. When I hear you talk about intervention of any kind, Mennonites are among those who have intervened in many, many situations of violence but have chosen to do so without choosing violence. That is what the Mennonite understanding of pacifism is.

[Unidentified Questioner]:

We were told that you ground your objection of pacifism in part [because] it’s counter-intuitive with respect to both our fallen nature and our animal nature, self-defense, and those kinds of things. That came out in your response. But it seems like not a very good ground for justifying the rejection of a position, to say that it’s counter-intuitive with respect to our fallen nature or animal nature. From a pacifist perspective, I think counter-intuitiveness is a mark of the truth of the position. If something is counter-intuitive with respect to our fallen nature, perhaps that’s a sign we ought to have our intuitions reformed.

Milbank:

What I said was that [pacifism is] counter-intuitive in relation to our *created* nature, trying too much to jump out of our animality and the limited range of our responses like the instinctive protection of those close to us. We're not angels. We can't quite, we shouldn't try to, jump out of that kind of animality, because it belongs to our created nature.

Travis Kroeker:

Could you specify which of our intuitions are created and which ones are fallen?

Milbank:

A lot of theological debates are about that, aren't they?

Kroeker:

The notion that one would try to intervene in a situation where an innocent life is threatened is one kind of intuition; the question of how to do that is another. It seems to me that thought is required in making that transition.

Denny Weaver:

It was stated several times that you're really wanting to recover a pre-fourteenth century orthodoxy as the response to modernity and so on. You [can] look at history from both ends. You [can] look at it from the front, from where we are, and then go back to the point where you think it was right but since then it's a disagreement. So, some people have criticized Anabaptists for having this bad view of history [or for saying that] it was corrupt and then got recovered. In one sense, you're just moving the line back to where the fall was. That's what happens when you look at it front-back. What are the criteria for coming down there? If you come from the other end, starting with Jesus and the incarnation, then there is no standard. Every single doctrine, every single treatise, every single position, is a choice. What are your criteria for deciding that decisions from the thirteenth century bind us? Secondly, when, as Malinda Berry pointed out, people like James Cone and Delores Williams do not see themselves represented in that theology but handicapped by it, why is that foundation the basis to speak to our modern situation?

Milbank:

I don't like James Cone's theology at all, and I think the best Black theologian in America is Jay Carter at Duke. His book is coming out soon and contains, I think, a devastating critique of Cone's theology. A very different kind of black, more radical, and orthodox theology is now emerging. So, no, it's not the [thirteenth century] thing. It has to be a question of an authentic development of the gospel tradition that is the real test. I'm trying to say you can't separate reason, scripture, and tradition. That is [only] a way of looking at it that we have, partly as a result of the advent of printing. It's not just that, but we tend to think of the Bible as a single-bound book that is different from the movement of human beings in time. In the Middle Ages, the Bible was a much more oral reality, it didn't exist just in written form, literally. It's not that tradition was added to the text. If you read those catholics, you know that the Bible itself is tradition, it's a moving thing. Gregory the Great says, when he comments on the Bible, that it grows bigger. They just didn't have the Bible invented by protestants, in a certain sense. . . . Likewise, they didn't separate reason from grace [and] they had the idea that this Bible/tradition thing is fundamentally christocentric. . . . If you're an analytic philosopher, this will seem fantastically unsatisfactory, because there are no clear foundational starting points that we can point back to. . . . My sense is [we have lost] a kind of integral way of looking at things that is more authentic.

I and other people in Radical Orthodoxy are still fleshing out this 'what went wrong' account. It's not just Duns Scotus, it's a whole movement going back to Avicenna, in a way. Nor are we talking about – I say this in my new book and will say even more in my next book – simply reinstituting something. On the contrary, we need a much stronger sense of democracy, of consensus, of human-poetic-cultural formation of this process. This is the modern element, the renaissance element. I'm much more interested in a kind of counter-modernity represented by thinkers like Vico, Hamann, Cudworth, Jacobi, and Coleridge. . . . I'm much more interested in this counter-modernity – a non-aligned, orthodox, liberal, Kantian, epistemological-cum-politically liberal modernity – than in simply going back.

Note on Contributors

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Anabaptist Faith and American Democracy

A SYNOPSIS

Readers will be able to reconstruct much of Ted Grimsrud's argument (the original article was published in MQR 78.3 [2004]) from the respondents' comments in the papers that follow, as well as from Grimsrud's reply, also printed below. However, the following short synopsis of the article may be helpful. –Editor

Early in “Anabaptist Faith and American Democracy,” Grimsrud asks, “Is the traditional Mennonite ‘two kingdom’ stance, in which Christian convictions are understood primarily to be directly relevant for the faith community’s inner existence but not for that of the broader society, adequate for determining our understanding of citizenship today?” His answer to this question is no, but his answers to the series of questions that shape his main argument are a resounding yes in every case.

In developing his view, Grimsrud contends that “three distinct stories” must be taken into account: the Anabaptist Story, whose core elements he identifies as noted below; the Democracy Story (“the good America” that “welcomed migrating Mennonites” and “served as a beacon of hope for self-determination and freedom”); and the Empire Story (“the other America” given to “conquest, domination and widespread violence”). The distinction between the Democracy Story and the Empire story is vital because it allows us to separate our “participating in democracy” from “our potential complicity in militaristic state violence.”

Among the questions Grimsrud poses are these:

- “Do American Anabaptist Christians have a responsibility to aggressively seek to take their pacifist convictions into the public square in a way that might influence our government?”
- “Do we Mennonites . . . have the responsibility to speak out openly and assertively in contributing to democracy by playing a role in the public conversation by which society arrives at governmental policies?”
- “As members of our ‘powerful’ civil society and as pacifists with theological convictions and a long history that point toward a rejection of the Empire Story, do we have a specific responsibility to become politically active as an expression of our Anabaptist faith?”

Grimsrud contends that four core Anabaptist convictions provide the necessary guidance for fully participating in the democratic conversation: (1) THE FREE CHURCH is well positioned to “perceive the difference between the Democracy Story and the Empire Story”; (2) REFUSAL TO FIGHT IN WAR can assist “nonpacifist neighbors better see how the Empire story so powerfully subverts the Democracy Story we all profess to affirm”; (3) AFFIRMATION OF “UPSIDE-DOWN SOCIAL POWER” permits supporting democracy movements while presenting “a theological critique of violence and domination” lest such movements become another Empire Story; (4) COMMITMENT TO ALTERNATIVE ECONOMICS allows for redefining economics and for “constructing an alternative community.”

Any limits to Anabaptist participation in public policy conversations must not arise out of “self-imposed restrictions” of the kind that Grimsrud sees inherent in the approach taken by Ted Koontz and Stanley Hauerwas. Koontz, author of “Thinking Theologically about War Against Iraq” (*MQR* 77. 1 (2003)), distinguishes a ‘first language’ (the language of faith) from a ‘second language’ (the language of pragmatic or secular conversations), and urges Christians to concentrate mostly on the former. Grimsrud finds support for his own position in the work of Jeffrey Stout, who asserts, for instance, that “the authentic democratic conversation welcomes all conversing citizens openly to express whatever premises ground their claims” (See Stout’s *Democracy and Tradition* [Princeton, 2004].) Both Stout and Grimsrud reject Hauerwas’s “antipathy toward ‘liberalism’” and his insistence on “letting the church be the church” in such a way that “undercuts Christian identification with the Democracy Story.”

Grimsrud concludes that it is both possible and necessary “to enter America’s public conversation boldly as citizens and as Anabaptist Christians – recognizing that we would not be faithful to either calling were we to separate them.”

Public Theology and Democracy

Scott Holland

I have suggested in a much debated essay that the tragic events of 9/11 created a discursive crisis in the contemporary American Anabaptist and Peace Church communities of faith (see “Peace and Polyphony: The Case for Theological and Political Impurity,” *CGR* 20.2 [2002]). Indeed, in the aftermath of the attacks on the Twin Towers, some Anabaptist peace activists were trying to out-God-talk Osama bin Laden and the Taliban in the public square with commands from Jesus rather than directives and demands from Allah.

Certainly, persons of faith can and must fiercely protest war and passionately pursue peace. This is not the critical discursive question blurred by the fire and smoke. Rather, the question is, How do persons of particular faith communities enter into public and political discourse? Do those of us who are Americans enter political dialogue and debate as citizens of a pluralistic democracy or as religionists representing a God’s-eye-view and command? Unless we are prepared to be a kinder, gentler, Anabaptist Taliban, I contend we must enter the conversation as citizens and public intellectuals. Hence, it is important to make an artful distinction between our personal loves and convictions and our broader public responsibilities to a common good and to the peace of the city. Can faith communities, colleges, seminaries, institutions, and agencies formed and informed by Peace Church values produce an interdisciplinary rhetoric and pedagogy of peacemaking inspired and empowered by the values and practices of faith, yet beyond the God-talk of confessional and communal discourses? I believe the answer is yes.

My evolving work explores the possibilities of a constructive public theology that enters into solidarity with the project of peacemaking as a public and pragmatic vocation. This desire to compose a practical, public theology is not a mere academic interest. Indeed, it evolved from my many years of pastoral ministry as I attempted to preach and teach in ways that inspired and equipped my parishioners to embody the Gospel as a living peace church in the world, and for the world, rather than become yet one more sectarian, sacred reservation of spirit in a blessed fallen world. I first articulated my passionate, pastoral concerns for a public theology capable of addressing the church, the academy, and society in a formal way in “God in Public: A Modest Proposal for a Quest for a Contemporary North American Paradigm” (*CGR* 4.1 [1986]).

These concerns have since evolved and found expression through several publications, including “Give Me Prophecy and Joy” in *Brethren Life and Thought* (Summer and Fall 2003). My proposals for this evolving theology are explored in *Prophets, Poets & Pragmatists: Toward a Public Theology* (in progress). My concern is how particular traditions might contribute to a public good. More specifically, I am very interested in the polyphony of questions around religion in democratic culture and the role of faith in public discourse. Thus, I welcome Professor Ted Grimsrud’s fine essay, “Anabaptist Faith and American Democracy.”

I could write several pages of appreciation for the ways Grimsrud’s work challenges Anabaptists to reconsider and re-imagine our dual vocations in the world as Christians and citizens. Here I will focus only on a matter that both conservative and liberal Anabaptists should consider: the confusion about a necessary distinction between personal morality and public ethics.

I suspect this confusion is at least one reason so many Mennonites, Brethren, and Quakers voted for George W. Bush in the November 2004 elections. Conservative or traditional members of these faith communities were attracted to the Republican accent on personal faith, morality, and values, and thus carried their domestic and churchly tastes and dispositions to the polls with little regard for the complicated demands of seeking the common good. Considering this matter of personal morality and public justice, I fear that Grimsrud’s quick dismissal and deconstruction of Ted Koontz’s important paradigm of first and second languages for doing Christian social ethics only perpetuates this confusion. This dismissal of the necessity of a private-public distinction in ethical discourse invites a situation in which persons of deep faith and strong personal convictions vote on the basis of personal morality – whether that morality is liberal or conservative – rather than in the interests of the broader common weal.

Koontz’s model of first and second languages for doing religious ethics intersects with Walter Brueggemann’s understanding of biblical prophetic discourse being different on the wall (in the public square) and behind the wall (within the gathered community of faith). It links up nicely with philosopher Richard Rorty’s metaphor of “Trotsky and Wild Orchids” on the value of private-public distinctions in ethical language in pluralistic societies. It also reflects John Howard Yoder’s use of middle axioms in Christian ethics and witness. In addition it coheres with the long history of many Christian imaginative

theological constructions of “the two kingdoms” as a way of noting a duality between personal confessions of faith and the demands of affirming secular justice as well as civil and social order in a blessed but fallen creation.

My response to Grimsrud’s apparent longing for a consistent Christian language or confession in the public square will accent three themes: Anabaptism and Liberalism, Personal Passions and Public Responsibilities, and Seeking Cultures of Peace.

Anabaptism and Liberalism

Stanley Hauerwas has critically yet correctly charged that my work seems to care as much about “the liberal project” as it does about Jesus and the Anabaptist Vision. For the task of composing “a public theology” or a theology that engages both church and culture, this is indeed true. My project seeks to bring the creative energy and eros of Anabaptist and Peace Church movements into solidarity with classical liberal commitments to creative democracy, personal liberty, ethical individualism, civic virtue, and human desire. (The reference to “liberalism” here is not to a contest between liberal and conservative theologies but to the philosophical and political traditions of democratic liberalism.)

I am distressed by a new, sophisticated wave of illiberal resistance to the friendship between discipleship and democracy in the Anabaptist academy. Inspired by illiberal theological thinkers such as Hauerwas, MacIntyre, and Milbank, this resistance tends to take on two different forms in the Anabaptist guild: the conservative communitarian and the counter-cultural radical. While both forms of religious cultural critique claim some prophetic unction, the true prophet committed to a public peace, rather than to his own personal or communal ideological purity, must likewise master poetic and pragmatic discourses. In the composition of a theology of culture in a pluralistic society, the person of faith would do well to read both Jesus and Jefferson, and to quote Emerson and Whitman as freely as Menno and Mack in the public square.

Walt Whitman, the strong poet of democratic vistas, knew how to make the poet, the pragmatist, and the prophet dance together with joy in the public square. Whitman, as a creative public intellectual, understood the importance of poetic and transcendent visions and voices beyond mere morality and tribal confessions for the well being of the common weal. Righteous calls to social ethics or personal morality become flat and rule-based without soulful transcendence. Remember Whitman’s “Mystic Trumpeter”?

*Sing to my soul – renew its languishing faith and hope;
Rouse up my slow belief – give me some vision of the future;
Give me, for once, prophecy and joy.*

Like Grimsrud, I believe Peace Church work in public theology must be in conversation with some of the best academic work in the field, including the pragmatic religious social criticism of Jeffery Stout (*Democracy and Tradition*, Princeton, 2004) and the prophetic religious criticism of Cornel West (*Democracy Matters*, The Pilgrim Press, 2004). After all, if we care about the peace of the city we must catch a vision and speak in a voice that is more reflective of the polyphony and pluralism of the New Jerusalem than the serenity and solitude of Eden. Along with Grimsrud and Whitman, I believe we must “invite a multitude to speak.” However, Whitman also reminds us that we each contain a multitude and thus our voices carry the sounds of many communities simultaneously.

Personal Passions and Public Responsibilities

On April 19, 2004 I preached a sermon from my familiar pulpit of the Monroeville Church of the Brethren in suburban Pittsburgh. That afternoon I heard a sermon in Pittsburgh that almost made me regret I had said *anything* about “God” that day. The occasion was the annual meeting of the National Rifle Association at the downtown Convention Center. Rocker and gun-lover Ted Nugent actually preached a sermon to the NRA delegates entitled “God, Guns, and Rock’n’Roll.” (See Nugent’s book by the same title published by Regnery, Inc. in 2000). Nugent’s sermon was public God-talk at its worst. He freely and passionately linked the American Dream to the trinity of God, guns, and rock’n’roll. In his theology God signified national morality, rock’n’roll represented our freedoms, and guns were gifts from both God and the Constitution to insure that the ungodly would dare not tread on our rights as Americans. Not surprisingly, Nugent also suggested that God endorsed current United States foreign policy and our brave war president.

When I hear God-talk like this, I find myself more and more drawn to the public philosophy of Walter Rauschenbusch’s backslidden grandson, Richard Rorty, who offers a thoughtful analysis of a necessary distinction between our personal passions and our public responsibilities in a pluralistic,

secular society. Let me summarize this point from my essay on Rorty's work, "The Coming Only Is Sacred" (*Cross Currents* [Winter 2004]). Rorty calls this distinction the case of "Trotsky and Wild Orchids," which is also the title of his most autobiographical essay. There he tells the story of his boyhood conviction, acquired from his parents and their circle of New York friends and colleagues, that all decent people were, if not Trotskyites, at least socialists. Even as a boy Rorty had a deep concern for social justice. Yet he was a precocious kid and loved many things, including wild orchids. He learned to identify, by their Latin names, the forty species of orchids found in the mountains of the northeast. This personal obsession with rare, beautiful flowers made him feel uneasy, because he doubted that Trotsky would approve of such a passionate interest and involvement that did nothing to ease human suffering.

At age fifteen Rorty escaped the bullies who beat him up on the playground of his high school and entered the University of Chicago with a problem on his mind: how to reconcile Trotsky and wild orchids in some kind of metaphysical, theological, or philosophical system. This problem occupied him for the next twenty years and displayed itself in various thought experiments and proposals. Finally, Rorty reached the conclusion for which he is now famous in some circles, infamous in others: We need not harmonize the personal and the public.

This is not to suggest that at times the personal and the public cannot and do not come together in satisfying ways. They indeed do. Nevertheless, Rorty suggests it is good to resist the temptation to systematically reconcile our private obsessions, whether they are wild orchids, confessional poetry, metaphysical speculations, or tender lovers, with our public responsibilities to others in a pluralistic, democratic society. This proposal is not merely funded by Rorty's philosophical rejection of grand systems; it has much to do with his political commitment to freedom, tolerance, and a resistance to human cruelty imposed by what he calls bullies, oligarchies, and bosses.

Following Rorty's private-public distinction, in private one is free to follow one's bliss or tend to one's personal ethic of self-creation. However, in public, there is a need for a broader set of ethical distinctions and political obligations to others and to social institutions. Rorty is convinced that the ultimate synthesis of love and justice may be found in the creative dance steps of a partnership of self-creation and social solidarity.

Seeking Cultures of Peace

Rorty's public philosophy can be very attractive to persons of faith. His Jeffersonian celebration of a secular state, coupled with his contempt for theocracy, should satisfy both conservative Anabaptist advocates of a two-kingdom theology and progressive Peace Church members who have made anti-Constantinianism the rage even in the mainline churches of the west. His resistance to bullies, bosses, and oligarchies must cheer the hearts of Free Church believers and liberal persons of faith from many traditions.

Yet there is something incomplete about Rorty's insistence that religious discourse or the language of faith must *always* by its nature be placed in the category of "the private." Rorty's grandfather Rauschenbusch understood that faith was not simply centered in privileged or provincial rites and rituals, doctrines, and dogmas, or creeds and confessions; religion or faith can be a way of seeing the world. It can be a way of imagining oneself in relationship to others and to ultimate concerns, and to the process of meaning-making. As such, religion as imaginative composition or construction finds its closest analogue in art. Thus, like art, the religious imagination helps many of us participate in that mysterious and social reality we call "culture." Whether pondering classical categories of the good, the true, and the beautiful, or attempting to define cruelty and compassion within a postmodern linguistic turn, it is rarely possible or helpful to completely exile the discourses, images, and practices of faith from the conversation. The pragmatist committed to social transformation and concerned about cultures of peace in a violent world would do well to discern the cultural effects of religion for the hopes of personal and public reconciliation – as well as for their potential to damage and destroy.

Keeping in view my suggestion that art is religion's nearest analogue, consider Joyce Carol Oates on "The Faith of a Writer":

I believe that art is the highest expression of the human spirit. I believe that we yearn to transcend the merely finite and ephemeral; to participate in something mysterious and communal called "culture" – and that this yearning is as strong in our species as the yearning to reproduce the species. Through the local or regional, through our individual voices, we work to create art that will speak to others who know nothing of us. In our very obliqueness to one

another, an unexpected intimacy is born. The individual voice is the communal voice. The regional voice is the universal voice.

– Oates, *The Faith of a Writer: Life, Craft, Art*
(Ecco, HarperCollins, 2003)

What I am suggesting is that individual and regional voices, particular voices, together contribute to a more public or universal voice. There is no generic public voice. The multitude of particular voices in a great society finds a public coherence not in an easy harmony but in a complex, creative polyphony. This includes religious voices. Whether the social critic or public philosopher believes these religious voices are inspired by God, the Muse of art, emotional needs, psychological projection, or the longing for social cohesion, they are nevertheless a profound, powerful part of culture and the human art of meaning-making, and thus cannot be exiled from public debate and discourse. (This is why, in conversation with my colleagues and co-editors, we chose a culturally-conscious title for our book on international peacemaking: *Seeking Cultures of Peace*, ed. Fernando Enns, Scott Holland, and Ann Riggs [World Council of Churches, Cascadia and Herald, 2004].)

In a public theology, the concern is not with seeking mere doctrines or theologies of peace but rather “cultures of peace.” This concern was recently addressed at an international peace conference held in Nairobi in August 2004, for which Bethany Theological Seminary was the host planning and fundraising institution. The conference, called *Watu Wa Amani* or “People of Peace,” brought together members of the Historic Peace Churches with ecumenical representatives from the World Council of Churches to address the conflicts in Africa in light of an active call to peacemaking and reconciliation. The conference did theology in a cross-cultural and contextual style, and was especially attentive to how theology, worship, and spirituality contribute to the formation of a social vision. In the spirit of public theology, local or communal concerns were never pried apart from the cosmopolitan realities of the global village. Yet this social vision requires an artful translation in its movement from the sanctuary into the streets.

In this setting, African colleagues told us how the *sokoni*, the market, can serve as a metaphor for the rules of public discourse. The African market is a common ground where members of a village, town, or city gather not only for commerce but for conversation that is truly public about the ordinary

and extraordinary slices of shared life. Those who gather there, whether Christian or Muslim, recognize that the rules for communication in the market are different from the grammars of space that is merely domestic, tribal, or religious. The creation of hospitable space in the market requires a public philosophy and discourse that differs in tone from the particular theology and personal confessions appropriate to the church or mosque.

Personal Dreams and the Public Good: A Case Narrative

I do much of my writing in an old tavern converted into lovely living and studio space in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Yellow Springs is a progressive, left-leaning village where artists, intellectuals, social activists, young professionals, and old hippies still dare to discuss religion and politics in the public square. I recently had a conversation about a political poster with a couple of village residents in Dino's Coffee Shop. My table-talk conversation partners were smart, cynical men who seemed to mix an eclectic blend of anarchism, neo-Marxism, and sixties counter-cultural values into their politics.

Our discussion and debate about the message of the poster made me think of many quarrels I have had with Anabaptists and radical Christian peacemakers about public and political responsibility. With the November 2004 election quickly approaching, the poster presented two side-by-side drawings of the presidential candidates, George Bush and John Kerry. There was an identical text under each candidate: *Middle-Aged, Yale Educated, White Christian Male*. Then there was this message: "If you like corporate power, special interests, free trade, war, and the security state . . . then this election is for you! Because this November, you can have your way regardless of who wins." Under the poster text a detachable bumper sticker declared, "DON'T *just* VOTE because our dreams will never fit in their ballot boxes." My companions liked the poster very much.

I told my new acquaintances that although I valued political dissent and vigorous social criticism, the political sentiment of the poster struck me as terribly sectarian and even flirting with totalitarianism. Our debate began! I cannot report here all we exchanged in our conversation, but I will identify concerns I expressed that arc from that very secular coffee shop table to some of my theological conversations with self-professed "Christian radicals."

I of course took issue with the politically naïve notion that there is no substantive difference between the two candidates and the resulting "so why

vote” attitude. Yet the center of my critique was directed to the resistance to compromise and to the desire for purity or utopia implied in the poster, which is language alien to the possibilities of deep democracy and rhetoric more akin to totalitarian dreams. The bold declaration, “DON’T *just* VOTE,” really diminishes and even mocks the value of voting, and thus disrespects the bloody struggles for civil rights by the disfranchised. But it is the stated reason for this resistance – “because our dreams will never fit in their ballot boxes” – that is so disturbing, because it is profoundly anti-democratic.

I challenged my sectarian political critics to consider the language of *their* ballot box. I made the case that these men had graduate degrees from major public universities, they drank public water, used public utilities, carried their personal dreams from place to place on public roads that took them safely home at night. If in the twilight hours the rare robber or rapist might be suspected of prowling the placid streets of Yellow Springs, a call to 911 would bring the Village Police, who truly understand their vocation to be peace officers, speeding to their doors. “It is not *their* boxes,” I insisted. “It is *your* ballot boxes because we all share this impure, imperfect, gritty yet graced public space together.”

With too much caffeine pulsing through my head and heart, pointing dramatically to Xenia Avenue, the main drag of the village, I said, “Hell, yes, this might be the boulevard of broken dreams, but it’s where we live!” I continued, “Do you really think that in a pluralistic society the public ballot box is supposed to hold our personal dreams without compromise? In a deep democracy or in a strong democracy, the ballot box strives to collect the vision of the common good, the dream of a beloved community beyond mere private interests, the commitment to justice and safe public space for all.” Happily, this is a conversation that can never end in an anti-totalitarian society.

Conclusion

Political thinkers as diverse as Rorty, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Hannah Arendt, and Albert Camus remind us of the dangers of imposing one ideology, theology, dogma, or dream onto the public sphere. Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* demonstrates that when a personal dream is substituted for a broader public good in the political process, a dangerous flirtation with totalitarianism begins.

This critical difference between personal convictions and public goods is often misunderstood in radical Anabaptist and Peace Church communities. Grimsrud's article is marked by this misunderstanding. Yet a very orthodox, normative Anabaptist theologian does carefully outline this distinction in one of his works. John Howard Yoder offers his views of the two kingdoms, church and state, Christian and citizen, in *The Christian Witness to the State*. There he makes a clear distinction between an ecclesiology and a more public political philosophy for Christian thought and practice. The Christian of course is called to follow the way of Jesus, Yoder argues. The church through its own body politics – discipleship, community, and peacemaking – is a living witness to the reign of God. Yet the church is not the world. Only the Constantinian, theocrat, or totalitarian would be tempted to confuse the functions and identities of church and state.

The Christian witnesses to the state by embodying the practices of the Gospel in and through the community called church and, quite importantly, by actively calling the state to be true to its own highest ideals in the practice of justice. The Christian is not seeking to baptize the secular state as an agape community. Instead, according to Yoder, the thoughtful Christian may point to *middle axioms* that are points of mediation or compromise between the perfection of Christ as the church understands it and the brokenness of the world. The Christian appropriately expects mutual, brotherly-sisterly love in the redeemed community, yet speaks prophetically for justice in the public square. Granted, some Mennonite scholars contend that Yoder later abandoned the middle axiom paradigm for a more uncompromising “politics of Jesus” as normative for all of life. One scholar recently told me, “It is not surprising that liberal Brethren are so drawn to Yoder's earlier language of compromise!” In my view, Yoder's constructive use of established middle axiom ethical language was his attempt to re-imagine classical two-kingdom theology in a democratic culture.

Although Ted Grimsrud and I are perhaps informed by different theological imaginations on this matter of two languages or private-public distinctions, I think we agree that the church is indeed in the world for the world. I am grateful for Grimsrud's intellectual gifts to the church, the academy, and society. His ongoing work in biblical studies and social ethics truly embodies what it means for a Christian intellectual to love God and the neighbor with all one's mind.

Global Anabaptist Faith and North American Democracy

Jeremy M. Bergen

I will respond to Ted Grimsrud's paper as a Canadian, a Mennonite, and a student of systematic theology. At the outset, I will make three brief observations. First, the Canadian Mennonite history of negotiating specific privileges with the government, serving as senior civil servants or as members of provincial or federal parliaments, and testifying before parliamentary committees and Royal Commissions has been based on, and has resulted in, a relatively positive view of government and democracy. I recognize all this in contrast to the visceral reactions of many American Mennonites to the 2004 United States election. Second, there is a danger that Canadians are let off the hook too easily with regard to American hegemony. We have the luxury of distancing ourselves from US policies. Further, we can present our apparent involvement in the domination these policies might cause as evidence that we have been forced or duped into complicity. This can obscure the fact that we are active partners with the US in the inequalities of the economic globalization system, have often joined the US in military initiatives, and actively reproduce many assumptions of American culture. Third, there is a converse danger that we will be lumped together with the US discussion. This denies real cultural and historical differences. That Canadians do not have a constitutional separation of church and state, yet practically have a most minimal civil religion, is but one example.

With these observations in mind, I venture a positive response to Grimsrud's article. Below I will try to extend his argument and to cast the net wider for resources with which to do that. Whatever the Anabaptist Story is, it obligates its participants to engage in the pursuit of the common good, even and especially to reject and resist oppressive configurations of worldly power, and to make practical, though not ultimate, use of democratic institutions for this end. I welcome Grimsrud's appeal to Mennonites to continually discern how convictions and practices, and especially our peace position, can be an effective witness in the world.

The Anabaptist Story

In order to get to the essence of the Anabaptist Story, Grimsrud offers a parallel with how scholars of the historical Jesus point to a fact that is independent of biased reports – namely that Jesus was executed as a political criminal – as the lens through which to assess whatever is said of his life and

teaching. Grimsrud proposes that what the various sixteenth-century Anabaptist groups had in common was their being viewed with suspicion and hostility by civil and religious authorities.¹ Viewing Anabaptist diversity in light of this commonality allows us to appropriate their core legacy for today: a free church, the conviction that Christians should not fight, an upside-down notion of social power, and a commitment to economic sharing.

The elements Grimsrud identifies are crucial aspects of the Anabaptist Story, but I question whether this approach is an adequate way of leveraging an Anabaptist core. In the first place, it assumes that the difference is the essence, i.e., that the identity of Anabaptists is rooted in what they did not share with Catholics or Lutherans. This is an inadequate view of the church and renders inaccessible to us the rich depths of the Christian tradition. It also overlooks the fact that Anabaptism was arguably a movement of spiritual renewal, calling for faithfulness to Christ, which issued in some specific, indispensable social-political-ecclesial consequences. We ought to understand our core story in significant continuity with the Christian tradition where that is the case, but also as one that dissents on the issues Grimsrud identifies. Secondly, the isolation of principles obscures the fact that the Anabaptist Story is always an already-embodied set of beliefs, practices, precedents, and interpretations. What an “upside-down notion of social power” is cannot readily be isolated from attempts to instantiate it. This does not mean that what is, is what ought to be. But it does imply turning attention to specific experiences in Anabaptist-Mennonite history and assessing a mixed record of faithfulness and unfaithfulness, without a clear set of theoretical principles to do the sorting.

Does this make a difference? Does a turn to a more complex historical and global record give clues for taking Anabaptist convictions into the public square? I believe the answer is yes, because it will draw attention to the Anabaptist Story as already engaged in the Democracy Story or the Empire Story. Here I draw from the experience of my own Dutch-North German-Russian-General Conference tradition. In the last three centuries, these Mennonites often sought special privileges and exemptions, and in return provided their host with specific agricultural services and otherwise exemplary citizenship. In seeking exemption from military services, Mennonites have often found that autocratic rulers – William of Orange, Frederick the Great of Prussia, Catherine the Great of Russia, Lt. Gov. John Graves Simcoe of Upper Canada, William Penn of Pennsylvania – were willing to grant these requests.² Moreover, these Mennonites were often settled on land to the

disadvantage of those already there. This should be an occasion for serious self-reflection and confession, since it suggests that insofar as our pacifism has been of a strongly two-kingdom variety, it has at times sought the shelter of empire and shared in its spoils. We are not in a position simply to *choose* to engage the Democracy Story, the Empire Story, both or neither. Rather, we are already embroiled in the complex dynamics of their interplay. What is open to us is how we understand the complexities and compromises of our history, and how we retrieve it for the purpose of present engagement. I am not claiming that the Anabaptist Story gives way to the Empire Story, though perhaps there is something about how our Anabaptist identity has been remembered and articulated that led, at times, to an alliance of nonresistance and empire.

Recognizing the need for confession in light of aspects of unfaithfulness, we should also seek constructive lessons from elements of faithfulness in those same experiences. What can we learn from the nineteenth-century Mennonite commonwealth in Russia, where Mennonites effectively ran their own large-scale municipal governments within the Russian system? What about the current experience of the Colombian Mennonite Church, involved in high-level peace negotiations, targeted by government, paramilitary and rebel groups, and effecting the inclusion of conscientious objection options in the constitution? What do the efforts of Mennonites in Indonesia to be agents of reconciliation within a Muslim-Christian dynamic show us about non-violence in an ostensibly democratic yet deeply divided public space? What about the issues of involvement in public life which the Mennonite Church in Asuncion is facing, given that the president of Paraguay attends that church and that his wife and several cabinet ministers are members?

Answers to these questions may help us see how the larger question of which of the two languages to speak in public is answered in practice in different circumstances, especially if we ask these communities how they understand their public witness in light of Anabaptist identity. This strategy reflects that our tradition is a living one and we must learn how to draw on a range of experiences in order to provide ourselves with an orientation, as Anabaptists, for the future. We should certainly continue to appeal to the sixteenth century, but we must also “thicken” the tradition to which we can refer for handles on our identity. I am suggesting that US Mennonites consider how global experiences may help to fill in what it means to Anabaptist and/or Mennonite, and I commend the same thing to Canadian Mennonites.

Empire and Democracy Stories

Grimsrud draws attention to Stanley Hauerwas's concern that participation in democratic practices not inhibit the capacity of Christians to speak Christianly. With regard to the Empire Story, I suggest that our capacity to keep our political discussion theological and to address arguments specifically against the logic of empire, rather than that of order, the state, or democracy *per se*, might be enhanced by listening to someone like Augustine. Though Augustine is known for his founding contributions to the Just War Theory, it is his diagnoses of the pathologies of empire that might be useful here. He devotes much of the *City of God* to showing how the pagan ethic of glory was rooted in a fear of death. Fear as a foundation for political ideology masks itself by self-deception and issues in political deception. Robert Dodaro argues that while several Catholic ethicists argued that the first Gulf War met just war criteria, they were collectively un-Augustinian by neglecting to consider whether the rhetorical deception and self-deception of empire renders the facts so inaccessible as to make a just war calculus unintelligible.³ This charge applies doubly to the web of deceptions around the recent Iraq war.

I hope that we as Mennonites might bring a set of practices and convictions about truth-telling into the public sphere in a way that engages both just war Christians and citizens in general for whom a truthful rendering of circumstances is a condition for applying pragmatic reasoning. Grimsrud's argument may be extended only slightly to say that a free-church epistemology allows us to name the lies of empire and that we ought to speak this analysis to all who will listen. Lies, says Augustine, are intrinsically evil and cannot be justified. Furthermore, political lies are practically destabilizing and effectively preclude a just social order.⁴ An indispensable condition for a just social order is its capacity to bear the search for truth, and to be a forum for truth-tellers. This then serves both as a criterion for any political arrangement, including democracy, and as a condition for the reception of our truthful witness as Christians. My brief engagement with Augustine presupposes that we must participate in the public sphere first and foremost as members of the Body of Christ. This means learning from aspects of the Christian tradition that may guide us, challenge us, or provide common language with which to engage fellow Christians who see questions of democracy and empire very differently.

Providence and the Holy Spirit

Central to Grimsrud's paper is his claim, following Jeffrey Stout, that democracy can consist in a set of practices for a substantive good (though for Grimsrud, not a final good), and is not merely a set of procedures reducing public discourse to its lowest common denominator. Rather, it is about removing certain constraints so that insightful, eloquent, and even spiritual arguments and practices can be freed for the benefit of the common good, and, insofar as these arguments are accepted, form social norms that give shape to a common good.⁵

Phrased pneumatologically, Stout is suggesting that democratic practices can free gifts for circulation in the community. The possibility that these gifts are both within and without the church is something to take seriously. Regarding this exchange of gifts, Grimsrud points out that "Hauerwas called on the church to [be itself] by making sure to hear the voice of the 'weakest member'"⁶ Yet, when the church models listening to its weakest members, it might hear surprising things. I suggest that the attempt of the Mennonite Central Committee Peace Theology Project to hear the experiences of Mennonite lawyers, police officers, social workers, and civic officials – those who have not usually been heard in Mennonite discussions of the church's witness in the world – may turn our attention to *diverse* ways that Anabaptist engagement in democracy is already implied.⁷ I hasten to add that what Mennonites in fact do need not be what they should do. However, the requirement of the church to be the church, and to take seriously the accounts its various members give of what it means to be Christian in the public sphere, must be considered as a possible movement of the Spirit *within* the Body of Christ. This is especially true if our free-church ecclesiology affirms that members of the covenant community bear the witness of the Holy Spirit.

We must also ask about the movement of the Spirit *outside* the church. The debate about whether and when to speak one or both of the "two languages" likely reflects our underdevelopment of a doctrine of providence. While the tradition of Schleithem affirms that magistrates are "ordained by God, outside the perfection of Christ," we have not often considered the providential arrangements by which God orders power in the world. We are ambivalent about whether power falls under the doctrine of sin or the doctrine of creation.⁸ If it is under sin, then our attempts to speak a "second language" will always be a tragic compromise. But if it is under creation, then we might hope that our convictions about the *arrangements* of that power, expressed

in either a first or second language, need not be compromised in order to be intelligible. That we might work in *ad hoc* coalitions with non-Mennonite, non-Christian, or non-religious groups with similar specific convictions about power arrangements need not mean betraying our calling to be radical disciples of Jesus. I am not suggesting that the state is itself redemptive or that democracy be identified with God's providential purposes. Rather, God's ongoing creative activity manifests itself outside the church, in concrete though often veiled ways, and all God's work is coordinated towards God's redemptive purposes.

Our theological attention has often been rightly turned to questions of Christology – to the nature of the Lordship of Christ in the church and in the world, to the abiding activity of the Holy Spirit to realize this Lordship within the church and without. Implicit here is a strong understanding of the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father *and the Son*, and thus of the church as the prime or sole bearer of God's redeeming activity in history. What has been neglected is the specific relationship between the Father and the Spirit (while of course being disciplined by Trinitarian logic) – and thus the role of institutions, such as democratic practices, in God's redeeming work outside the church. If the church finds its witness is effectively received in the world, it will not be because of its own efforts but because God is already at work there. Our active efforts to “be church” must be accompanied with humility, confession, and patience, and the vision by which we see God at work in myriad ways must be sharpened. Thus, Grimsrud's contention that Anabaptists can show the idolatry of the Empire system in concrete, accessible ways based on our confession of Christ presupposes that the Spirit is at work in the world. To bring pacifist commitments into democratic conversations is to trust that God's Spirit may use them for redemptive ends.

Notes

¹ Ted Grimsrud, “Anabaptist Faith and American Democracy,” *MQR* 78 (2004): 343.

² T. D. Regehr, *Peace, Order & Good Government: Mennonites & Politics in Canada* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 2000), 15-16.

³ Robert Dodaro, “Eloquent Lies, Just Wars and the Politics of Persuasion: Reading Augustine's *City of God* in a ‘Postmodern’ World,” *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 95-104.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 87-89.

⁵ Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 150-51, 167.

⁶ Grimsrud, “Anabaptist Faith and American Democracy,” 353.

⁷ *At Peace and Unafraid: Public Order, Security and the Wisdom of the Cross* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, forthcoming).

⁸ Cf. John D. Rempel, "Tentative Postulates for Speaking Truth to Power: The Case of the United Nations," paper presented at Mennonite Central Committee Peace Theology Conference, Akron, PA, August 1-4, 2004.

Anabaptism and Democracy: A Constructive or Deconstructive Relationship?¹

Matt Hamsher

I thank Ted Grimsrud for his insightful article and for continuing the conversation on the issue of Anabaptist engagement with the wider culture and with the political process in particular. The relationship between the Anabaptist, Democracy, and Empire Stories is crucial for contemporary Christian discipleship and ethics. I doubt whether anyone would argue with placing the Anabaptist Story and the Empire Story on opposite ends of the continuum, but I have reservations about the placement of the Democracy Story. On the basis of that Story's advocacy of noncoercive participation, Grimsrud seems to be placing it without qualification closer to the Anabaptist Story on the continuum, in opposition to the Empire Story's "conquest, domination and widespread violence."² Yet the Democracy Story, even in its radical form, has much more in common with the Empire Story, as both share presuppositions about the depravity of human nature and the need for violence to guarantee the social contract. While Grimsrud acknowledges in a footnote that "we should also offer critiques of the Democracy Story itself insofar as it sometimes allows for the use of violence,"³ what if the Democracy Story no less than the Empire Story is founded upon the violence of self-assertion at the expense of others?

This is not to deny that "Mennonites have experienced (and even helped to foster) the American ideals of tolerance, freedom of religion, economic opportunity, protection of rights, free speech – the stuff of the Democracy Story."⁴ However, two questions must be asked before we assume too close a connection between the two stories: Is the rationale for supporting these ideals the same? Do these ideals really constitute the "stuff" of the Democracy Story? Our response to these questions will depend largely upon our

understanding of the Democracy Story and our definition of its core values. Grimsrud draws, for example, from Walter Karp, Noam Chomsky, Jonathan Schell, and Jeffrey Stout to differentiate the Democracy Story from the Empire Story by separating a peaceful, participatory, republican civic America from an imperial, militaristic, nation-state America.⁵ While this distinction is eminently helpful for Anabaptists seeking to distinguish their support for civic America from complicity in the violence of imperial America as they become more involved in political advocacy, I am not so sure it allows Mennonites to embrace all of civic America without reservation. Can America as Empire exist without at least the complicit support of civic America?

Furthermore, are Karp, Chomsky, et al. the best representatives of the Democracy Story as understood and practiced on Capitol Hill, on Main Street, or even in the academy? How helpful is this portrayal of the Democracy Story for understanding the political climate in the US today? Does the Democracy Story really offer a powerful alternative to the Empire Story, or does it only offer an opportunity to hold it accountable to its own professed values? I propose that viewing the development of the Democracy Story through the work of Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant, and John Rawls offers another insight into the values of that story, or at least points toward the need for greater critical engagement before it can be embraced so wholeheartedly.

At the root of political philosophy as espoused by Hobbes, Kant, and Rawls lies an analysis of the nature of human social interaction as essentially one of perpetual conflict. Infamously described by Hobbes as being “nasty, brutish, and short,”⁶ human social reality understood this way is also foundational for both Kant and Rawls. Other persons are assumed to be enemies, or at least potential competitors, for the satisfaction of personal ends that ultimately are mutually exclusive. For Hobbes, the only rational solution to this unhappy state of affairs resides in an appeal to the external force of law.⁷ So too Kant, in *Perpetual Peace*, asserts that

A state of peace among men who live side by side is not the natural state (*status naturalis*), which is rather to be described as a state of war: that is to say, although there is not perhaps actual hostility, yet there is a constant threatening that an outbreak may occur. Thus the state of peace must be *established*. [original emphasis] For the mere cessation of hostilities is no guarantee of peaceful relations, and unless this guarantee is given by every

individual to his neighbor – which can only be done in a state of society regulated by law – one man is at liberty to challenge another and treat him as an enemy.⁸

An egoistic pursuit of individual ends inevitably resulting in conflict is also apparent in Rawls's attempt to return to an "original position" in order "to derive satisfactory principles from the weakest possible assumptions" in which "a deep opposition of interests is presumed to obtain."⁹ Although significant advances in reducing the potential abuse of this power are made in the transitions from Hobbes's monarchy to Kant's republic to Rawls's modern liberal democracy, the necessary exercise of violent coercive power remains, and so does the temptation for elected leaders or even a democratic majority to wield that power unjustly in order to advance their own interests.

Indeed, as Alasdair MacIntyre has described the contemporary moral experience, the external application of force as the security of morality results in using force or manipulation to achieve one's own ends.

Seeking to protect the autonomy that we have learned to prize, we aspire ourselves *not* to be manipulated by others; seeking to incarnate our own principles and stand-point in the world of practice, we find no way open to us to do so except by directing toward others those very manipulative models of relationship which each of us aspires to resist in our own case.¹⁰

This dependence upon coercive power and manipulation in order to protect the egoistic pursuit of one's own life and liberty transforms moral debate into a struggle for power. It also works against the development of internal sources of motivation for benevolent action on behalf of others, something that I believe is an essential core value of the Anabaptist Story.

Might the recent US presidential election, for example, demonstrate how many Christians (and possibly Mennonites, too) voted for George W. Bush's "family values" platform out of a desire to manipulate others into moral agreement rather than out of a compassionate concern for those suffering as a result of immoral and unjust laws and policies? A democracy is always in danger of being transformed into a theocracy whenever control of the government becomes a substitute for Spirit-empowered witness that always holds out hope for the conversion of one's neighbors. If fellow citizens cannot be trusted to discern the truth together, then they must be manipulated into moral action, by force if necessary. While the tradition of radical protest against injustice within the larger

Democracy Story appears to reflect a greater openness to dialogue, part of its legacy is not mutual cooperation or commitment to dialogue but co-option of power and the ability to manipulate others in a new, albeit more just, direction.

The appropriate parallel to the core Anabaptist conviction that Grimsrud identifies as the refusal to fight in wars¹¹ and the belief that violence is not necessary to resolve conflicts of interests is the conviction from the Democracy Story that violent coercion *is* necessary to limit the violence that occurs as a result of a natural state of war between human individuals. I therefore disagree that only the Democracy Story “raised *for the first time* the possibility that violence and human government need not be inextricably linked” (my emphasis).¹² Does this statement not marginalize (even if unintentionally) Jesus’ teachings on nonviolent human social interaction, and the subsequent organization of the church as a *polis* that could exist as a political body without resort to violent coercion?¹³ It was not the Democracy Story that *first raised* the possibility that violence and human government need not be inextricably linked, but Jesus and the New Testament church – a vision that was caught and given new life in the Anabaptist Story.

Other parallel but nevertheless distinct convictions may include these: (1) the Anabaptist conviction of the church as free from state control, against the liberal democratic conviction of the state as free from church control; (2) the Anabaptist affirmation of upside-down social power (which John Howard Yoder calls “a theologically mandatory vesting of the right of dissent”), against a democratic affirmation of equality (which Yoder describes as the idea “that most people get to talk or that everybody gets counted”);¹⁴ and (3) an Anabaptist commitment to an alternative economics, against the close identification of the Democracy Story with free-market capitalism (at least in the United States).¹⁵

I do affirm with Grimsrud that the emergence of the secular Democracy Story offers new possibilities for nonviolent cooperation and demonstrates a greater openness for critique. The need for engagement is obvious not only because we must proclaim Jesus as Lord over all areas of life but because, as Grimsrud cautions:

If we do not have a clear sense for how our theologically-based convictions *link* with pragmatically- and humanistically-grounded convictions we will be more likely to toss them aside when they are challenged. We all know stories of people who “lose their faith” when they encounter a wider world that their narrow “first language” has not prepared them to deal with.¹⁶

This seems to be one of the parallel dangers presented by Anabaptist opportunities for engagement in the wider culture. If we withdraw, we may become unable to speak to competing claims to “lordship.” But the twin temptation is equally dangerous – to become engaged uncritically. That there is no single source or definition of the Democracy Story may demonstrate the validity of arguments by Ted Koontz and Stanley Hauerwas on needing to be clear about the distinctive beliefs of the Anabaptist Story. We must deconstruct which parts of the Democracy Story we are advocating and which ones we must challenge. Thus, as Yoder writes in “The Christian Case for Democracy,”

[I]f we claim for democracy the status of a social institution *sui generis*, we shall inflate ourselves and destroy our neighbors through the demonic demands of the claims we make for our system and we shall pollute our Christian faith by making of it a civil religion. If on the other hand we protect ourselves from the Constantinianism of that view of democracy, we may find the realistic liberty to foster and to celebrate relative democratization as one of the prophetic ministries of a servant people in a world we do not control.¹⁷

The crucial variable is not democracy, but a supererogatory concern for others that is both central to the Anabaptist Story and shared by some within the Democracy Story.

Finally, I would like to put forward Just Peacemaking Theory as one example of a strategy of engagement that attempts to be both biblically based and practically viable in the public square, i.e., both faithful to the Anabaptist Story and supportive of the positive features of the Democracy Story.

One of the ten practices of Just Peacemaking Theory is to “Advance Democracy, Human Rights, and Religious Liberty” in recognition of the fact that “the more democratic the states are, the more peaceful their relations are likely to be. In their disputes with each other, democracies are more likely to employ democratic means of peaceful conflict resolution.”¹⁸ Moreover, the development of democratic reforms can be linked with a greater respect for human rights and religious liberty, the “stuff” of democracy to which Grimsrud refers. The particular strength of Just Peacemaking Theory as it relates to the Anabaptist Story, however, is that it does not rest upon advocacy of democracy and human rights alone. Encouragement for democratic forms of government is joined by four principles that stress the need for peacemaking initiatives: supporting nonviolent direct action; taking independent initiatives

to reduce threat; using cooperative conflict resolution; and acknowledging responsibility for conflict and injustice, and seeking repentance and forgiveness. These transforming initiatives follow closely from those taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, and they affirm what I have referred to as central to the Anabaptist Story – a supererogatory ethic in human social relationships that goes beyond traditional understandings of social contract or covenant theories. Just Peacemaking Theory thus allows us to “celebrate relative democratization” while at the same time challenging the coercive violence of both the Democracy Story and the Empire Story.

Notes

¹ I am grateful to Glen Stassen and Rob Muthiah for their constructive suggestions for improving earlier drafts of this essay.

² Ted Grimsrud, “Anabaptism and Democracy,” *MQR* 78.3 (2004): 342.

³ *Ibid.*, Note 52, 360.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 346.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 346-51.

⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: Parts I and II* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1958), 106-07.

⁷ John Howard Yoder seems to make a similar point in his essay, “The Christian Case for Democracy,” in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 169: “Some of the contract theories are relatively pessimistic in that they see the purpose of the contract to be reciprocal control over the threats which we represent to each other.”

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, trans. M. Campbell Smith (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1948), 9.

⁹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 456-57.

¹⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, second ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 68.

¹¹ Grimsrud, 344.

¹² *Ibid.*, Note 4, 344.

¹³ Cf. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, second ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 52-53; Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1964), 17.

¹⁴ Yoder, “The Christian Case for Democracy,” 168.

¹⁵ The Anabaptist core convictions are those given by Grimsrud, 344-45.

¹⁶ Grimsrud, 357.

¹⁷ Yoder, “The Christian Case for Democracy,” 164-65.

¹⁸ Bruce Russett, “Advance Democracy, Human Rights, and Religious Liberty” in Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998), 97.

In Praise of the Least Oppressive Oligarchy

Peter C. Blum

*Of all the forms of oligarchy, democracy is the least
oppressive, since it provides the strongest language
of justification and therefore of critique which
the subjects may use to mitigate its oppressiveness.*

– John Howard Yoder¹

My response to Ted Grimsrud's paper, "Anabaptist Faith and American Democracy,"² is thoroughly positive. While I intend to spell out this response in a substantive way, it is important to begin by describing some of the personal background I bring to this discussion. I grew up not knowing anything about Mennonites, in a family that took for granted what Grimsrud calls "the Democracy Story," never worrying about its being intertwined with an "Empire Story." I attended a Mennonite high school, went on to a Mennonite college, married Mennonite, and have now been Mennonite all of my adult life.

My early immersion in Anabaptist thought in the late 1970s and early '80s at Goshen College gave me the general impression that Anabaptist convictions imply an antipathy towards the Democracy Story, now seen as little more than a mask worn by the Empire Story. This was wedded to an impression that, given the political spectrum in the US, Anabaptist convictions regarding peace and justice are generally more compatible with the left than with the right. My pilgrimage away from these impressions has taken me through a series of tempestuous affairs with various kinds of "conservative" political and social thought, and into employment at an academic institution often associated with the right, where I regularly follow Jesus' example by "eating with Republicans and sinners."³

Though I remain thoroughly confused and mostly disgusted by politics, broadly speaking, it has become increasingly clear to me that liberal democracy is emphatically not, as some would have it, "a bad idea."⁴ It has also become clear that my own understanding of Anabaptist ecclesiology, rather than being in tension with my liking for liberal democracy as I have often assumed, is in some ways fully consistent with it. Grimsrud's reflections help confirm that

growing conviction. In what follows, I first call attention to the continuity between Grimsrud's relatively positive assessment of democracy and a similarly positive, though somewhat neglected, assessment advanced by John Howard Yoder. I then turn to brief critical reflections on the notion of multiple "stories" or "languages." I conclude with some remarks on the urgency of the issues in question in a North American Anabaptist-Mennonite context.

In the essay, "The Christian Case for Democracy,"⁵ we find John Howard Yoder's most explicit discussion of whether, and in what sense, democracy should be considered the best form of human government. At one level, Yoder's response to this question, though affirmative, is far from final or unqualified. He wonders aloud if perhaps we need to "keep the question open" in order to maintain a "realistic" perspective. It is no surprise that he emphasizes the Constantinian character of the question, noting that it is raised against a backdrop of "mainstream" assumptions about moral discourse – assumptions that Yoder has questioned throughout his writings. But his answer is still ultimately affirmative. If we can remain vigilant regarding the Constantinian temptation, "we may find the realistic liberty to foster and celebrate relative democratization as one of the prophetic ministries of a servant people in a world we do not control" (166).

At the heart of these reflections lies what Yoder describes as a "provocative paradigm," drawn from Jesus' teaching about the political difference between his disciples and "the rulers of the nations" who "lord it over them" (156). Domination is accepted by Jesus as the way of government among the nations; it is neither affirmed nor condemned, but observed as a fact. More important, the authority figures in this sphere employ a language of legitimation that casts them as benefactors. In Yoder's reading, the latter is still more of an empirical observation than a value judgment. He neither endorses legitimacy claims nor unmasks them as ideology. Rather, he clarifies that the politics of discipleship will follow a different path:

"But it shall not be so among you; you shall be servants because I am your servant." After having described realistically both the fact of rule and the fact of value claims being made for that rule, Jesus locates himself and his disciples in a different ethical game. They are not to take over that game of "rulers-making-a-case-for-their-benevolence" nor are they to attempt to

interfere with it. They are called simply to do something else. The meaning of that “something else” is the alternative answer to the question of government which is represented by the servant Messiah. (156)

The difference of discipleship is not opposed to, but *otherwise than*, the facticity of domination and the legitimating language of beneficence. “Since Constantine,” Yoder says, “we have fused those three levels. . . . This mixes the descriptive and the prescriptive, interweaving the language which justifies coercion with that which guides voluntary discipleship” (157). As is so often the case in Yoder’s analysis, the discussion is dominated by the assumption “that we are talking about government of Christians and by Christians” (157).

The crucial point from Yoder’s discussion that makes contact with Grimsrud’s essay is that the alterity of the politics of Jesus does not imply anything like silence or mere indifference with regard to the politics of the nations. As cautious and appropriately provisional as Yoder’s endorsement of liberal democracy is, it is an endorsement. *Pace* standard characterizations of Yoder’s thought as “sectarian” (read “apolitical,” or worse, “quietistic”), a clear thesis of his essay is that democracy appears as *preferable* from the viewpoint of a disciple of Jesus. This preference, I take it, is based on the same general rationale that underlies Grimsrud’s essay. Liberal democracy is committed to a legitimating story with which we may express carefully qualified agreement, and on which we may freely draw in prophetic calls for the mitigation of oppression.⁶

Neither Yoder nor Grimsrud is advocating a simple acceptance of the substance of democratic legitimacy claims as *true*. Yoder especially takes pains to underline this:

When I have the good fortune to find myself in a situation where part of the rulers’ language of justification is the claim to have the consent of the governed, then I can use the machinery of democracy and am glad to do so. But I do not therefore believe that I am governing myself or that “we” as “the people” are governing ourselves. We are still governed by an elite, most of whose decisions are not submitted to the people for approval. . . . The consent of the governed, the built-in controls of constitutionality,

checks and balances, and the bill of rights do not constitute the fact of government; they only mitigate it. . . . It remains the nature of the civil order itself that its coercive control is prior to any justifications or qualifications thereof. (158-59)

Nevertheless, Yoder's insistent "realism" regarding the facticity of domination does not detract from his inclination to see democracy as most compatible with "the dignity of dissent; the ability of the outsider, the other, the critic to speak and be heard. This is not majority rule; it is minority leverage" (167). Though Yoder does not emphasize the point through his choice of terms, it is not just democracy in the abstract that is under consideration here, but *liberal* democracy in particular, democracy that is consistently fearful of what Tocqueville called "the tyranny of the majority." In terms I have employed elsewhere, a trope shared by the languages of liberal democracy and Christian discipleship is that of "openness to the Other."⁷

For Grimsrud, the discussion of democracy and Anabaptist faith is explicitly cast in terms of distinguishable, competing "stories." The issue is the compatibility or incompatibility of the Anabaptist Story, the Democracy Story, and the Empire Story. This way of framing the discussion raises a problem (or perhaps a nest of problems) that is also implicit in Yoder's discussion. At the most general level (and at the risk of a certain academic clumsiness), I believe the problem(s) may be characterized by reference to the specter of "systemic incommensurability." The idea of alternative and potentially conflicting stories or languages recalls thorny discussions across academic disciplines about "rationality" and "relativism." Simply stated, it seems that our talk of stories or languages implies two options for how stories or languages are related to each other. We might think, on the one hand, there is a metanarrative or metalanguage that provides a final or "absolute" frame of reference for adjudicating questions of truth, rationality, validity, etc. Or we might think, on the other hand, that claims regarding access to, or even the existence of, such an absolute framework are not credible. One way lies an "absolutism," the other way lies "relativism" (and its even more frightening sibling, "nihilism"). Many of us are increasingly unable to accept either apparent option. The real question, in the end, is not which option is correct but whether this way of setting up the problem is fundamentally misleading.

This nest of problems has been addressed from various directions in recent philosophy, in both its European and Anglo-American streams. Though a number of perspectives have arguably contributed to rethinking these issues, careful discussion of such contributions in theological contexts is relatively recent. In Anabaptist-Mennonite contexts, where academic or “theoretical” modes of inquiry have often met higher-than-average levels of suspicion, these contributions are only beginning to receive serious consideration. I raise this especially in relation to Grimsrud’s way of framing his essay, but not to suggest that it undermines his arguments. My concern, rather, is that these problems must receive more explicit attention if further discussion among Anabaptist-Mennonite scholars is to bear substantial fruit. (Elsewhere I have made a start towards exploring this point, in connection with Yoder’s work in particular⁸ as well as more generally.⁹)

Some final words are in order regarding the urgency of the general discussion encouraged by Grimsrud’s essay. It is a dual urgency, arising from both current national politics and current denominational politics in the United States. At the level of national politics, the ongoing possibility of publicly advancing claims that arise specifically from Christian discipleship is radically and unavoidably problematic. If we wish to proclaim, or even simply to *live*, our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus, we cannot escape the fact that the very notion of “following Jesus” is essentially contested. Grimsrud’s call to active, critical, but friendly engagement in democratic political discourse is arguably a necessary prerequisite to the intelligible communication of what Anabaptists take to be the good news in contemporary North America. Liberal democracy is committed to holding open a space where we may noncoercively but passionately contend with others whose magisterial definitions of Christianity become de facto definitions *of us*, hence often drawing us toward the frigid extreme of one or another pole where discourse is potentially drowned out by the chattering of teeth.

Of even greater concern is the level of denominational politics. I take it as a central emphasis of Anabaptist ecclesiology that discernment – including discernment of the meaning and application of scripture – should take place at the level of the local, gathered community. Here I will be most audacious in the interest of stimulating further conversation, even though I am least able in this context to provide substantial support for my claims. Reflecting on the meaning and importance of this emphasis has been a central element of my own intellectual

and spiritual struggles in recent years. As the results of congregational discernment become more diverse, I am disturbed by the ease with which some Mennonites seem to abandon this emphasis in the interest of a “Truth” to which they ostensibly have access apart from such a discernment process. Since “the Bible is clear” on certain issues (a current favorite in the US is homosexuality), it seems obvious to some that positions on those issues should be defined at a higher level, as the “teaching positions” of the denomination.

As I have explored the emphasis on local community discernment in the Anabaptist tradition, I have come to see a tension between the submission or yieldedness (*Gelassenheit*) of the individual to the community, and the individualism so often associated with liberal democracy. But when discussions of individual and community remain vague and superficial, they too readily assume a binary opposition, an all-or-nothing choice between the two. “Old Order” Amish and Mennonite communities are widely viewed as illiberal and authoritarian, as anti-democratic. Yet even in these cases, however imperfect the practice may be at times, the underlying principles (both implicitly presupposed and explicitly appealed to) are those of a discernment process in which all the members have a voice; those in leadership are, in principle, servant facilitators of the shared discernment process.¹⁰

As far as I have been able to tell, the Anabaptist ideal of the discerning local community is basically indistinguishable from the idea of direct participatory democracy. I suspect that it is only in such a local community, small enough for all its members to know each other well, that the full participation of individuals in their own governance is a real possibility. This is emphatically not to make any “utopian” claims as to the inherent goodness of the small community; the shadow cast by the facticity of dominion is never *absent* even at the local level.¹¹ My suggestion, rather, is that there may be a significant difference in the *ability to manage* our implication in that facticity at any level of social reality above the local community. In sociological jargon, the Anabaptist ideal of local discernment may entail a relational context dominated by primary relationships (oriented toward persons as ends) rather than secondary relationships (oriented toward persons as means).

Ted Grimsrud has done us a great service by encouraging and contributing to the discussion of Anabaptist faith and democracy. My comments here are intended primarily as supportive of his general position, but also as further contributions to this urgent conversation.

Notes

¹ John Howard Yoder, "The Christian Case for Democracy" in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 151-71, at 158-59.

² Ted Grimsrud, "Anabaptist Faith and American Democracy," *MQR* 78.3 (2004): 341-62.

³ Though it may have other origins ultimately, I owe this phrasing most directly to Ned Wyse.

⁴ In addition to Anabaptist-Mennonite colleagues and friends with whom I have discussed these issues, I am deeply indebted to several students who participated with me in a recent seminar on the concept of community at Hillsdale College. I am especially grateful to Elizabeth Crepeau Ehlen for her stubborn suspicions regarding the perspectives of John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas, and for passionately but lovingly challenging a number of my more illiberal tendencies.

⁵ Yoder, "The Christian Case for Democracy." Parenthetical page references in the following discussion are to this essay.

⁶ Consider the thoroughly "liberal" texture of Yoder's own phrasings, at times. An example that many of us – recalling the essay originally dates back to 1977 – will find remarkably prescient: "We are more likely to fall into international anarchy (i.e., war) or into domestic war when people do take over the government with too strong a sense of divine calling to set things right, with the national order as instrument" (159).

⁷ See Peter C. Blum, "Community, Totality, and Hospitality: On the Openness of Anabaptist Community," *Brethren Life and Thought*. 48.3 & 4 (Summer and Fall 2003): 159-75.

⁸ See Peter C. Blum, "Foucault, Genealogy, Anabaptism: Confessions of an Errant Postmodernist" in Susan Biesecker-Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast, eds., *Anabaptists and Postmodernity* (Pandora Press US and Herald Press, 2000), 60-74; Blum, "Yoder's Patience and/or with Derrida's Differance" in Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz, eds., *A Mind Patient and Untamed: Assessing John Howard Yoder's Contribution to Theology, Ethics, and Peacemaking* (Cascadia Publishing House, 2004), 75-88.

⁹ The specifically Anabaptist discussion in Peter C. Blum, "Heidegger's Shoes and Beautiful Feet: Ritual and Cultural Portability," *MQR* 79 (January 2005): 89-107, draws theoretical substance from "Overcoming Relativism? Levinas' Return to Platonism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 28.1 (Spring 2000): 91-117.

¹⁰ See the nuanced discussions of Old Order Amish decision making in Donald B. Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

¹¹ Here I am inclined to be critical of Yoder's discussion, insofar as its phrasings often seem to imply that the phrase "facticity of dominion" describes a reality found outside of the community of disciples and not within it. Yoder's primary reference here is to an imperative regarding a church's self-understanding, as opposed to the empirical distance of churches from that understanding. Yoder surely would have claimed (justifiably) to be fully aware of this empirical distance, and there is evidence throughout his writings of this awareness. But I do not intend to dismiss claims that Yoder may underemphasize problems of power and oppression within the community of faith, and in ways that may be deeply problematic.

Columbus's America and Emerson's America

Peter Dula

The idea of two Americas, put forth in Ted Grimsrud's essay, is one that I have thought about a great deal in the last several months in Iraq. Most of my friends here are French, Spanish, and Italian. They go to great lengths to stay as far away from Americans as possible. In fact, one of them has strict regulations about avoiding contact with Americans, and many more refuse any kind of formal partnerships with US organizations. But all of them make exceptions for the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). I have been to dozens of NGO parties where an MCC colleague and I were the only Americans. Often the conversation would turn to complaints about Americans (the way they look, dress, or talk, how much they eat, the way they vote) followed by apologies – 'Oops, sorry, I keep forgetting you are one of them.' At that point I would often note the irony that such conversations were taking place against the backdrop of a very loud stereo playing REM, Beck, Lou Reed, or even Sinatra, all quintessentially American artists.

When I talk about two Americas here I mean Empire America, an empire possible in part because there is no civic nation, and the Artists' America, the wild riot of our novels, films, and music. I will call them by the names of their founders, Columbus's America and Emerson's America. I will get to something more like Grimsrud's distinctions later.

Withdrawal has a long and noble lineage in the mythology of Emerson's America. I don't mean the American mythology of the high school history books, of the politicians' America, or of John Rawls, but the very different American mythology as presented on film and in literature. Thoreau headed for the pond to escape the 'quiet desperation' of his neighbors in Concord. Huck Finn lights out for the territories once he realizes that Missouri is unlivable. Shane rides off into the darkness after his attempt to rejoin civilization is foiled. He is pushed out, reminded that there is nothing for him but withdrawal. Bogart's Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe, one expects, have merely stayed out.¹ But we do not blame them. Their America, which is called 'California,' unlike Shane's, is uninhabitable. Philip Roth's Zuckerman lives alone like a hermit, because, he says, it is the only way 'to keep the shit at bay.'²

These are Emerson's compatriots, inhabitants of the city of words he founded, which he called 'this new yet unapproachable America.'³ Why 'unapproachable'? Why are its inhabitants withdrawn, or withdrawn from? Most obviously because this America, the one founded not by Columbus but by Emerson, a land of myth and dream existing in, and beckoning from, Emerson's prose, is not something you can simply approach. You have to be born into it, 'born again' as Emerson puts it. It is also unapproachable in that you cannot get nearer to it because it is right next to us. It is in our laps. For some reason we cannot take hold of it, perhaps because we are not trying hard enough. But that doesn't seem to quite get at what Emerson thinks. He writes, 'I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch the hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition.'⁴ If you read closely, you hear the connection between those clutching fingers and the hand in our 'unhandsome condition' and you may begin to think, as Stanley Cavell does, that the objects are not slippery in themselves. Our clutching makes them slippery. It is a parable of philosophy's violence.⁵

Emerson feels the burden of this unapproachability as acutely as any thinker I know. In 'Self-Reliance' he says of Americans, 'Every word they say chagrins us and we know not where to begin to set them right.'⁶ The 'us' is important. We are chagrined by each other. All of us harbor different visions of America, none of which can be adjudicated – a way of saying we are still not democrats. Furthermore, it confesses Emerson's own weakness and complicity. 'We know not where to begin to set them right': Emerson offers no place where words can be safe – not in church, not among the proletariat, not in a Scottish fishing village. 'Every word they say chagrins us': whether it is the speech of our politicians or the advertisers, or the fact that millions of Americans will, on any birthday, wedding, or death, allow their sentiments to be expressed by Hallmark instead of by themselves.⁷

The problem is that *every* word chagrins us. Cavell suggests Emerson recalls here the opening of Aristotle's *Politics*, where we are told it is language that fits us for political association.⁸ Emerson says the same thing, but in a minor key so it sounds like language fates us, condemns us, to political association, as if language is itself a prison, the 'zoo of words' to use Nabokov's terrifying image. Emerson is saying that politics in this country called America

chagrins him. Or, as Cavell puts it, 'America has not yet been discovered.' There is no civic nation, no Democracy Story.⁹

If every word chagrins us, this means there are no words left for Emerson that aren't the same as the chagrining words. The words we share in common are all the words we've got.¹⁰ So the heroes of Emerson's America perform an act of withdrawal. They deny their audience; they write for everyone and no one; they attempt to turn their stammering into irony, paradox, pun. That is, they write like Emerson, Nietzsche, or Wittgenstein. They write like the modernist artist painted and sculpted. They deny their audience in hopes of creating a new one.¹¹ Cavell wrote of modernist art, 'The loss of a public is in fact the artist's withdrawal from his public, as a consequence of his faithfulness to his art. The public is lost to art because they are readying themselves for war, for life by the gun. They are also lost because of art, because art maintains itself against their assaults, and because, almost against its will, it unsettles the illusions by means of which civilized people conduct themselves.'¹²

Why is this so hard for theology to understand? One way to approach it would be to wonder why theology is so preoccupied with the question of the 'public' and so resistant to the redefinitions that, say, John Howard Yoder tried to give to that term. Instead, I am asking what words we might substitute for 'artist' and 'art' in Cavell's statement. Could we substitute 'theologian' for 'artist'? Why not? Because the proper analogical terms are not theologian and church, but Christian and church? Could we honestly substitute 'church' for 'art'? Are discussions like this one, and the many preceding it, just covers for the anxiety that even if we could withdraw we don't deserve to? That we haven't earned the right, or that we have lost the right, to withdraw? That we are part of the public, participants in Empire, just insofar as we are not yet democrats? What is democracy? Who is a democrat?

Democracy does not name a pre-designed framework of principles, rights, privileges, and institutions presented to the people as a gift from the elites, though some such framework will be indispensable. It names a space in which diverse individuals and groups come together in hopes of discovering how their interests are tangled up with each other's interests. In doing so, they are forged into political beings. They may fear that in this conversation they might have to compromise, but they persist in hoping that they might be

transformed. Democracy encourages the voicing of differences, and welcomes and demands dissent from the most unruly corners of the demos. But it is never difference for the sake of difference or unruliness for its own sake. Democracy is deliberation about how the goals of individuals and groups might be seen as interconnected, and about how those goals may not be able to be formulated, let alone achieved, in isolation. Democracy is deliberation about what constitutes the good and how to achieve it, not about how to achieve a good known in advance through strategies known in advance. Furthermore, that good is never allowed to become a ‘common good,’ if this means a good that becomes reified in such a way as to overrule emerging conflicts, one that is not allowed to be provisional but instead becomes a possession.

That many so-called democrats too often forget this is one reason Sheldon Wolin, who for many of us has come to define the political and to whom the previous paragraph is indebted, insists that democracy has become fugitive. Now that the spaces of democracy have been colonized by the internal workings of Empire, now that the civic nation has been swallowed up by the megastate – the Economic Polity, governmentality, the society of control, pick your description – the moments of democracy’s achievement are fleeting, episodic, and local. But for Wolin this is not a problem. He writes,

The true question is not whether democracy can govern in the traditional sense, but why it would want to. Governing means manning and accommodating to bureaucratized institutions that, *ipso facto*, are hierarchical in structure and elitist, permanent rather than fugitive – in short, anti-democratic. . . . Accordingly, small scale is the only scale commensurate with the kind and amount of power that democracy is capable of mobilizing, given the prevailing modes of economic organization. The power of a democratic politics lies in the multiplicity of modest sites dispersed among local governments and institutions under local control.’¹³

This is Wolin’s version of the Democracy Story and the Empire Story. I am largely persuaded by it, though I want to let Emerson guard against any attempt to read nostalgia into Wolin’s account of American history.

I am struck most by the differences between Wolin's version and Grimsrud's, yet I am open to the argument that the latter may have a similar meaning. Such an argument would have to explain the relative priority in Grimsrud's account of democracy of things like 'voting and office-holding' or the repeated insistence on influencing the government. It would also have to explain the near-total lack of attention to the local and the small scale, and be clearer that the validity of democracy is *not* to be understood as dependent upon its influence over our government. Despite Grimsrud's criticisms of the nation-state, his repeated references to 'public policy' suggest he is far less aware than Wolin that democracy is an end in itself that is likely to be squandered when it attempts to find a home in federal institutions. For Grimsrud, instead of containing hierarchical and elitist bureaucracies that are essentially anti-democratic, it is as if the Democracy Story includes a set of institutions that are essentially in good order but are being misused. This difference has to do with his failure to develop a critique of liberal democracy. As it is, his democracy can seem like it is just Rawls plus religious voices. That is a good thing, but the critique of Rawls offered by Stout (not to mention Wolin) goes much deeper and is much more unsettling. It reveals liberalism as 'a program of social control.'¹⁴ For Grimsrud, however, America's violence is almost exclusively identified with foreign policy. The bad America is the one of militarism and imperialism, not the corporatist state at home.

If Wolin is correct, what light does he throw on 'let the church be the church'? What is the difference between that admonition and being part of the multiplicity of modest sites under local control? What if 'let the church be the church' meant being part of that multiplicity? It would not have to mean that Mennonites 'have the responsibility to speak out openly and assertively in contributing to democracy by playing a role in the public conversation by which our society arrives at governmental policies.' It would mean the careful cultivation of a radically democratic church life, what Yoder called 'a free-church ecclesiology,' based on the vision of 1 Corinthians 12-14. It would strive to enact in its own life what has been made impossible by contemporary configurations of power. It would by no means rule out 'openly and assertively . . . contributing to democracy by playing a role in the public conversation by which our society arrives at governmental policies,' but doing so would not be seen as particularly democratic, let alone as a privileged mode of fulfilling the

mandate to work for a more just society. Instead, it would focus on entering into alliances and coalitions with other outposts of the multiplicitous witness for something more humane than the administered society. Not, however, only to promote an agenda but to discern an agenda, and to be transformed in the process. This would not be done in addition to being the church. It would be done out of the recognition that being the church demands vulnerable encounters with others. Only then will our eyes be pried open to the sins we are too blind to notice without the prodding of outsiders, and only then will we have the opportunity for confession, hence forgiveness.

Notes

¹ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Enlarged ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 56.

² *American Pastoral* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 64.

³ Emerson, 'Experience,' in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 485.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 473.

⁵ For much of this paragraph, I am indebted to Cavell, 'Finding as Founding,' in *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures After Emerson After Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1989).

⁶ *Essays and Lectures*, 264.

⁷ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 245.

⁸ *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 24.

⁹ At least not Grimsrud's version of it. We will get to Sheldon Wolin's version shortly.

¹⁰ To say that Emerson, and we, have no words but all those words we have in common, the current use of which chagrins us, is to deny that Emerson is the conventional individualist of liberal philosophy. For Emerson, the social is everywhere. As Cavell puts it, 'In Emerson, as in Wittgenstein, I encounter the social in every utterance and in each silence. Sometimes this means that I find in myself nothing but social, dictated thoughts (the condition Emerson opposes as "conformity," what philosophy has forever called the unexamined life); sometimes it means that I find in the social nothing but chaos' (*Cities of Words*, 4).

¹¹ Ted Koontz beautifully modeled this kind of Emersonian self-reliance in his remarks to the Ethics War and Peace conference in Jerusalem, a story he tells in the essay Grimsrud is criticizing (see *MQR* 77.1 [2003]). Grimsrud likes this part of the essay because it is an example of 'first language discourse' but thinks Koontz should decline ever to use 'second-language discourse.' But it is not clear if Grimsrud is saying, 'always use the language of Christian faith and never the language of secular and pragmatic considerations,' or that the distinction too easily breaks down, or that second language use is okay, just so long as it is

Arundhati Roy, Jonathan Schell, and Noam Chomsky and not the 'pragmatic' discourse of the politicians. While preparing these remarks I spent a day in Washington, DC, meeting with Senate staffers and officials at the State Department and National Security Council to talk about Iraq. There I quite freely used the sort of 'second language' Koontz recommends. Not doing so was and is a bit hard for me to imagine. I wonder if first and second languages is the best way to phrase the options. Wittgenstein pictures language as an old city. In that case there is only one language in question. What Koontz calls 'first language' we might then call the part of the city where we grew up. Wittgenstein's image may make it easier to see how the lines between first and second languages are often rather difficult to discern.

¹² *The World Viewed*, 230.

¹³ *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Expanded ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 602-03. See also the introduction to Wolin, *The Presence of the Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 5: 'Less than two hundred fifty years ago, "America" was primarily the name for diffused powers represented by thirteen provincial societies and their scattered towns, villages, and settlements. Now it signifies an imperial system struggling to preserve its global influence while simultaneously launching its power into outer space.'

¹⁴ Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 81.

Negotiating Democracy: Mennonite Reflections A Reply to Respondents

Ted Grimsrud

I

My essay, “Anabaptist Faith and American Democracy,” originated as a public lecture given in June 2003 to a MennoNeighbors theology forum in Harrisonburg, Virginia. The lecture, entitled “Anabaptist Faith and the Wars of America,” sought to respond to the United States invasion and occupation of Iraq. Various responses, friendly and not-so-friendly, helped me develop the ideas further and recast the essay as a more general meditation on Mennonites and democracy.¹

Perhaps the war in Iraq remains a useful case for laying out the issues I am most concerned with. How do we as Anabaptist Christians in North America respond to this war? Many US Mennonites, it would appear, implicitly support it – or at least support the people directly responsible for it. I am not aware of hard data, but most observers seem to have the clear impression that many Mennonites and Amish, especially in the “battleground states” of Ohio and Pennsylvania, strongly supported the Bush/Cheney ticket in the 2004 election. This impression raises a significant question: What do we make of the support (supposedly) peace-loving Mennonites would give to a war-initiating president?

Many more US (and probably Canadian) Mennonites remain aloof concerning the war. Either they cannot be bothered with “political” issues or they believe they should not be distracted from “kingdom work” by the things of this world and its wars and rumors of wars. However, there are also many of us, perhaps especially clustered around our church colleges and seminaries and in the Mennonite urban diaspora, who overtly oppose the war.

Drawing upon Ted Koontz’s *MQR* essay that speaks directly to this issue, “Thinking Theologically About War Against Iraq,”² we may identify two options for Mennonite war opponents. The first option is to enter the public discussion on the terms of public policy makers and secular society in general, more or less using lowest common denominator vocabulary, speaking pragmatically in light of universally accepted humanitarian concerns and of

genuine national interest. With this approach, we would *avoid* speaking out of our specific, faith-based Christological convictions, trying to communicate more broadly in public, “secular” language.³ The second option is to speak overtly from our specific religious convictions, what Koontz calls our “first language” of Anabaptist/Mennonite Christian pacifism. If we choose this option, we must – in Koontz’s argument – recognize the limitations to the relevance of this language. We simply will not be understandable or persuasive to public policy makers, because this first language is not very accessible to those in the “second language” realm of the public policy arena in a secular society. So, in this option, we focus as much on remaining clear among ourselves about our pacifism (and helping to keep it alive) and its christological bases as on trying directly to influence public policy.

I find neither option satisfactory. One problem with the first option is that when we speak strictly in terms of universal, broadly understandable pragmatic and humanitarian concerns, we will likely not be speaking and acting out of our deepest convictions. This is my biggest issue with Scott Holland’s proposal. I share his concern that our Anabaptist communities *not* “become yet one more sectarian, sacred reservation of spirit in a blessed fallen world” – and that we engage fully in seeking the *social* good for the entire world. Yet I fear that with his public ethics/personal morality split, Holland cuts Anabaptists off from the very heart of their best contribution to the public conversation and from the passion of heart he rightly values so highly. Nor, if we speak only in Holland’s “public language,” will we likely contribute much to the broader discussion, because we will not be adding anything to it from our unique perspective and tradition. I believe that seeing the world through Christian pacifist lenses allows us to see some things others do not normally see. Our special insights may be contributed as angles of view that would otherwise not likely be entered into the conversation.

The problem with option two is that we *ourselves* are putting limits on the relevance of our voice. While neither Peter Dula nor Matt Hamsher articulates his concern in ways that fully fit within this option, I fear that each, with his pessimism about civic society and the view of Liberalism as *the* dominant public philosophy (unlike Jeffrey Stout in *Democracy and Tradition*⁴, who sees Liberalism as only one of *many* democratic voices in the conversation), comes too close to this unwarranted *self*-limitation. The second

option may end up being a form of self-censorship wherein we decide ahead of time that our voice will not be offered to the wider conversation. As well, by limiting in effect the relevance of our Christian pacifist convictions and perceptions, we are granting a great deal of autonomy from God (as we perceive God) to the public realm.

In light of these problems, I am trying to work at another way of thinking about opposing the war in Iraq or, more generally, about participating in our nation's public policy conversations. I want to argue for seeking to do all we can to influence US public policy in light of our ethical convictions while remaining consistent with our identity as Anabaptist Christians.

What are the central elements of this identity? In my July 2004 essay I summarize four important distinctives that characterized the broad sweep of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement as a unique embodiment of Christian faith: (1) the establishment of a church free from state control; (2) the refusal to fight in wars; (3) the creation of communities structured around upside-down social power; and (4) the practice of an alternative economics characterized by a non-acquisitive spirit. In response to Jeremy Bergen's questioning whether these distinctives provide "an adequate way of leveraging an Anabaptist core," I would point out that I am careful to frame my retrieval as an attempt to "draw upon the radicality of that movement for help in negotiating our current citizenship challenges"⁵ – not to provide an objective, scientifically historical, merely descriptive account of the Anabaptist movement on its own terms. I am approaching that movement in an analogous way to how I approach the Bible – not as an inert historical object but as a story in which I continue to participate, asking what is most useful in it for my own faithfulness and that of my present-day community.

The Anabaptists formulated and articulated their core convictions as part of their sense of calling to be salt and light, contributing to the transformation of a world that in so many ways embodied rebelliousness against the rule of Jesus Christ. They understood their witness as being "for the nations," even in spite of the nations' hostility. Due to that hostility, the extent and effectiveness of their witness was severely limited. Anabaptists quickly bumped up against limits, facing severe persecution from the very start in early 1525 and lasting most of the rest of the sixteenth century and beyond. They were executed by the score, forced underground and into exile,

their transformative spirit soon reoriented toward a spirit of seeking simply to survive and find the few European pockets of toleration.

However, in the early twenty-first century context in North America we do not face the same limits imposed upon the early Anabaptists. We have both much greater potential for having a voice in shaping our nation's public policies and much greater safety in expressing our (perhaps) counter-cultural convictions. So, when we hear international voices urging us to do what we can to curb the violence of the US Empire, we cannot appeal to Anabaptist-like persecution or Soviet-like impregnable governmental leaders. Our main limitation, at least in regard to making an effort to join the public conversation if not in regard to our effectiveness, appears to come from our own self-imposed restraint.

Is it possible, contrary to the intimations of Koontz and others (most famously Stanley Hauerwas), to maintain our Anabaptist identity while involving ourselves in shaping public policies? According to Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*, the US democratic tradition says, Yes, we Anabaptist Christians may participate in public policy conversations *as* Anabaptist Christians – adding our distinctive voices to the discernment processes and remaining true to the most central elements of our identity. However, some of us are not so sure. Are we keeping faith with the world's victims of our nation's Empire Story, if we limit our own participation in the conversation prior to facing the kinds of externally imposed restrictions that limited our forebears? Positing too strong a sense of *incommensurability* between our convictions and the “outside world” (as do Koontz and Hauerwas, in my mind⁶) due to *our* assumptions about what “they” can understand, about the limits to the applicability of our convictions, and about the corrupting nature of our so-called “liberal society” places too many self-imposed limits on our participation.

I find it helpful to make a rudimentary distinction in thinking about our context in the United States between the “two Americas” I discuss in the essay – the Democracy Story and the Empire Story.⁷ There *is* incommensurability between our Anabaptist faith and faith in the Empire.⁸ However, unlike Koontz, I do not think of it in terms of Christians versus non-Christians. This split, as seems especially obvious since the rise of the Christian right, divides Christians from Christians.⁹ As well, we all surely know of, even work side-by-side with, people who share our deepest convictions concerning peace and opposition to war but do *not* identify themselves as Christians.

Admittedly, elements of the practice of democracy in the United States, and beliefs about democracy, are in tension with Anabaptist faith. However, the traditions, practices, and ideals of people who most fully embody the Democracy Story may on the most part be affirmed as compatible with our convictions. When I think of the Democracy Story, I think most of all of the great dissenters – Tom Paine, Henry David Thoreau, William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Jane Addams. Randolph Bourne, Eugene Debs, Fighting Bob LaFollette, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Noam Chomsky, Wendell Berry, Jim Wallis, Terry Tempest Williams, and on and on.¹⁰ And I could also use synonyms for the Democracy Story, such as Civil Rights Story, Anti-War Story, Religious Freedom Story, Labor Rights Story, etc. That is, perhaps the term “democracy” itself requires careful thought. I tend to think of “democracy” mostly in light of what John Howard Yoder called “the rule of Paul.”¹¹ By that he meant the full participation in decision-making and discernment processes of all people within the community – and the commitment to foster this participation and to resist efforts to limit it. To me, “democracy” in this sense is very Christian, very Anabaptist. Many other sources also flow into American democratic ideals, but part of how American democracy is supposed to work (as Stout so well articulates) is that all of us who have a voice should be using it.

II

All the respondents to my essay have made most helpful contributions to continuing the discussion. Jeremy Bergen captures very well my concern when he says I am proposing that faithfulness to the Anabaptist Story obligates its participants to: (1) engage in the pursuit of the common good, (2) reject and resist oppressive configurations of worldly power, (3) make practical, though not ultimate, use of democratic institutions for this end, and (4) continually discern how our convictions and practices, especially our peace position, can be an effective witness in the world. I especially appreciate Bergen’s framing this discussion more overtly in doctrinal terms, particularly his point that we are better served to reflect on the problem of “power” in the context of our doctrine of creation rather than our doctrine of sin. His cautiously optimistic view of the role of “democratic practices in the redeeming work of God outside the church” and that this follows from understanding the Holy

Spirit to be at work in the entire world, rings true. We need to take very seriously the Genesis chapter two image of the Spirit of God animating the “dust” and bringing forth the human being. Wherever there is life, the Spirit is present and at work.

I share Matt Hamsher’s perception that the Empire Story has profoundly corrupted the actual practice of democracy in the United States (and elsewhere, too). I would *not* want “to embrace all of civic America without reservation,” insofar as this corruption has spread to so many aspects of the practice of “democracy.” Certainly, right now (and all too often in the past) the rhetoric of “democracy” is being used to underwrite some of the most egregiously imperialist actions the US has ever undertaken. To Hamsher’s question, “What if the Democracy Story no less than the Empire Story is founded upon the violence of self-assertion at the expense of others?”, I say that to the extent this is true I would advocate rejection of, and resistance to, those streams. However, the way I have defined the Democracy Story leads me to argue that this violence is not an inherent part of that Story but a case of the Empire Story stealing the rhetoric of democracy for its *anti*-democratic purposes. I am trying to argue for a *critical*, discerning approach toward “the political climate in the US today” wherein Anabaptist Christians can make common cause with others who see in the Democracy Story bases for resisting the Empire Story.

Scott Holland has been making a tremendous contribution to our broader Anabaptist conversation of culture and faith dating back at least to his 1986 *Conrad Grebel Review* essay, “God in Public.” His writings never fail to provoke thought; he offers a crucial sensibility that challenges us toward openness to the treasures lying outside our particular tradition. Like Holland, I believe that the person of faith in North America is well-advised “to read both Jesus and Jefferson and to quote Emerson and Whitman as freely as Menno and Mack in the public square.” This is why I found Stout’s recent work so exciting; I take him to be calling us to quote *both* Emerson *and* Menno – in conversation with those quoting Jefferson *and* Moses, Whitman *and* Mohammad, Locke *and* Luther. My concern is that Holland at times seems to be relegating Jesus, Menno, Moses, Mohammad, and Luther to the realm of “personal morality,” a realm we are advised to keep clearly distinct from that of “public ethics.” Such counsel strikes me as precisely opposite to

what Anabaptist Christians in North America need to hear right now. Today, whether we approve or not, explicit Christian faith (so-called) is being planted right at the heart of the American public square – Christian faith that underwrites war, the death penalty, unrestricted corporate aggrandizement, hostility toward poor and vulnerable people, and other inhumane policies. To draw *directly* on our tradition – especially the peaceable way of Jesus and the Anabaptists – might be our signal contribution to “public ethics” in our present society.

I am pleased that Pete Blum brings John Howard Yoder’s essay, “The Christian Case for Democracy,” into the conversation. Blum’s reading of my discussion as complementing Yoder’s fits with my intention. This seems most clear in regard to my concern with how Christian pacifists as *pacifists* might understand their participation in North American public life. I believe that as pacifists we are required *both* to see the democratic nation-state as not being ultimate *and* to recognize we have a responsibility to take whatever options are open to us (and compatible with our Christian pacifism) to seek to influence public life in life-enhancing directions. Implied in Blum’s references to Yoder is the sense that one major way we might engage in public conversations is by critique, using the stated values and justifications of the Democracy Story as bases for challenging its actual practices that foster violence and injustice. I also agree with Blum and Yoder that there is a close connection between the nature of the practice of “participatory democracy” within our church communities and in the wider society.¹²

Blum’s comments about the “specter of ‘systemic incommensurability’” are helpful for understanding some of the responses my essay has received. Some people, perhaps those especially sympathetic with Hauerwas and Koontz, seem anxious about my suggestion that one loyal to the Anabaptist Story can engage fully in the Democracy Story without being seriously compromised by the Empire Story. A bit of that anxiety could stem from a sense that these stories (or “languages”) are truly incommensurable, that the Empire Story cannot be distinguished from the Democracy Story, and that if one seeks to work within the Democracy Story one has, in reality, to leave the Anabaptist Story. We do need much more discussion on this issue!

Peter Dula might be surprised that I quite agree with his drawing on Sheldon Wolin to characterize democracy. Dula writes, “democracy . . . names

a space in which diverse individuals and groups come together in hopes of discovering how their interests are tangled up with each other's interests. . . . Democracy is deliberation about what constitutes the good and how to achieve it." These thoughts closely approximate those of Stout, the main source for my perspective on the "Democracy Story." Dula says, "I am struck most by the differences between Wolin's version and Grimsrud's," but does not explain what those differences are. Based on his summary of Wolin, I cannot imagine what they are. Apparently Dula thinks one difference is that I would disagree with Wolin's view that "democracy" should not be preoccupied with "governing." However, given the priority I place on the "Anabaptist Story" and my numerous allusions to pacifism being at the core of our central contribution as Anabaptists to the Democracy Story, I do not believe we should seek to "govern." Dula writes disparagingly of "the relative priority in Grimsrud's account of democracy of things like 'voting and office-holding' or the repeated insistence on influencing the government." I wish he had given more weight to the more constructive latter two-thirds of my essay. In drawing on Stout, I am focusing on being part of the "conversation" and do not speak of voting, office holding, or influencing the government.

The four constructive points serving as the culmination of my argument focus on (1) being free to *critique* the Empire Story (meant to imply especially a critique of the anti-democratic nature of the American "hierarchical and elitist bureaucracies" that Dula accuses me of not caring about); (2) drawing on our pacifism to help our fellow citizens better understand how Empire subverts democracy; (3) bolstering humane, life-enhancing movements for self-determination around the world based on upside-down power – with the admittedly unstated assumption that such movements are "local and small-scale;" and (4) working at constructing alternative communities that embody peace – again an embrace of work that is local and small-scale. That is, I basically agree with Dula's portrayal of "democracy" and am bemused that he would have read me in the way he did.

Dula implies that I argue that focusing on "governmental policies" is the "privileged mode of fulfilling the mandate to work for a more just society." He contrasts this to "the careful cultivation of a radically democratic church life." In response, I point to the conclusion of my paper, where I state that a key element of a constructive Anabaptist response to the citizenship issue is this:

We are called to live as a people of faith shaped by God's mercy whose common life embodies that mercy. This calling likely will lead people of faith to live differently from their wider culture. The Anabaptist commitment to share life together in practical ways as a means of sustaining a witness to the way of Jesus remains central to the possibilities of genuinely living faithfully.¹³

I am most emphatically *not* suggesting that Anabaptist Christians privilege a focus on governmental policies over fostering a radically democratic church life. I have suffered too many bruises myself while seeking to foster this radically democratic church life in my ten years of pastoring and nearly ten more years now teaching in a church-owned college, though, to be flippantly idealistic about this task. The work to witness to the way of peace in our wider society *and* the work to build faith communities that embody that way are *both* essential elements of resisting the domination system – and are both very demanding.

Dula's questions challenge me to restate the burden of my essay in this way: Our work as Anabaptist Christians of fostering a radically democratic church life is *directly relevant to* our citizenship in whatever "democratic" country we are part of – and, vice versa, our national citizenship is directly relevant to our church life. As we seek to build strong, healthy faith communities as part of being faithful in our social ethics *and* as we seek to function as peace-enhancing national citizens, our central focus in both areas should be to embody and articulate the core message of peace as found in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. And we dare not impose a self-limit on the range of this message by embracing an artificial "two language" schema that defines our faith community convictions and practices as being unintelligible or irrelevant to the wider world.

Notes

¹ I am especially indebted to our monthly theology discussion group at Eastern Mennonite University where we discussed a draft of the essay, Shalom Mennonite Congregation where I presented it in sermon form, and editor John Roth and anonymous referees of the *MQR* for helpful responses.

² 77.1 (January 2003): 93-108.

³ This seems to be Scott Holland's position. He affirms Koontz's schema, but with what seems to be the opposite purpose – not to protect the Christian's "own personal or communal

ideological purity” (as he implies thinkers such as Stanley Hauerwas, Alasdair MacIntyre, and John Milbank seek to do) but to be freed to pursue a “public philosophy” delinked from the narrow particular-community constraints that Koontz seems to be championing for Anabaptist Christians.

⁴ Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

⁵ Ted Grimsrud, “Anabaptist Faith and American Democracy,” *MQR* 78.3 (July 2004): 343.

⁶ For an insightful critique of Koontz and Hauerwas on this issue, see Michael Cartwright, “Conflicting Interpretations of Christian Pacifism,” in Terry Nardin, ed., *The Ethics of War and Peace: Religious and Secular Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 197-213.

⁷ I found Peter Dula’s comment in his paper that there is “no ‘democracy story’” in the US to be quite odd when he links this comment with a discussion of “Emerson’s America” as being distinct from “Columbus’s America.” Surely Dula is aware that Stout understands himself to be an Emersonian and portrays Emerson as a “father” of what I call the Democracy Story. I could also mention Cornel West’s linking what he calls “deep democracy” (something very close to what I mean by the Democracy Story) with the work of *artists* such as Toni Morrison and his beloved jazz and blues musicians (*Democracy Matters* [New York: Random House, 2004]).

⁸ I agree completely with Matt Hamsher’s concern for how theorists for liberal democracy such as Thomas Hobbes underwrite imperialistic violence. I want to argue, though, that “democracy” in the name of Empire is actually a contradiction in terms. The Democracy Story I have in mind has always opposed Empire – going back to those among the American colonialists who sought humane relationships with Native Americans, such as the Pennsylvania Quakers. See John Nichols, ed., *Against the Beast: A Documentary History of American Opposition to Empire* (New York: Nation Books, 2004).

⁹ Many Anabaptist Christians seem all too sanguine about recent surveys in the US showing that Americans self-identified as Christians are *more* likely to support violence (as in the death penalty and the War on Iraq) than non-Christians. In light of such a fundamental difference on a central issue of faith for Anabaptist Christians, how does it even make sense to talk about being part of the same “body of Christ”?

¹⁰ Some of these and similar thinkers, activists, and artists are mentioned by Stout in *Democracy and Tradition* and by Cornel West in *Democracy Matters*.

¹¹ *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), 61-70. See also Yoder’s essay, “The Christian Case for Democracy,” in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), especially pages 166-68, “In Praise of Holy Experiments.”

¹² I discuss Yoder’s portrayal of communal discernment processes at some length in “Pacifism and Knowing: ‘Truth’ in the Theological Ethics of John Howard Yoder,” *MQR* 77.3 (July 2003): 403-15. Like Blum I allude to recent skirmishes in Mennonite churches concerning homosexuality as an example of problematic failures to follow healthy discernment processes.

¹² “Anabaptist Faith,” 361.

¹³ I sketch an approach to applying Yoder’s pacifist epistemology to making church life more “radically democratic” in “Pacifism and Knowing.”

Kenneth R. Chase and Alan Jacobs, eds. *Must Christianity Be Violent? Reflections on History, Practice, and Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003.

Given the war in Iraq waged under the banner of “God bless America” by a nation frequently identified as “Christian” with a president who professes himself “Christian,” this book addresses one of the important theological questions of our era. In the introduction, editor Kenneth Chase frames the question in terms of “pragmatic” and “inherency” arguments. The pragmatic argument “links acts of violence with those who claim to be Christians” (10). The inherency argument has two themes. One is Christian insistence on defining good and evil and a God who punishes sets in motion forces that may make Christianity inherently “complicit with violence” (12). The second is sacrifice: “The Judeo-Christian logic requires that a living creature must lose its life for God’s favor to be restored to a guilty human” (12).

The book’s twelve chapters (plus two conversations), revised from presentations at a March 2000 conference at Wheaton College sponsored by the Center for Applied Christian Ethics, work with one or both of these themes. Essays treat the first crusade, the violence of the *Conquistadores* in Latin and South America, theological opposition to slavery, the motivations and actions of rescuers and opponents of the Nazi holocaust, suggestions for teaching US history from a nonviolent perspective, theological emphases that minimize violence by Christians, and just peacemaking practices that allow pacifists and just war advocates to cooperate without resolving their differences. Perhaps the most intense chapters present Stanley Hauerwas’s argument that Jesus precedes the philosophy of pacifism and its application to John Milbank, who acknowledges that God’s creation contained no original violence but claims that sin makes participation in violence inevitable, whether one abstains from or enters into conflict. The printed Hauerwas-Milbank conversation does not resolve their debate.

The book does not pose the question of Christianity and violence as sharply or as deeply as it might. In the historical arena – the pragmatic argument – beyond a brief mention in Mark Noll’s essay, I would like to see a full chapter on violence done to Native Americans in the settlement of North America, beginning with the New England Puritans, parallel to the story of the *Conquistadores* in Latin America. To bring racism closer to home, it

would be profitable to read about earlier biblical and theological defenses of slavery and segregation in the US as a parallel to the condemnation of violence against Jews in Nazi Germany.

For the inherency argument, the challenge to Christianity is mitigated by limits the editors placed on the analysis of violence in theology. Discussion of the hot-button topic of atonement was circumscribed to include only defenses of the satisfaction theory (16-17). Thus editor Chase argues that if Jesus' death is sufficient for sin, then we should challenge the idea that killing is necessary to eliminate the last evil "such as Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden, or Al Qaeda" (124), and that the righteousness of God's final judgment means that Christians do not need to seek vengeance. Richard Mouw's defense of satisfaction atonement argues that it does not promote violence because "in sending Jesus to the cross," God used a "last resort" remedy for sin in which "the punishment is proportionate to the end being sought," analogous to the limited use of violence in just war theory; but in any case, Jesus' submission to unjust violence is not an example for Christians to follow because the "once-for-all theme in the Reformed understanding of atonement" gives it an "inimitability collorary" (165).

I applaud Chase's nonviolent application of satisfaction atonement, but both his and Mouw's arguments confirm the intrinsic violence of its imagery. Limiting the discussion to defenses of satisfaction both ignores the developing, wider argument whether God is properly understood as using or sanctioning violence, a divine violence intrinsic to satisfaction atonement, and avoids significant interaction with serious challenges to the violence of satisfaction atonement from black, feminist, womanist, and nonviolence-shaped theologies. Admitting these issues would raise the question of the "inherent" violence of Christianity to a higher level, and would bring additional biblical and nonviolent arguments into the discussion.

This volume makes a substantial contribution, but its answer will satisfy only some readers. It provides food for thought for those concerned about violence who wish to preserve the broad tradition of standard, primarily evangelical theology and an opening for justifiable war. For those desiring a fundamental reassessment of Christianity's relationship to violence, the book leaves important work yet to do.

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C. Arnold Snyder, ed. *Commoners and Community. Essays in Honour of Werner O. Packull*. Pandora Press, 2002.

To honor Werner Packull, with whom many associate the “polygenetic beginnings” thesis, now thirty years old, and more recently phrases like “between paradigms” and “demise of a normative vision,” one should expect a Festschrift with the latest revisionary interpretation of sixteenth-century Anabaptism. The authors (Packull’s colleagues and students) and the editor have delivered, and they have produced a richly rewarding book.

That the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is and was fully Christian, not heretical as charged in the 1500s, is now widely assumed. There still are evangelists for Anabaptism seeking to persuade us of the superiority of the Anabaptist reformist agenda, many themselves converts from another tradition. Indeed, elements of such a defense of one’s Reformation tradition are still widespread, yet much has changed in that regard. Historians now teach students to appreciate a broader and fuller Reformation agenda.

To take seriously the contextual influences that have changed us over time also includes tracking shifts in historiography. It remains a challenge to think of the Christian Tradition and of our smaller traditions as having a history of development, where neither a rediscovery of an elusive pristine beginning nor a celebration of our present reality as the result of unending progress can serve. This Festschrift provides a handy introduction to the sobriety now characteristic of Anabaptist studies.

At the zenith of Anabaptist studies (between 1960 and 1980), it was possible to claim statistical significance for Anabaptists in specific regions of Europe and, above all, to see them as forerunners of values now taken for granted in modernity. The modern assumptions of freedom of conscience, separation of church and state, and voluntarism in religion that Harold Bender described as “basic in American Protestantism and so essential to democracy” were “derived from the Anabaptists of the Reformation period, who for the first time clearly enunciated them and challenged the Christian world to follow them in practice” (*Anabaptist Vision*, 4). More recent scholarship makes such claims no longer meaningful, though they are still encountered in popular Mennonite writing. For example, theologian James Reimer cites Mennonite Islamic scholar David Shenk’s embellishment of Bender, about Anabaptists

“blazing the way forward for the global commitments today to human rights, religious freedom and pluralistic culture” (122). Reimer is less certain that links to the modern democratic state should be celebrated so freely, given Hauerwas’s claim that such a state “is intrinsically dependent on violence to sustain itself”; Reimer senses a dilemma for Mennonites in modernity.

Commoners and Community summarizes what scholars have now established. Arnold Snyder begins with a short outline of Packull’s published contributions. Then follows a longer essay by Edmund Pries on Packull’s biography. Snyder ends his introduction by further revising the polygenesis claim to say that internal connections between the two groups most studied in English – the Swiss and the South German – were stronger than their distinctions.

Although statistical record keeping came later, present research allows us to draw a more accurate picture of the Anabaptist communities. Until 1618 the majority of Anabaptists were artisans from the “middle elements of the population.” Men were dominant, more so in the Biblicist groups, less so in the spiritualist groups. But among Anabaptist martyrs, women constituted about one third, a higher percentage than in most other martyr traditions. The best estimate now is that 2,000-2,500 Anabaptists suffered martyrdom in the Reformation era. This represented 40 to 50 percent of all martyrs, a sobering fact in another way. Recent research has also established that Protestant authorities more often spared the lives of dissenters than did Catholic authorities. From yet another angle, the relatively low numbers of martyrs caused the Dutch scholar Zijlstra to assert that Dutch Mennonite survival was due “to the stubborn resistance of local authorities to enforcement of the laws against heresy,” the Dutch republic protecting Doopsgezinde after 1570.

Indeed, as we learn more about the survival and development story of the Dutch Mennonites during the Enlightenment, more questions emerge. Whereas one had relied on the claim of 160,000 Dutch Mennonites around 1700, with a steady loss of membership thereafter to the present, it now seems clear that between 1570 and 1670 Dutch Doopsgezinde membership remained constant around 60-65,000, though the general population was growing. During the eighteenth century, according to Michael Driedger, Dutch Mennonites were active as leaders and publicists for learned societies, social agencies, and reform groups. A seminary (though with only one professor

teaching) had been sponsored by the Lamist wing of the church since 1735 and continues to the present. Dutch Mennonites were active in the Enlightenment, editing journals, taking part in Free Mason societies, and being leaders in Pietism, as preachers, poets etc. A number of Mennonites were politically active and supportive of the Batavian Republic set up under Napoleon, many of whom were seminary students. Yet, “unlike many Dutch Mennonites, north German Mennonites [also participating in the Enlightenment and Pietism] remained politically obedient to the established powers” (120, n46). Why this is so is not easily answered, except for the obvious difference of political context for Dutch and north Germans.

Even the picture of the Swiss and south German Anabaptists as moving toward greater isolation from society and settling for apoliticism now requires adjustment. The unearthing of manuscripts from the end of the sixteenth century reveals an active “Marpeck group” among the Swiss Brethren, Marpeck’s irenic and flexible style not having died out after all. In theologian Reimer’s reading, the materials show less of the strict dualism of Schleithem, “a more comprehensive reading of the Bible as a whole, using figurative and spiritualist hermeneutics; respect for individual conscience and opposition to coercive measures in matters of faith . . . support of the ban but with toleration of diversity within the church; greater flexibility in relating to government officials; and less readiness to damn those outside the perfection of Christ” (136).

This volume includes biographical and bibliographical surveys of Packull’s remarkable achievement. The remaining twelve articles are grouped under Perspectives on Reformation and Tradition, and Perspectives on Anabaptist History. The latter section devotes attention to spiritualist themes in Anabaptism. Packull’s first monograph identified mysticism as central to the early south German-Austrian Anabaptist movement; Snyder’s essay on mysticism and spirituality notes the shift away from mysticism studies in the later 1970s and ’80s, but his own research now sees Hubmaier providing, through his *Summa of the Entire Christian Life*, “one of the seminal works in all of Anabaptism” (200), in essence a systematic Swiss Anabaptist spirituality.

Walter Sawatsky, Professor of Church History & Mission, AMBS, Elkhart, IN

Will Schirmer, *Reaching Beyond the Mennonite Comfort Zone: Exploring from the Inside Out*. Cascadia Publishing House, 2003.

Convinced Anabaptist Will Schirmer takes the Mennonite family lovingly to task for habits and attitudes of clannishness preventing congregations from successfully reaching and incorporating new people. After being part of the Mennonite church in southeastern Pennsylvania for more than twenty years, he shares many observations of “in-group” thinking and behavior that hold newcomers at arm’s length, under such chapter headings as “What Non-Mennonites Don’t Want to Hear.” Some of these grievances are particular to Mennonites (attitudes like “Mennonites are the only Christians,” or “The world is bad and you are worldly”), while some can be found in any close-knit group (behaviors like “private inside jokes and conversations”).

The last three chapters focus on means to reach beyond the familiar, using stories of Mennonite churches taking deliberate steps to effectively engage the mission fields around them. Written for a lay audience, the book offers discussion questions at the end of each chapter for group study and application of “where the shoe fits.”

Schirmer’s chapter on “Nonconfrontation: A Way of Life or a Way Out?” is the most thoughtful and provocative of his anecdotal observations. He believes our theology of nonresistance has often promoted a culture of avoidance in dealing with inter-personal and congregational conflict, fostering patterns of denial, acknowledgement, and regret rather than healthy problem solving. He argues that Jesus left us with many healthy examples of confrontation and non-confrontation, and he appeals for a more active use of Jesus’ process for confronting sinners (Matthew 18:15-17), emphasizing the importance of communication at every stage to win over sinners and confront our own fears and weaknesses.

The concluding chapters on “Reaching out Beyond the Familiar,” “Getting to Know People and Meeting Their Needs,” and “Getting Churches on Track with the Great Commission” are both inspiring and practical for any congregation seeking to grow beyond the status quo. The author critiques our culture’s emphasis on comfort (the “easy chair” mentality) that has crept into our churches, erecting barriers to change such as familiarity, legalism, inward focus, self-preservation, and resting on laurels. He describes churches pursuing a course

of change in order to focus beyond themselves; they have pioneered shifts in leadership, worship, attitude, and congregational structure that can serve as models for others. The dynamics Schirmer describes could apply to many congregational settings outside the Mennonite fold, but they are relevant to community-minded Mennonites grappling with the dynamics of rapid cultural change.

Schirmer helpfully identifies the Mennonite fear of compromising the Gospel as key to resisting change in the church. He argues for changing ourselves and how we present the Gospel, but not for changing the content of our good news. He cites congregations that have successfully taught the peace position to newcomers without rejecting or judging them for coming in with different perspectives, and he urges gaining an understanding of the shifting worldviews – traditional, modern, and postmodern – found within our congregations and the society around us. He proposes Mennonites overcome their discomfort with traditional methods of evangelism by concentrating on getting to know people and meeting their needs – something that Mennonites, with their history of service, do quite naturally. In his final chapter, Schirmer affirms the missional focus of Mennonite Church USA and Canada, and describes processes of healing, vision development, and procurement of outside resources which can help congregations become welcoming and inclusive of seekers.

Sally Schreiner Youngquist, pastor, Living Water Community Church (a Mennonite congregation), Chicago, IL

Jane Rogers Vann, *Gathered Before God: Worship-Centered Church Renewal*. Westminster/John Knox, 2004.

Each word in Jane Rogers Vann's three-word title is essential to understanding her intention: (a) *Gathered* – Her book takes a corporate view of church renewal. Gathered before God are not only God's people corporately assembled, but the practices of those people – in worship and out – as a single expression of faithfulness. (b) *Before* – Placing every aspect of Christian living before God, Vann can describe worship as a morally demanding endeavor. "Before" may indeed be the one-word descriptor of church renewal – when all aspects of life are lived before God in expressions of faithful

praise. (c) God – “[T]he central purpose for the church is the worship of the triune God made known through the story of the people of Israel and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ” (2).

Professor of Christian Education at Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education, Vann proposes a process of church renewal based on experiential learning theories. This combination – education and theology – is the book’s warp and weft. The shuttle is the question, “How do we learn the Christian life from the experience of congregational life?” (2) If a collection of mature Christians is the sum of a church on its way to renewal, what shall its practices be? What characteristics will it bear? How do spiritual renewal and worship renewal enhance each other? Answers are furnished here both in a sturdy theology of the worshipping church and in stories of ten Presbyterian congregations embodying characteristics of worship-centered renewal.

Not only is “worship’s integrity compromised every time it becomes an instrument used to support other programs,” the programmatic church implicitly suggests that when people participate in those programs “their Christian lives will be faithfully formed” (6), and presumably the church will be renewed by way of such programming. But programs do not equate to vitality, nor participation to growth. *Gathered Before God* leads readers to imagine worship as a paradigm for the whole of Christian life and the organizational hub of all congregational life (9). This should come as both a challenge and a relief to those searching for new vitality.

In the first of two accessible parts, Vann lays the theoretical groundwork for congregational renewal. Renewal happens through learning, and learning occurs when experience is followed by reflection. In educational terms, we learn by doing and finding meaning in what we do. Theologically, we experience God by participating in activities that expect God’s presence, and we learn from them when we take time to reflect upon them. Vann’s three-to-one ratio of experience to reflective discipline might seem a bit lopsided, but she contends it represents “not a devaluing of experience in favor of reflection but a careful valuing of experience as the ground of all knowledge” (39).

Chapter three describes worship as the setting of concrete experience. Worship is the environment of *primary theology*, firsthand experience of God by God’s gathered people in the midst of some really peculiar dynamics.

Secondary theology is the work of reflecting upon that encounter, and here Vann's unique offering of theory and story forms the book's core. Chapters four through six examine prayer, study, and mission as environments of reflective practice and practice. Congregational stories help the reader understand worship as primary experience, with the church's other functions organized around it as spaces for reflection and implementation. Part two is immensely practical.

One of this book's strongest attributes is the balance given to art and academics, education and theology, theory and narrative. It is also unique in its ability to talk to Protestants about ritual while cautioning against ritualization, to address moral formation without being moralistic, and to address mission without using worship mechanistically.

Karmen Krahn, Swift Current, Saskatchewan

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