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Foreword

Presenting the Benjamin Eby lectures is one of the traditions that CGR has maintained for many years. In this issue we are pleased to offer “How Can I Keep from Singing,” the Spring 2013 Eby lecture given by composer-educator-choral conductor Leonard Enns on the eve of his retirement from Conrad Grebel University College.

This issue also offers an article on peace church theology and the intellectually disabled, contributing to the burgeoning discussion on disability and theology. Finally, there four papers on the theme “Judgment and Wrath of God,” two by biblical scholars and two by theologians, which are based on presentations given at the Mennonite Scholars and Friends Forum at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature annual meetings in Chicago, November 17, 2012. Readers will also notice several calls for papers and a conference/festival announcement.

As we enter our 31st year of continuous publication, we pledge to uphold and extend CGR’s mandate to offer thoughtful, sustained discussion of spirituality, ethics, theology, and culture from a broadly-based Mennonite perspective. We welcome submissions of articles or reflections in keeping with that mandate, as well as brief responses to published articles.

Jeremy M. Bergen, Editor

Stephen A. Jones, Managing Editor

SPRING 2013 EBY LECTURE

How Can I Keep from Singing?

Leonard J. Enns

*We believe that music is . . . the persistent focus of [human] intelligence, aspiration and good will. To be an artist is to arrive at some sort of resolution of the mind and matter struggle. . . . To be an artist is not the privilege of a few, but the necessity of us all.*¹ —Robert Shaw

This essay, a slightly revised version of my 2013 Eby lecture, is largely an attempt to justify a career of teaching music at Conrad Grebel University College, where the Eby lectureship serves as an annual forum in which to present individual faculty research. In a previous Eby lecture given in 1984, entitled “Music: Intellect and Emotion,”² I argued for the necessary linking of both mental and affective involvement in the best musical experiences; that position remains unaltered for me today. Still, years of work as conductor and composer in my “laboratory” at Grebel (namely, the Chapel), in numerous congregational settings, and in concert have turned theories expressed in that lecture into experientially-grounded convictions. The focus of my thinking in the present essay is that music makes an important and unique contribution in three distinct settings: the post-secondary academy, the gathering for Christian worship, and society in general via the public concert.³ As documentation, I draw examples from my own work as a conductor and composer, most of which were presented through commercial and archival

The Sound Examples of recordings referred to in this article are available at <https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/cgrsoundexamples>. All the examples that employ recordings, except number 5, are available indefinitely. Example 5 is licensed until March 2017.

¹ *The Choral Journal* 23 (February 1983), 21.

² “Music: Intellect and Emotion,” in *The Conrad Grebel Review* 2, no. 2 (1984): 89-105.

³ While this may seem a disparate list, it represents the three central thrusts of my career as educator, church musician, and conductor/composer.

recordings at the lecture.

I make two basic assumptions. The first assumption is that music is an expressive art created by humans, using sound as a medium and time as a canvas; that it requires listening, as opposed to hearing; and that it rewards repeated listening with deeper appreciation. I distinguish between *hearing* (being aware of a sound) and *listening* (being engaged with a sound).⁴ The second assumption is that the path to this progressively deeper appreciation has three stages: (1) liking music, (2) understanding music, and (3) appreciating music in an engaged, informed, and potentially transformational way. These stages are not necessarily sequential; engaged appreciation will develop over time in a zigzag way as repeated listening, study, and experience put liking, understanding, and appreciation into dialogue with each other.⁵ One might, for example, learn to understand a late Beethoven quartet, then to appreciate it in a deep way, and then come to really like it! All three stages are part of a rich whole. Still, engaged appreciation is normally the result of the other two.

While most people like music and find it meaningful in various, often profound ways, the task of university-level music education in a liberal arts setting is to take students who like music to the next step of understanding it. Normally, in such programs the ultimate goal is an informed *appreciation* of music. The emotive response to music may vary individually and cannot be taught, but the depth of appreciation will be directly related to the level of understanding. The goal of informed music appreciation is fundamental for liberal arts programs in music, where it is valued highly as distinct from the priority placed on performance and technical proficiency in typical music performance faculties and conservatory programs. (In the Canadian system the degree nomenclature of “B.A. [Music]” versus “B. Mus.” reflects these differing emphases.)

Although worship is not to be simplistically equated with “education,”

⁴ Composer Paul Hindemith’s perspective is helpful here. He writes: “[M]usic, whatever sound and structure it may assume, remains meaningless noise unless it touches a receiving mind. But the mere fact that it is heard is not enough: the receiving mind must be active in a certain way if a transmutation from a mere acoustical perception into a genuine musical experience is to be accomplished.” Paul Hindemith, *A Composer’s World* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1961), 18.

⁵ See also Edward T. Cone, “Three Ways of Reading a Detective Story—or a Brahms Intermezzo,” in *Music: A View from Delft*, ed. Robert P. Morgan (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989), 77.

mature public worship will necessarily involve a complex interweaving of the cerebral, the sensual, the emotional, and the physical—this latter in varying degrees. At the same time, even that parsing suggests a false division of what in the end is best called “the human.” When we engage with the Holy through music in public worship, both the meaning and the meaningfulness of the encounter become enriched as our understanding of music and its role in worship increases. The same dynamic process applies to other elements of worship as well.

MUSIC IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

While there is significant flow-through between education, worship, and concert, the place of music is distinct in each context. Education helps us understand music. Worship asks all its elements including music to serve its prime purpose, and thus the first question for music in worship is functional rather than aesthetic. The concert setting provides the richest context and potential of all, ideally combining elements of education with spiritual and emotional engagement.

It is some of the benefits of music to education that I want to consider first. In general, the study of music, as of other performing arts, offers a bountiful, holistic way of *learning* and a profound way of *knowing*. Intellectual inquiry, physical training, and affective experience all work together in a unique way in music studies and serve as mutual enrichment. I have in mind “formal” education at the post-secondary level in these comments, but I also intend them to be understood broadly and not restricted in their implications to a structured educational setting. The focus is not on how music education is accomplished, but on the significance of music studies as a part of education in general. My remarks may contribute to discussions about priorities determining educational curricula, particularly in the liberal arts setting that is still the seedbed of many church-related post-secondary education programs.

I should say here that performance training per se is best located in a conservatory rather than a university. At the same time, university academic studies in music history, theory, aesthetics and so on, if totally separated from a context of actually making music, do an injustice to both the art of music and the potential of music education. The goal of balancing these

two—balancing “doing” and “thinking,” if you will—provides a rationale for liberal arts programs in music such as the one at Conrad Grebel University College. The educational significance of music as a discipline depends on its being both *considered* and *experienced*. The aspiration of music education is for the affective dimension—spiritual and emotional—to be integrated with listening and performing in an informed way. This integration will then lead to, and enhance, true and engaged music appreciation. Such emphasis makes music a very powerful and unparalleled mode of learning and knowing.

Music studies engage unique modes of learning, since music is much more dependent on psychological, psycho-acoustical, physical, and cultural elements than on the normal language syntax underlying, and to a great extent limiting, the methodology of most other disciplines. Students learn music in ways that address them directly and require them to embrace the subject matter in modes mainly bypassed in their other studies. In performance, students benefit from ways of learning that involve physical engagement (think of pianists, string players, singers, percussionists), integration of physical and emotional elements (music expression is related to emotion, whether mimicked or real, as is the case for actors), and a high degree of self-awareness and context-awareness (monitoring at many levels is constant as performers adjust pitch, rhythm, and volume, according to requirements of the score, feedback from others in the ensemble, audience response, and so on). The robust cognitive, physical, and emotional integration, and the flexibility and “stretch” that music requires and develops are virtually unique in the academy (akin only to performing arts such as dance and drama), and significantly beneficial to students’ education.

I now want to look at how and why music education offers benefits going well beyond the apparent boundaries of the discipline itself.

Music Teaches Self-knowledge

The way meaning flows from music is complex and nuanced. The lessons offered will vary, depending, for example, on whether one engages as performer or listener (or composer, for that matter). However, there are general claims that can be convincingly supported, especially in relation to the educational setting. While a liberal arts music education will admittedly have as an objective some level of performance proficiency, the aim, as we

noted earlier, is increased *appreciation* of music. But even this is only the outside skin of the real way in which music can be central to that education, namely in its contribution to a more humane society.

For students engaged in music making, the art helps them both to know themselves and to develop interpersonal sensibility. In the setting of a choir, for instance, music asks singers to develop confidence in themselves while teaching them about their place in the larger choral (that is, social) context. In the following example, consider how the individual parts make their contribution but also become subsumed into a collective sound, losing their individual identity while becoming part of much richer whole. Singers must be self-confident and contribute individually, while balancing those elements with the full ensemble. The example is from my composition, *Nocturne*.⁶ The words are those of Lorenzo to Jessica in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (Act V, scene 1):

*Here will we sit and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears; soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.*

*Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold;
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubins;*

*Such harmony is in immortal souls,
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.*

Music and Others

Given the increasing globalization of our world and despite the unhelpful concomitant fetish with “differences” in some quarters, the potential for music's positive impact is increasing.⁷ I suspect that the depth of our

⁶ Sound Example 1: Leonard Enns, “Nocturne” (excerpt), *ShadowLand* Audio CD (Waterloo, ON: DaCapo Chamber Choir, 2009). Used by permission of DaCapo Chamber Choir.

⁷ The underside is that there can also be a perverse misuse of “music” (using the term loosely),

knowledge about the religion, history, and culture of others stands in inverse proportion to our inclination for behaving aggressively toward them. If, after studying and performing their music, we take a further step and sit down with them to share the experience of music, the temptation to settle disputes aggressively will no longer be moot. Music can take us to a place where greed and aggression dissolve; it can help chip away prejudices and make us more mutually sensitive. Unfortunately, there are bad, humiliating, and insensitive examples of patronizing arrangements of music from cultures other than our own. But more and more musicians are working with humility and understanding in order to develop a mutual embrace within the global community through music. Consider the Israeli-Palestinian choirs and orchestras whose mission, while certainly musical, is equally to foster mutual understanding and peacemaking. The work of Daniel Barenboim and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, bringing together young musicians from Israel and the Arab world, is one instance among many.

Music offers a powerful entry into the world of others. Engagement in their sound-world will often result in a new level of appreciation of these folk. It may start with an introduction to the practices of their culture; it may be through music that we begin to understand their religious values, or find a strong bond with them as fellow human beings. One compelling example of the positive, sensitizing role music can play in reinforcing and re-informing a global neighborhood is a recent work by the young Iranian-Canadian composer Iman Habibi. His composition, *Colour of Freedom*, is for a western-style choir and a Persian-style soloist. Habibi gives the English words of Canadian author, poet, and political activist Marina Nemat to a choir singing in a “Western Art Music” style, and provides the Persian words of 10th-century mystic and poet Baba Taher to a soloist singing in a traditional Persian style.⁸

frequently with the effect of reinforcing prejudices, misogyny, and other divisive, harmful, and hateful ideas.

⁸ Nemat is a contemporary Iranian-born Canadian who as a teenager was imprisoned and tortured in Tehran’s notorious Evin Prison for criticizing the Iranian government. She is noted for her books *Prisoner of Tehran* (Toronto: Penguin Group Canada, 2008) and *After Tehran: A Life Reclaimed* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2010).

The text for this excerpt⁹ is as follows:

*The streets of Tehran
Cannot remember the colour of freedom,
For even the pavement of alleyways
Is crimson red.*

— Marina Nemat

*My sorrows plenty, and my pains countless
Alas, there is no remedy to my pain
oh God, my companion doesn't know
That my cries are involuntary*

— Baba Taher

*Freedom is the colour of water,
And it dripped through our fingers
Till all that was left was thirst.
But seeds of light
Remain in the depths of darkness
And will grow when droplets of hope
Find their way through layers of cruelty.¹⁰*

— Marina Nemat

Who can listen to this music without being deeply touched by the lament of seemingly unachievable aspiration? The feeling of longing for a true human bond is palpable—a visceral sense that we are all one family, with one hope. The lament, however, is particular, and Western listeners cannot help but feel, along with empathy, a degree of discomfort and complicity in such sorrow. Here music brings global neighbors closer together in an experience of the common currency of the human condition, an acknowledgment of the pains we inflict on each other but also the hope we can offer each

⁹ Sound Example 2: Iman Habibi, *Colour of Freedom* (excerpt). DaCapo Chamber Choir (February 25, 2012). Archival concert recording, Kitchener, ON. Used by permission of Marina Nemat, Iman Habibi, Amir Hahgigi, and the DaCapo Chamber Choir. In this performance the Persian texts of Taher are sung by the Iranian-Canadian Amir Hahgigi; the English words of Nemat are sung by the choir.

¹⁰ Used by permission of Marina Nemat.

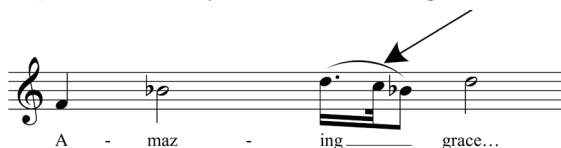
other and the joy we can share. Peacemaking may begin with an effort to understand others, and when the intention is as noble as in this example, not only can music *making* be a partner in peacemaking, well-intentioned and carefully planned music *studies* can contribute as well. A corollary is that academic studies in Global Music—offered at Grebel and increasingly elsewhere—are a legitimate, relevant, and arguably indispensable part of any education program that sees music as a humanizing discipline. Such a focus is an obvious natural fit for institutions offering peace studies.

Music and Relationships, Context, and Situation

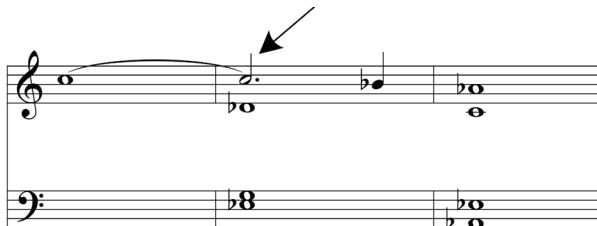
A sound by itself can never be music; it can only be music in relationship to another sound. Further, musical *meaning* derives from musical context: the same note in four different settings, for instance, has four different meanings, purposes, and ways of behaving. Take an ordinary pitch “C” as an example. First, it is a largely meaningless sound by itself, contextualized only by the framing silence:



Second, it may serve as a fairly insignificant “passing tone” between the two more important melody notes (of *Amazing Grace* in this example):



Third, it may be a “suspension,” a goal-driven note whose context demands that it will descend to another place before the issue is resolved (the context ascribes an aural teleology to the note!):



Lastly, the same pitch may serve as an important destination, as a point of arrival. The C here is an octave lower than the previous ones, to simplify the notation:



[In the lecture, Sound Example 3, given at the piano, demonstrated all four instances above.]

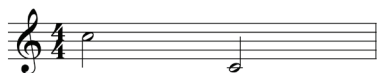
Note that while we are referring to the same pitch in all cases, very different meanings obtain in each case as a result of various contexts. The point is that *sound* can become *music* only in relationship to sound, and that the function and meaning of a sound will change depending on its context. Expressive meaning requires, and is impacted by, relational context. Grasping this musical reality and, more important, *experiencing* it as a performer or listener, can help with understanding the effect of context even in non-musical situations. The metaphor must be unpacked and the analogy tested, but the lesson is there. Music may serve as a metaphor by which we can find a deeper understanding of the importance of relationship and purpose in our interaction with others and the environment. The learning is not necessarily “cerebral”: it is visceral, perhaps psychological, and possibly even spiritual.

Music and Investigative and Imaginative Skills

A core aim of music education is to foster an understanding of potential and possibility. How does one develop an idea, how does one explore the “sound world” opened up by two different pitches, for example? One can work within the defined “space” (C to G, for instance, in something like “Mary had a little lamb”) or introduce new ideas, colors, or pitches as nuance and enrichment (think of what Beethoven does with those two pitches that open his Fifth Symphony), and so on. For the music student, the challenge is to explore the potential of an idea using sound as the material for the argument. The “language” of the dialectic is particular to music, but the challenge is not unique; every novelist, poet, painter, or dancer is searching, exploring,

and expanding an idea in a certain way. The contribution that music makes, along with other fine and performing arts, is to couch the search in a non-verbal mode and to engage the mind in a way that stretches and enriches. For the composition student, the task is to develop a single germ motive into an extended satisfying work; for the music analyst, it is to find the way back—to discover how an entire composition unveils the potential of one or more basic ideas.

As a simple example, take two pitches separated by an octave, a high and a low C:



We can explore the possibilities in many ways. Filling in the descent can give us a C major scale:



With the addition of some simple rhythms, the music takes us to a specific Christmas carol:



More sophisticated embellishment of this fundamental scalar descent takes us to the Land of Oz:



[In the lecture, Sound Example 4, given at the piano, demonstrated all four instances above.]

Our imagination might then consider reversing direction, and treating the basic gesture as an ascent rather than a descent. Then further melodies emerge, including that familiar mnemonic, “Doe, a deer,” from *The Sound*

of Music. The process of development is fundamental to most disciplines, either at the forefront or as the other side of cohesion, consistency, logical decision-making, and so on. Music exercises and strengthens that process. William Blake begins his poem *Auguries of Innocence* with these lines:

*To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.*

This is an enviable perspective, one that music education can equip students to achieve.

Music Enriches and Transcends Text

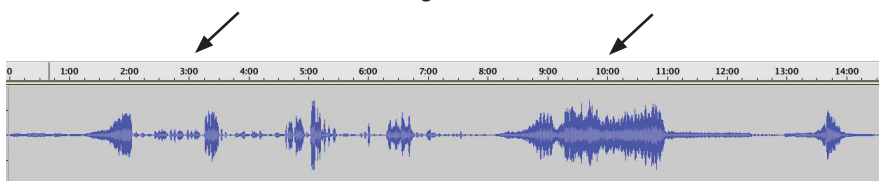
Finally, and especially pertinent to the present topic, music plays a vital role in combination with text. Music can be a bountiful resource for language studies and has contributions to make in this regard in the academy, church, and concert hall. While music appears to be pre-lingual both historically and developmentally, it is also beyond—or above—language in its ability to express and carry meaning. Combined with words in choral and solo compositions, music can extend, nuance, and elevate text and meaning. The acoustical alchemy of this art exists in the passage from semantic to spiritual meaning, from the physical to the transcendent.

Music allows us to express the deepest joy, grief, longing, and fear when words alone will not do, or when we find it impossible to express ourselves in words. Examples are endless, but I will offer one from contemporary American composer Eric Whitacre's setting of the final verse of 2 Samuel 18. The composition is *When David Heard*, for a cappella choir.

*When David heard that Absalom was slain
he went up into his chamber over the gate and wept,
and thus he said:
My son Absalom,
would God I had died for thee!*

Even on its own, this is a powerful text in the context of the larger drama. But listen to the way Whitacre's music deepens the grief reflected in the text. We hear stunned, shocked grief; outpourings of uncontainable grief; broken grief.¹¹

While this example presents only the first three minutes or so of the work, the entire composition extends over a quarter of an hour. Grief pours out in waves, as a halting lament over a huge canvas of time. A simple intensity graph of the work in performance shows these waves of lament, measured here with minute markings:



The example ends just before the second “outburst” visible at 3’ 15.” on the graph above, which displays the sound image of this section. The text fragment “O, my son Absalom” is repeated over and over in a musical keening that continues for most of the work. The only instance of the phrase, “would God I had died for thee,” is at the 10 minute mark, nested near the center of the largest outpouring. This example presents one of many possible instances of music enriching and even transcending text. Reading the text takes about 20 seconds; living the meaning of it takes a lifetime. Whitacre’s music takes us much closer to embracing and experiencing the real life impact of the text than reading alone can do. This supra-lingual meaning that music can bring to text is one of its great contributions in education, worship, and concert settings (more on the latter two below).

A much-quoted statement of the great American conductor Robert Shaw is one of the best summaries of the overall educational challenge, gift, and necessity of music, whether within a formal education setting or elsewhere:

We believe that music is more a necessity than a luxury, not simply

¹¹ Sound Example 5: Eric Whitacre, “When David Heard” (excerpt), *ShadowLand* Audio CD (Waterloo, ON: DaCapo Chamber Choir, 2009). Used by permission of Walton Music Corporation and DaCapo Chamber Choir.

*because it is therapeutic nor because it is the universal language, but because it is the persistent focus of [human] intelligence, aspiration and good will. To be an artist is to arrive at some sort of resolution of the mind and matter struggle. . . . There is no landscaped approach to beauty and truth. You scratch and scramble around intellectual granites, you try to diffuse or tether your emotional tantrums, you pray for the day when your intellect and your instinct can co-exist, so that the brain need not calcify the heart nor the heart flood and drown all reason. But in that struggle lies the tolerable dignity and a tolerable destiny. . . . To be an artist is not the privilege of a few, but the necessity of us all.*¹²

MUSIC IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

In the church, the question becomes: How does music serve the needs of the worship service? Here the potential exists for music to be an act of worship in and of itself, and, as is most often the case, to enrich the verbal dimensions of worship, enhancing the meaning of the text and allowing worshipers to engage in ways that transcend the limits of normal language.¹³

Music as Reading of Text

Just as spoken word becomes part of worship both through active listening and engaged participation, so does music. And typically in the Christian church word and music combine to carry worship. The gathered community listens to music—perhaps in a prelude, a choral anthem, or another form—and participates in it, especially through hymn singing.

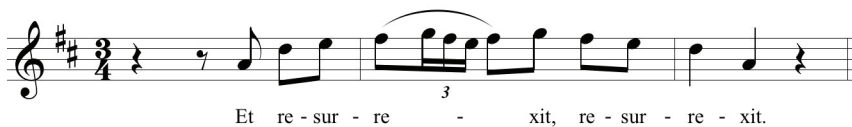
It is in the solo and choral worship elements and in hymn singing that music becomes a certain “reading” of the text. As in all cases the music can “paint” the text, but this is hardly its main function in worship. Further, what works well for one word in one verse of a hymn may not be suitable for a subsequent verse. It is more important for the music in a hymn to express the

¹² *The Choral Journal* 23 (February 1983), 21.

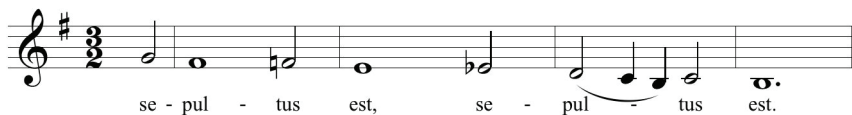
¹³ See also Leonard Enns, “The Composer as Preacher,” in *The Conrad Grebel Review* 15, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 269–81. Reprinted in *Music and Worship: A Mennonite Perspective*, ed. Bernie Neufeld (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 228–46.

concept of the text rather than the *particulars* of the text.¹⁴ Choral anthems, and hymn arrangements that combine choir and congregation, can attend to this latter task of opening up the meaning of specific words or verses. But even there it is more the spirit of the lyrics than the flesh of any given word that is at the heart.

Johann Sebastian Bach is a master at acoustically en-fleshing the word (the Word); consider the rising flourish at the *Et Resurrexit* of his B Minor Mass. His setting of the word “resurrexit” is a good example of word-painting:



This flourish stands in brilliant contrast to the immediately preceding stark, grave-like descent of the *Crucifixus*, an example of music expressing the concept of descent (rather than the particulars of a single word):



[In the lecture, Sound Example 6, given at the piano, featured these settings.]

Whether operative at the level of the basic concept of the text or in a specific “word painting” manner, music combined with words will often be a reading of the text and may at times have primary influence over the text in the spiritual development and faith formation of worshipers.¹⁵ While this is a topic for exploration elsewhere, suffice it to say here that the composer for worship is faced with the demanding task of attending to both the precise meaning of individual words and the overall intent of the lyrics.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the topic of text and music in hymns, see Kenneth Hull, "Text, Music and Meaning in Congregational Song," in *The Hymn* 53, no. 1 (January 2002). Reprinted in *The Conrad Grebel Review* 20, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 81-106.

¹⁵ See Hull, “Text, Music and Meaning” in the *The Conrad Grebel Review* reprint, 97-98. I am grateful to Hull for his distinction between a “setting” of a text and a “reading” of a text, particularly as it applies to hymns and other vocal music for worship.

I find composing in response to this challenge to be deeply rewarding, and here I offer one example of my own writing for choir and solo voice. I am working with a familiar hymn text, “All Creatures of our God and King,” translated from the Latin of Francis of Assisi. My intention is to give the text renewed, fresh, and possibly expanded meaning. While the melody normally associated with this text presents a regal reading of the words—fitting for “our God and King”—it leaves little room for the kindness and gentleness of death, or for any sense of meeting death with other than a staunch, stiff-backed heroism. Yet that is the sense imparted by the hymn tune at the sixth verse, which begins: “And though, most kind and gentle death, / waiting to hush our latest breath, / Thou leadest home the child of God. . . .” For a text such as this, a one-size-fits-all approach provided by a tune can be too constraining; the more the melody is in keeping with one verse, the less it may be for others.

Here is the familiar hymn tune, with the first phrases of verses 1, 4, and 6: the melody is very fitting for the first verse; less so, I maintain, for the fourth verse; and not suitable at all for the sixth.



1. All	crea - tures	of	our	God	and	King,	lift
4. Dear	moth - er	earth,	who	day	by	day,	un -
6. And	thou	most	kind	and	gen - tle	death,	wait -



up	your voice	and	with us	sing	al - le - lu - ia,	al - le - lu - ia!
fold - est	bless - ings	on our	way,	al - le - lu - ia,	al - le - lu - ia!	
ing	to hush	our	lat - est	breath,	al - le - lu - ia,	al - le - lu - ia!

One alternative might be to use a melody that has no “form-fitting” aspect at all. This is how many chant melodies work, aspiring simply to carry the text, not to “read” it in any particular way. Another is to create a new setting of the text, allowing for musical variation from verse to verse. Such settings (readings) are typically the contribution of soloists or choirs in worship. In these works, sometimes called hymn anthems, a new music/

text combination can add further layers of meaning and nuance to familiar, often treasured texts. The example I offer is my setting of the Francis text for baritone soloist and male choir.¹⁶ While some music repeats from verse to verse, I have centered this reading of the text on the sixth (“gentle death”) verse. Francis, translated into English, teaches a gentle, patient approach to death, which itself is the gate to the ultimate home of the “child of God.” Perhaps a new setting of that verse, such as this one, can shed fresh light on the text and theology of the hymn.

Congregational song can also be enhanced and extended by a choir in worship, where, for example, the choir may provide a particular interpretation or musical commentary on a familiar hymn shared in song with the congregation. In these and other ways, music extends and nuances the meaning of text in worship. An example of this approach is my hymn-anthem, “Incarnate God.”¹⁷

Music as Communion

While music in worship often serves as a way of deepening the meaning of text, its most fundamental role is as a kind of communion. Each worshiper engages with others in a visceral, potentially spiritual way through participating in communal song, and may also enter the presence of the divine through singing and listening to music. Though the understanding of the *sacrament* of communion that I grew up with in a small Mennonite church may seem out of date today, I still value its emphasis on making things right with the neighbor before taking the bread and wine. My belief is that this sacrament in its fullest sense always involves a living out of the bidirectional pattern of the cross—a commitment to both neighbor and God.

¹⁶ Sound Example 7: Leonard Enns, “All Creatures of our God and King” (excerpt), *In Concert* Audio CD. Winnipeg Faith & Life Male Choir; Phil Ens, soloist (Winnipeg, MB: Faith and Life Communications, 2002). Used by permission of Mennonite Church Manitoba.

¹⁷ Sound Example 8: Leonard Enns, “Incarnate God,” *How can I keep from Singing*, Audio CD. Conrad Grebel Chapel Choir; Jan Overduin, organist (Waterloo, ON: Conrad Grebel University College, 1997). Used by permission of Conrad Grebel University College. I have altered the first word of the text; it will be familiar to most readers as “Strong Son of God.” The hymn anthem is dedicated to George and Esther Wiebe, both now retired from long and distinguished careers as music professors at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (now Canadian Mennonite University) in Winnipeg, Manitoba, whose work daily demonstrated the points I am making in this essay.

Congregational song may serve in a like manner, as a kind of communion that reaches in both of these ways. It is “sound theology.”

*Communion with one another*¹⁸

When we gather in worship, we are part of a community that exists both physically in the present and mystically through space and time. We are one with those who are present, one with those who have gone before us, and one with those who will come after us. When we own long-held confessions of faith, this web of relationships comes alive; in congregational singing, the poetry and the music of our hymns confess this reality. Traditional hymn texts and music in particular bind the Christian church across time, while contemporary and global texts and music often unify it through space. In these ways, congregational hymn singing is one of the great gathering forces of the church.

The Protestant Reformation was, among other things, an expression of the desire for meaningful involvement in worship, for a fundamental change from observation to active engagement, from pseudo-mysticism engendered by obscure Latin to direct encounter with liturgy and biblical text in the vernacular. Central to this re-formation, communion became both personal and communal, to be engaged in tangibly and spiritually rather than observed as a mystery. The bread was touched, broken, and shared by all. Similarly, the physical, sensual reality of congregational singing—making sound, breathing in unison, celebrating, sometimes weeping, through the formalized structure of song—is a gift offered by music in worship. When worshipers inhale together and join in song, a bond is created in the service of praise, confession, supplication, and affirmation. In communal singing, the “vertical” extension to the divine is grounded in a “horizontal” embrace of the group; the horizontal axis of the cross is en-fleshed. Congregational song affirms participation as a central dynamic of post-Reformation worship; in engaging in congregational song we live out in sound a commitment to the community of believers.

¹⁸ For an expanded discussion, see my “Music as Communion,” *Canadian Mennonite*, November 16, 2009, 4-7.

Communion with the divine

With our plethora of words and endless articles of faith, and our prescriptions and dogmatic descriptions, do we not diminish the divine source and ultimate home of our being? Is God so small that mere words will suffice, both in our imagining of, and in our approach to, the divine? The numerous biblical references to God as light, wind, fire, and so on are more akin to music than to text. Music offers us the possibility of transcending even these specifics of language, and of taking us to a point beyond the constraints of verbally limited imagination.¹⁹ Music can bring us, unfettered by verbal logic, into communion with God, binding creature and creator, soul and source, and when rightly part of worship, it can become a profound and direct contact with God.

Hymn *texts* specify and channel the “fire” of this divine communion, while hymn *music* extends the reach of the texts and potentially brings us to God. If we only *listen* to music in worship, no matter how lovely or refined, how ancient or contemporary it might be, the Reformation has not yet happened, and the curtain of the Temple has not been torn open to allow us to enter the Holy of Holies. Without engaged hymn singing, we remain observers rather than participants.

The gift offered by music in worship, then, especially through congregational song, is that it may serve as a unique kind of communion, reflecting both dimensions of the cross—communion with one another and with God.²⁰ When thoughtfully chosen and placed in the liturgy, congregational song brings the experience of communion from behind the screen out into the midst of the people. It is possibly the Reformation’s most visceral, sensual, and precious gift to worship.

¹⁹ A similar point is made by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834): “In holy hymns and choruses, to which the words of the poet cling only loosely and lightly, that is exhaled which definite speech can no longer comprehend, and thus the sounds of thought and feeling support one another and alternate until everything is saturated and full of the holy and infinite.” Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 75.

²⁰ John Rempel asks: “How can music shape worship that believes that change of heart and change of society is possible?... A basic criterion then for the role of music in worship is its power to transform.... We come to worship blinded to the neighbor before our eyes. We leave worship with eyes and hands of compassion.” John Rempel, “An Anabaptist Perspective on Music in Worship,” in *Music in Worship: A Mennonite Perspective*, ed. Bernie Neufeld (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 42-43.

MUSIC IN THE PUBLIC CONCERT

I will name the public concert as the third element of my discussion, though I must leave in-depth exploration of it for future consideration. Briefly, the public concert can be a setting for virtually all the issues noted so far, at its best combining education with spiritual and emotional engagement. It may, but need not, include “entertainment.”

Music education will have an impact on the concert experience. If the relationship that I have proposed between *liking*, *understanding*, and *appreciating* is not specious, then we will experience a concert in greater depth as we understand more about the music we are hearing. It will become part of the fabric of our life, our imagination, and our relationships with others. In terms of possible parallels with the worship setting, except for occasional situations listeners do not regularly burst into song (a pity, perhaps!) but in a concert setting they can be, and often are, transported and transformed in ways similar to what is experienced in worship. The public concert ideally offers an experience of transcendence and positive challenge, and helps to build the road to a more humane society. The contributions of music to education, mentioned earlier, apply here too: the public concert can sensitize, dignify, pacify, motivate, and help create a vigorous, creative, positive community and a nobler society.

As well, the public concert is a setting for catharsis; for spiritual aspiration; for lament, confession, hope, and celebration. Ideally, as distinct from worship, it is blind to confessional and cultural preferences (although it remains true that much of the choral repertoire either arises from within the church or is related to ecclesial liturgies). The concert setting provides an unequaled context for combining elements of education, spiritual and emotional engagement, and, occasionally, entertainment.

SUMMARY

I am proposing that music has a rightful, uniquely fruitful place in education; that music becomes a type of communion in worship; and that music in the public concert offers benefits at personal, social, and spiritual levels, and is potentially transformational at all levels. If there is solid ground for these proposals, then there are implications for education, worship planning, and even for concert programming choices. I offer these thoughts as a possible

starting position from which to consider what is being done in these areas, how best to allocate relevant resources, and how to establish priorities and approaches so that the gifts music offers to the academy, church, and society may flourish.

Composer, conductor, and educator Leonard J. Enns retired in June 2013 from Conrad Grebel University College, where he was a faculty member for more than three and a half decades. During that period he made more than 300 church visits across Ontario, Quebec and the United States with the Chapel Choir, which he founded in 1977. He is the founding director of the national award-winning DaCapo Chamber Choir, and has contributed many works to the concert and worship repertoire. For details: www.lenns.ca.

THE BENJAMIN EBY LECTURESHIP

Established at Conrad Grebel University College in the 1980s, the Benjamin Eby Lectureship offers faculty members an opportunity to share research and reflections with the broader College and University community. Benjamin Eby (1785-1853) was a leading shaper of Mennonite culture in Upper Canada from the 1830s on. He and his wife Mary arrived from Pennsylvania in 1807. By 1812 he was an ordained bishop, and by 1813 the first Mennonite meetinghouse in the Waterloo area had been erected. About 1815 Eby saw to the building of the first schoolhouse. He continued his outstanding leadership in the church and in education throughout his life, all while supporting himself as a farmer. A lover of books, Eby wrote two primers for public school children, compiled the *Gemeinschaftliche Liedersammlung*, a new hymnal for Mennonites in Ontario, and edited a volume of articles by Anabaptist and early Mennonite authors. The latter is noteworthy especially because it preserves in a ministers' manual the traditional worship practices of the (Old) Mennonite Church. The Lectureship honors Eby's belief that the motivation to learn is a response to the Christian gospel.

***Shalom* Made Strange: A Peace Church Theology For and With People With Intellectual Disabilities**

Jason Reimer Greig

[T]he members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect. . . . God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member

(1 Corinthians 12:22-24)

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to a community deeply divided and struggling for unity. For him, placing the weakest members of the fellowship at the center was essential for the community's peace and well-being. No *shalom* existed if the most marginalized members experienced neglect and dishonor, something that emulated the false "wisdom" of the world that saw in Christ's death only foolishness and folly (1 Cor. 1:18-31). Traditionally the historic peace churches have been drawn to this same desire for *shalom* and unity both within their fellowships and in the world. By persistently advocating and proclaiming the *shalom* vision of Jesus, ecclesial traditions dedicated to nonviolence have transformed the ecumenical and international debate on what truly makes for peace. The influence of this witness to the nonviolent life of Christ cannot be denied.

However, too often the "weakest" and "least honorable" members, such as those with intellectual disabilities, remain absent or hidden in this ecclesial vision. In their advocacy for *shalom*, peace churches have been exemplary at loving the (often larger and more dominant) enemy. But what about the despised and rejected, and those who undergo less overt means of violence? Some Mennonites have begun to expand peace ecclesiology to include less traditional subjects of oppression,¹ but most of the discussion

¹ See Alan Kreider, Eleanor Kreider, and Paulus Widjaja, *A Culture of Peace: God's Vision for the Church* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005), and Fernando Enns, Scott Holland, and Ann Riggs, eds., *Seeking Cultures of Peace: A Peace Church Conversation* (Telford, PA:

concerns traditional forms of “conflict” between equal actors; the violence that comes from exclusion and radically asymmetric relationships rarely arises. Yet these are some of the prime targets of Paul’s criticism of the Corinthian church in its failure to embody Christ’s *shalom*.

This essay attempts to place people with intellectual disabilities at the center of an ecclesial vision and peace witness. I look first at two competing visions of peace, one given by western, late modern culture and another offered by the church, and then consider L’Arche and the thought of Jean Vanier as a potential embodiment of this peace for the church. I conclude by exploring a potential strategy for becoming a peace church for and with people with intellectual disabilities. What will be discovered in this exploration is that the *shalom* of God begins to appear very “strange” next to that of the world, and that it offers a bold counter-narrative to a culture that disdains those with intellectual disabilities. The “shalom made strange” that a church for and with people with disabilities proclaims is potentially more faithful to the gospel than the dangerous peace of western liberal society.

The Pax Pernicioso

In 2010, British embryologist Robert Edwards received a Nobel Prize for his ground-breaking work on in vitro fertilization (IVF) technology. After more than four million IVF births, ethical concerns about IVF seemed to have become passé, with Edwards proclaimed as a great humanitarian for granting thousands of people the “gift of a child.” However, in all the proceedings no one mentioned that in 1999 he had made grand claims about the need for advanced technology around reproduction, not just to make people happy but also for human progress. “Soon it will be a sin for parents to have a child

Cascadia, 2004). For how peace theology relates to women in particular, see Elizabeth Yoder, ed., *Peace Theology and Violence Against Women* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1992). Surprisingly, LGBT people have not shown much interest in connecting their struggle with the church’s peace tradition. For other discussions of inclusion and hospitality, see Ted Grimsrud, “Toward a Theology of Welcome: Developing a Perspective on the ‘Homosexuality’ Issue,” in *Reasoning Together: A Conversation on Homosexuality*, ed. Mark Thiessen Nation and Ted Grimsrud (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2008); Roberta Showalter Kreider, ed., *The Cost of Truth: Faith Stories of Mennonite and Brethren Leaders and Those Who Might Have Been* (Sellersville, PA: Roberta Showalter Kreider, 2004), especially ch. 31; and Karl S. Shelly and Heidi J. Siemens-Rhodes, eds., *None Can Stop the Spirit: Pastors and Leaders Express Hope for a More LGBT Inclusive Mennonite Church* (Goshen, IN: K.S. Shelly, 2009).

that carries the heavy burden of genetic disease,” he said. “We are entering a world where we have to consider the quality of our children.”² This is the bioethical “peace” of late modern western democracy, whose ultimate values of rationality and autonomy mean that anyone lacking these attributes is inherently lacking in value. Thus the prevention of those lives, writes Hans Reinders, “often appears as the only rational thing to do.”³ While western culture claims to provide equal access to every person no matter their ability, at the same time it invests huge resources in detecting and eliminating pregnancies with genetic abnormalities. This has led geneticist Brian Skotko to ask whether, with new prenatal testing, babies with Down syndrome might slowly disappear altogether.⁴ With the percentage of pregnancies terminated after testing positively for this syndrome now between 60 and 90,⁵ this can only be a *pax pernicioso*, a dangerous peace, for people with

² Quoted in Ellen Painter Dollar, *No Easy Choice: A Story of Disability, Parenthood, and Faith in an Age of Advanced Reproduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 8.

³ Hans S. Reinders, *The Future of the Disabled in Liberal Society: An Ethical Analysis* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 4.

⁴ Brian G. Skotko, “With New Prenatal Testing, Will Babies with Down Syndrome Slowly Disappear?,” *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 94, no. 11 (November 2009): 823-26.

⁵ The most cited source is Caroline Mansfield, Suellen Hopfer, and Theresa M. Marteau, “Termination Rates After Prenatal Diagnosis of Down Syndrome, Spina Bifida, Anencephaly, and Turner and Klinefelter Syndromes: A Systematic Literature Review” *Prenatal Diagnosis* 19[9] (1999): 808-12. But see also L.D. Bryant, J.M. Green, and J. Hewison, “Prenatal Screening for Down’s Syndrome: Some Psychosocial Implications of a ‘Screening for All’ Policy,” *Public Health (Nature)* 115, no. 5 (2001): 356, and David Mutton and Roy G. Ide, “Trends in Prenatal Screening for and Diagnosis of Down’s Syndrome: England and Wales, 1989-97,” *BMJ: British Medical Journal (International Edition)* 317, no. 7163 (1998): 922-23. affected pregnancies in younger women will account for the majority of any increased overall detection rate. Therefore, while a ‘screening for all’ policy will offer wider reproductive choices to more women, it is likely to specifically increase the number of young women experiencing termination of pregnancy for abnormality. A number of inter-dependent factors predispose some women to high levels of psychological distress following termination, and a combination of these factors is most likely to be found in the very young. In addition, very young women often have little knowledge of prenatal testing and may be more likely to accept screening presented as ‘routine’ without considering the consequences. At the point where decisions about diagnostic testing or termination are made, more specialised support may be indicated for some very young women. If the UK National Screening Committee’s recommendations are taken forward therefore, service providers should ensure suitable support is available for some of their more vulnerable clients. The 80-90 percent termination rate comes mostly from

intellectual disabilities.

The *pax pernicioso* is grounded in a larger cultural narrative of agency and productivity. In late modernity, choice and ability are the essential requirements for human flourishing, with strength manifesting itself in rationality, efficiency, and autonomous decision-making. Authentic citizenship demands a highly reflexive individual possessed of the robust subjectivity needed to enter into contractual and economic relations with others. Being at peace requires the ability to be responsible for one's life by choosing one's destiny and productively contributing to society. Success and accomplishment define worth, with speed their primary mode of operation.⁶

Under this narrative of agency and achievement, society views the lives of people with intellectual disabilities as profoundly defective. Those with cognitive impairments present lives totally counter to what society deems worthy: weak, dependent, slow, inefficient, and unproductive. These persons display a difference too disturbing and "strange" for society to countenance. Their radically different embodiment disrupts what Thomas Reynolds calls the "cult of normalcy," the "normal" body marking one as a legitimate person in consumer society.⁷ In the larger cultural narrative, the sufferer who obstinately contradicts the imperative of "healing" and "well-being" must be eliminated in order to maintain the *pax pernicioso*.

While peace churches would generally be uncomfortable with eliminating the weak from society, the emphasis on "action" and "doing" in their ecclesiologies sits uneasily with a narrative based on "achievement" and "agency." Thus Thomas Finger claims that believers' baptism must be an expression of "ethical determination."⁸ Joe Jones concurs, saying that faith "involves decisions and actions, and in that sense . . . is intentional action. . . . A faith that did not dispose one to particular sorts of actions and the actual

developed countries.

⁶ On efficiency and effectiveness as the two greatest values in post-Enlightenment thought, see Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

⁷ See Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), especially Chap. 2-3.

⁸ Thomas N. Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987), 2:347.

enactment of those actions is not faith in the Christian sense.”⁹ What does this mean for someone with limited human agency? Could someone with a profound intellectual and physical disability be truly a Christian in this conception of faith?¹⁰

Too often the faith expressed in a peace church can appear as, and be presented as, a faith for the strong and able. The overwhelming emphasis on action and doing can look much like a cult of normalcy, where identity is completely wrapped up with will and achievement. While an attempt may be made to include people with intellectual disabilities as exceptions whom the church generously accommodates, this inclusion never questions the cult of normalcy and tends to disqualify from moral significance those not “ethically determined” enough. People with cognitive impairments thus reside in a liminal space, vulnerable to patronizing platitudes at best, congregational neglect and disappearance at worst.

If the peace theology and witness of the church cannot include the weakest, most vulnerable members, one can legitimately question its *shalomic* character. Without a robust theology of grace and receptivity integrated into Christian discipleship, the Gospel stands as less than good news for people with intellectual disabilities. It might even come to resemble the *pax pernicioso* that sees them as only passive recipients of “care” from the able-bodied “strong.”

⁹ Joe R. Jones, *A Grammar of Christian Faith: Systematic Explorations in Christian Life and Doctrine* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 94.

¹⁰ Once can see in a Mennonite theology of baptism how the emphasis on agency can possibly exclude those in states of radical dependency. Jodi Nisly Hertzler’s explanation of why the church baptizes adults relies exclusively on the agency and decision of the candidate; any sense of the prevenient grace of the Holy Spirit or the church’s role as subject in the process is entirely absent. See her *Ask Third Way Café: 50 Common and Quirky Questions About Mennonites* (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2009), 22-3. How those with an intellectual disability could be baptized, if they are significantly limited in the cognitive abilities required to achieve this high level of subjectivity, stands as a fundamental question under this theology and practice. “High church Mennonite” Stanley Hauerwas has the same reservations when such an emphasis is placed upon the individual candidate: “Absolutely crucial for me is [the] claim that the primary subject of baptism is not the individual who is baptized but the church itself. I have always thought this is the crucial move if we are to understand why we rightly baptize the mentally handicapped.” *On Baptism: Mennonite-Catholic Theological Colloquium, 2001-2002*, ed. Gerald Schlabach (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004), 101.

Shalom Made Strange

Shalom Church

A potential way forward lies in Lutheran theologian Craig L. Nesson's articulation of a "shalom church."¹¹ Nesson does not include people with cognitive impairments specifically in his text, but his vision of the body of Christ shows much room for a peace ecclesiology that can account for society's most vulnerable members. With a broader, more holistic peace theology, the shalom church could take seriously the lives of people with cognitive impairments in its peace witness. Nesson places *shalom* within the context of the Jewish notion of *tikkun olam*, God's mission to mend the torn fabric of creation. Far more than denoting the absence of conflict, God's peace manifests itself in right relationships of flourishing and goodness: "Shalom involves all members of God's creation living in harmonious and life-giving relationships one with another."¹²

In addition to an appropriate orientation of respect towards God and the created order, God's *shalom* demands welcoming every person as a sacramental sign of God's presence in the world. Those outside the boundaries of "normal" cannot be "othered" into a special outlier status, for human flourishing requires a dynamic solidarity that hosts the stranger and searches for the lost. As exemplified in Jesus' life and mission to inaugurate God's reign on earth by eating with sinners and identifying with innocent sufferers, the church must act as refuge for those most forgotten and neglected. As creatures made for networks of life-giving mutuality and friendship, Christians know that conceptualizing others as objects rather than persons violates the sacramental nature of their being. Embodying God's *shalom* means being committed to what John Swinton calls the "rehumanization of the nonperson" that hears their cry for friendship and offers a Spirit-permeated space of liberation and flourishing.¹³

For Nesson, the Pauline notion of the "body of Christ" is the key metaphor in articulating the church's participation in *tikkun olam*. This

¹¹ Craig L. Nesson, *Shalom Church: The Body of Christ as Ministering Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³ John Swinton, *Resurrecting the Person: Friendship and the Care of People with Mental Health Problems* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 17-18.

image has not only mystical or spiritual significance but ethical significance. Steeped in the Christian narrative, the church's *telos* is *shalom*, embodied in Jesus' proclaiming and inaugurating the Kingdom of God.¹⁴ Nesson fleshes out the character of the church's social ministry through the traditional marks articulated in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. Each mark includes accompanying virtues and practices in which the *shalom* church participates as Christ's body.

Nesson includes traditional peace practices like reconciliation – including repudiation of violence and advocacy of nonviolent resistance – justice, and creation care in his ecclesiology. But it is his inclusion of an apostolic identity grounded in affirming the inherent dignity of each person that is a major contribution to what the peace witness should look like. The ethical character of the church's apostolic mission must be

grounded in the vital affirmation that every human person has been created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and for that reason alone is deserving of infinite respect. . . . To avow that every person is created in God's image is to claim that when we encounter another human being (as a kind of sign), we are to be immediately reminded of the God who created her or him and to relate to that person with sacred respect.¹⁵

In this vision, the church must pay particular attention to the weakest, most vulnerable members of society, and enter into risky solidarity with them, not because it is the right thing to do but because it is where Jesus chooses to reveal himself: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40). For Jesus, the strange places that liberal culture attempts to deny or demolish are the center of God's saving activity. Faithfulness to the gospel means being led by the Spirit to society's forgotten and abandoned spaces.

This vision can act as a powerful counter-narrative to that offered by the cult of normalcy. Rather than human flourishing demanding individual achievement and self-definition, the “good life” of the gospel means learning how to receive the gift of friendship from Christ present through the

¹⁴ Nesson, *Shalom Church*, 51.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

strange/r and how to pass it on to others. The wholly different orientation toward being human inherent in this risky solidarity can enhance faithful discipleship and act as a missional witness to a watching world.

Paul's "Weakness Theology"

Another place where a peace ecclesiology for and with the intellectually disabled might be discerned is in the work of Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong.¹⁶ Yong detects in Paul's Corinthian letters a "theology of weakness" that can open up the way to a "disability-inclusive theology of the church,"¹⁷ and contends that "the power of Paul's rhetoric of weakness is accentuated precisely against the normate assumptions of the Corinthian congregation and the false apostles. Whereas the latter operated according to worldly conventions that emphasized self-pride and self-assertiveness, personal exploits, eloquent rhetoric, powerful speech, and so on, Paul's approach was in accordance with the way of Christ and his cross."¹⁸ By understanding divine revelation as coming through weakness and vulnerability, we can see the intellectually disabled not only as those whose rights need protection but as ministers of God's *shalom*.

In 1 Cor. 12, Paul employs his familiar ecclesial metaphor of the body to bolster the unity of the congregation. Located within this metaphor is a bold claim that the weaker members are essential to that unity: "[T]he members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect. . . . God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member . . ." (22-24). The Greek word translated as "weaker," *asthenestera*, could refer to those with some kind of sickness, but it could also correlate with our modern term "disabled."¹⁹ Paul's mentioning of the weaker members' place in the body

¹⁶ Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). See also his *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2007), Chap. 7.

¹⁷ Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*, 82.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁹ See Martin Albl, "For Whenever I Am Weak, Then I Am Strong': Disability in Paul's Epistles," in *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 146.

is thus surprising, for it assumes they have not been pushed out but have a home in the fellowship. Not only do they have a place, they have one of “greater honor.” Yong sees in this claim that they are “embraced as central and essential to a fully healthy and functioning congregation in particular, and to the ecclesial body in general.”²⁰

This becomes understandable in light of Paul’s writing about the wisdom of God in chapter one of the same letter: “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are” (27-28). God has “made foolish the wisdom of the world” (20), not through the most rational and muscular means but through society’s most vulnerable and despised members. This seems consistent with God’s ultimate means of salvation and wisdom: Christ crucified (23). “If, in the world’s view, ability, capability, and self-accomplishment are normative expectations, then the disability, inability, and utter helplessness of the symbol of the cross now represent God’s power and wisdom.”²¹ In Paul’s theology of weakness, disabilities “become the measure of God’s means of salvation, and it is those who would insist on their own capability, power, and intelligence who are in turn excluded.”²²

For the Apostle, the intellectually disabled can move from the margins of the church to its very center. In this ecclesial vision, God’s *shalom* will be accomplished not by the self-confident ethical rigorist but by the “poor in spirit” who know their limitations and need for God’s grace. Thus the intellectually disabled can be seen as integral members who potentially embody, in an especially powerful way, the Holy Spirit’s peacemaking presence. Christ has reconciled the world not through efficient dominion but through the cross (Ephesians 2:16), and manifests this continuing mission of peace through lives that late modernity deems unproductive. In the body, weakness becomes not an exception but a characteristic of Christ’s subversive nonviolent *shalom*.

²⁰ Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*, 95.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

²² *Ibid.*, 102–103.

A Peace Not as the World Gives

Nessan and Yong articulate an alternative story with which to fashion a peace ecclesiology. For both, *shalom* begins by paying attention to right relations with the weakest and seeing them as powerful embodiments of God's activity. By cultivating this narrative, the church offers what John Swinton terms a "narrative of resistance" to a society that views these persons with fear and loathing.²³ By re-positioning the cognitively impaired from the margins to the center, the church can start to see them not as people who disturb the peace but as those who become ministers of *shalom*.

To a culture where rationality and autonomous agency comprise the basic attributes of human flourishing, this story can only appear as "strange." Jesus says this should come as no surprise: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. *I do not give to you as the world gives*" (John 14:27, emphasis added). Jesus' *shalom* story confronts the *pax pernicioso* and unmasks it as an illusion. The church's task is to be faithful to God's strange story and, by doing so, to become strange itself. As it becomes "conformed to Christ's strange image," it will, we can hope, begin to think again about people it previously thought "abnormal." Perhaps they will seem more normal and sane than the rest of us. They might even become leaders and teachers of what Christ's *shalom* looks like.

L'Arche: Seeing *Shalom* Made Strange

According to Stanley Hauerwas, "Christianity, like peace, is not an idea. Rather it is a bodily faith that must be seen to be believed."²⁴ One place where Hauerwas finds Christian *shalom* expressed is in the communities of L'Arche, which offer a visible counter-narrative to the *pax pernicioso* and its norm of violence. While L'Arche has never claimed to be an official church or denomination, its self-proclaimed mission to be a sign in the world

²³ "Counternarratives do the work of repairing broken or misleading narratives and as such become a place of rupture and change. Counternarratives offer a point of resistance." John Swinton, Harriet Mowat, and Susannah Baines, "Whose Story Am I? Redescribing Profound Intellectual Disability in the Kingdom of God," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 15, no. 1 (March 2011): 7.

²⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, "Seeing Peace: L'Arche as a Peace Movement," in Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations Between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 309.

speaks to its sacramentality and embodied bearing of the gospel message. "L'Arche shows, as the church is called to show, that Christianity is true by demonstrating what community would look like if the gospel were true."²⁵ If L'Arche embodies the strange story of God's *shalom*, then the church would do well to pay attention to it and to consider how it might inform peace ecclesiology. An articulation of this potential ecclesial vision lies in the writings of L'Arche founder Jean Vanier, who has shaped the organization's ability to be a sign of Christ's peace.

Christ is Our Peace

Vanier's vision of *shalom* begins with a great peace text: "For [Christ] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. . . . that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross . . ." (Eph. 2:14-16). Vanier has seen firsthand how people with intellectual disabilities have become outliers, pushed beyond the boundaries of the human, and recognizes there can be no liberation for them without tearing down the walls that violently exclude them: "There can be no peace unless we are all convinced that every person, whatever his or her abilities or disabilities, whatever his or her ethnic origins, culture or religion, is precious to God."²⁶ As long as there are "walls of fear" inside human hearts and human groups, they will continue to practice the "othering" that demonizes difference and leads to perpetual warfare. This fear represents the hostility and enmity that Jesus came to destroy through his life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus' work is to destroy the barriers, prejudices and fear that separate people with handicaps from 'normal' people, so as to unite them in a single body. It is the complete reversal of a hierarchal society in which the powerful, the influential and the privileged are elevated, and the weak and poor are put down. Those who are weakest form the heart of the body instituted by

²⁵ John Swinton, "Introduction: Living Gently in a Violent World," in Stanley Hauerwas and Jean Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 18.

²⁶ Jean Vanier, *Encountering the Other* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 43.

Jesus, in which competition no longer exists. Here each person has a place; no one is superior to anyone else. Each person is unique and essential.²⁷

Vanier's view coincides with Paul's: a unified body where the most vulnerable lie at the center of the community. Drawing inspiration from 1 Corinthians 12, Vanier puts forward a vision of a peace church that revolves around Jesus' nonviolent ethic and Paul's reflections on the body of Christ. Those reflections imply that "people who are the weakest and least presentable are indispensable to the church. I have never seen this as the first line of a book on ecclesiology. Who really believes it? But this is the heart of faith, of what it means to be the church. Do we really believe that the weakest, the least presentable, those we hide away – that they are indispensable? If that was our vision of the church, it would change many things."²⁸

The prophetic nature of L'Arche's community life is seen in its relation to time. In a world of speed and efficiency, time is the enemy to be conquered and dominated. Technology becomes a means to exercise violence over time, which in turn becomes one of the "powers" that enslave us. But the disabled at L'Arche continually train the nondisabled to slow down and live at a more human pace, to become "friends of time."²⁹ By doing so, those with cognitive impairments become teachers of the virtues of patience and listening, virtues so often neglected in the *pax perniciosa* but fundamental for persons of God's *shalom*.

As the intellectually disabled form the heart of this community of peace and reconciliation, L'Arche bears out the Pauline insight that weakness, not power or strength, represents the means of God's *shalom*. Humility towards others, not superiority, marks the way of peace. Only when people acknowledge their human contingency and creatureliness can they be secure enough to welcome the "other" in true friendship and mutuality: "Followers of Jesus are called to believe that non-violence, poverty, openness

²⁷ Jean Vanier, *The Heart of L'Arche: A Spirituality for Every Day* (Toronto: Novalis, 1995), 56.

²⁸ Jean Vanier, "The Vision of Jesus: Living Peaceably in a Wounded World," in Hauerwas and Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World*, 74.

²⁹ Vanier, *Community and Growth*, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 125. See also the reflections of Stanley Hauerwas on L'Arche as a community of "timeful friends" in his *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), Chap. 8.

and forgiveness are the surest ways for them and their communities to receive life from God and to give life, peace and unity to the world. It is in our weakness that the power of God is manifested through the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit.”³⁰ Vanier’s coherence with Paul’s “weakness theology” could not be clearer: recall “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness. So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (2 Cor. 12:9).

Vanier recognizes that enacting *shalom* is ultimately God’s business, not ours. The call to be peacemakers must be grounded and inspired by the life of the Trinity; only when the divine life operates within people can they perform the radical acts of letting go and forgiveness necessary for lives of *shalom*. Abiding close to Christ, who forgives seventy times seven, becomes the only way to flee the desire to bind another in hatred and to point the way to solidarity.

The Oddness of L’Arche

In the cult of normalcy’s narrative, the disruptive abnormal must be eliminated for society’s good and their own. Without the assets of rationality and autonomy, no human flourishing is possible and thus no real peace. However, L’Arche confronts this narrative by showing that the “strange” lives of people with intellectual disabilities not only have an inherent human dignity but can be paradigmatic for what it means to be a person. Thus Vanier comments that “[c]ommunity life with men and women who have intellectual disabilities has taught me a great deal about what it means to be human. . . . [I]t is the weak, and those who have been excluded from society, who have been my teachers.”³¹

In this way of speaking about the intellectually disabled, “L’Arche is truly odd—it refuses to do what society thinks it should.”³² Rather than either deny or demonize the disruptive difference of people with cognitive impairments, L’Arche instead offers “*a place where disabilities exist, but don’t really matter.*” Disabilities are not problems to be solved but “particular ways

³⁰ Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 37.

³¹ Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 6.

³² Swinton, “Introduction,” in Hauerwas and Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World*, 17.

of being human which need to be understood, valued and supported.”³³ This narrative of resistance directly confronts the *pax pernicioso* that envisions only an embodiment suitable for a hyper-individualistic consumer society. In Vanier and L’Arche’s vision, peace and unity require the solidarity of vastly different embodiments, for all have been precious created by God.

L’Arche thus acts as an embodiment of the “strange” *shalom* of God, who loves each one and is revealed by weakness and vulnerability. This *shalom* becomes marked by patience, not speed; mutuality over competition; relationship, not alienation; and grace as the font of all action. The strange peace of L’Arche functions as a counter-narrative not just for those with intellectual disabilities but for the entire church and human community.

Toward a Peace Church Theology for and with People with Intellectual Disabilities

With the example of L’Arche in sight, we can now move towards articulating a peace church ecclesiology for and with people with intellectual disabilities. First, the church will need to open its doors wide to welcome those whom the *pax pernicioso* cannot envision as persons. This entails becoming more inclusive. Second, the church must become a place of belonging where the intellectually disabled move from being strangers to becoming friends. When church members truly enter into relationships of mutuality with those with cognitive impairments, they cannot help but be transformed into more faithful disciples of Christ through their solidarity with the “strange” ones whom Jesus continually chose (and chooses) to befriend.

Inclusion: Boundary-breaking Hospitality

A significant reason for the church succumbing to the narrative of the cult of normalcy, or at least not offering a robust counter-narrative, is that it has not often had people with intellectual disabilities within its fellowship. The church must repent of how it has excluded them from its community life in physical ways as well as in its theology and worldview. While doing so, it also has to begin opening its doors in a radical welcome. The community’s

³³ John Swinton, “The Body of Christ Has Down’s Syndrome: Theological Reflections on Vulnerability, Disability, and Graceful Communities,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 68.

conversion must (and will) be accompanied by drawing the oppressed and marginalized into its social and worship life.

Biblical scholar Donald Senior sees radical inclusion inherent in Jesus' life and mission as described in the gospels.³⁴ Jesus' "boundary breaking" mission reached out to the outcast and drew them into the community in a "wide embrace." The number of stories that present Jesus either engaging directly with the "impure" or using them as protagonists in his teaching reveals the amplitude of his mission. It is to these strange persons and places that he continually chooses to go. Senior argues that this same mission must not be optional but essential to the church's life. He cites numerous examples of Jesus practicing inclusion of the outlier (Mark 5:1-20; 10:46-52; Luke 13:10-17), and contends that this welcome became a foundational orientation to the early Christian community's view of its own mission (Acts 3:1-10; chap. 10). Potent exemplars of this hospitality are the plethora of meal scenes in the gospels.³⁵ In the Mediterranean world of Jesus' time, to eat with someone was to include them in one's most intimate circle. The early Christian community saw these meals of Jesus, along with their own practice of table fellowship, as the gathering of the nations in Jerusalem proclaimed by Isaiah: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for *all peoples* a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines. . . . And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over *all peoples*, the sheet that is spread over *all nations*" (25:6,7, emphasis added).

Senior sees the same mission evident in Paul's life and writings. From being an agent of exclusion persecuting the "strange" Jesus followers of Palestine, Paul became the champion of an inclusive God (Rom. 3:21-4:25) and an inclusive community (1 Cor. 12:14-26). All could become children of God due to Christ, the God who revealed himself to the world as a crucified

³⁴ Donald Senior, "Access and Inclusion: The Biblical Vision," paper presented at the Summer Institute on Theology and Disability, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, July 17, 2012.

³⁵ Citations that Senior provides include Mark 2:13-17, 6:36-44 (and its parallels); Luke 5:27-39, 11:37-54, 14:1-24, 19:1-10; Matt. 8:11, 22:1-14, 25:1-13; John 2:1-11, 21:9-14 (among many others). Jean Vanier finds the same dynamic occurring around the dining table in L'Arche communities. He discovered that sharing life with people with intellectual disabilities was re-living the radicality of Jesus' table fellowship, bringing him to a deeper realization of the connection between the Eucharistic meal and the "ordinary" meal of daily life. See Vanier, *The Heart of L'Arche*, 29, and Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 204.

and “weak” Messiah. By finding the glory of Yahweh not in the Holy of Holies but in a crucified Christ, Paul rethought and reconsidered the heart of his tradition and opened a way into the people of God previously inconceivable.

If the mission of inclusion was not just a “good example” but a “pattern of reality,” as Senior maintains, the church must adopt this orientation in its social ministry. *Shalom* can no longer mean merely advocating nonviolent resistance to conflict or denouncing unjust uses of power (although these remain deeply important peace acts). The *shalom* witness must include radical acts of hospitality to outliers and non-persons whom the *pax pernicioso* would discard. The biblical value of hospitality must be recovered in its deepest, thickest sense; welcoming the other means opening up our tables—both at home and at worship—to the “strange” ones considered nothing in society.

A bold initiative would be to intentionally seek out and find those “genetic fugitives” with no place in the *pax pernicioso*. What would happen if a church (or the church) informed hospitals and genetic counselors of its desire to adopt pregnancies or infants with Down syndrome? What kind of witness would this be to a society that discerns only suffering and defect in these lives? Would some people reconsider terminating a pregnancy? The church could have a tremendous influence in transforming the western social imaginary by welcoming lives deemed “unworthy.”³⁶ By intentionally bringing the intellectually disabled into its fellowship and households, the church could show forth a depth of inclusion society is waiting to see. In God’s *shalom* all the dividing walls have been broken down between peoples and all “othering” abolished. The strange and disturbing are not pushed outside the community’s boundaries but called, hosted, and included.

Beyond Inclusion: Friendship and Belonging

However, inclusion is not enough. The church can invite people with intellectual disabilities into its fellowship and grant them access to all the

³⁶ Michael Gorman has argued that the early church’s attitudes towards condemning infant exposure and abortion, as well as welcoming those children into its social life, contributed to the abolishment of those practices in ancient Rome. See Michael J. Gorman, *Abortion & the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1982), 61-2.

sacred mysteries, but without entering into relationships with them no *shalom* occurs. The cult of normalcy narrative proclaims humans flourish when people are “free” (i.e., left alone) to make their own choices and decisions. But God’s *shalom* is inherently social and communal; there can be no *shalom* as individuals but only as a body of people in relationship with each other. Our selves are constituted by the other. In the words of Ubuntu, an African theology, “I am because we are.”³⁷

If inclusion is the first step in the church’s *shalom* made strange, then friendship and belonging must be the end goal. Arguably the greatest poverty and suffering for the intellectually disabled has less to do with their particular impairments than with their lack of mutual and chosen relationships.³⁸ The church has often done a good job offering “care” to those with cognitive disabilities, but extending friendships to them has been another matter. Yet without mutuality, relationships can become patronizing and infantilizing. The strange *shalom* of God requires moving “from generosity to a communion of hearts.”³⁹ As Vanier notes, “communities start in generosity; they must grow in the ability to listen. In the end, the most important thing is not to do things for people who are poor and in distress, but to enter into relationship with them.”⁴⁰ Inclusion connotes the “to” aspect of being a peace church for the intellectually disabled; doing *shalom* “with” them means becoming friends.

Jesus took this same approach with his disciples. On the night before

³⁷ For a Christian articulation of Ubuntu, see Michael Battle, *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me* (New York: Seabury Books, 2009), and *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997).

³⁸ Youth minister Benjamin T. Conner mentions this as a sad reality for many youth with developmental disabilities. See his *Amplifying Out Witness: Giving Voice to Adolescents and Adolescents with Developmental Disabilities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 34-73. In a recent study done in Canada on friendships and children with disabilities, a survey found that 53 percent of these children have zero to few friends. See Anne Snowdon, “Strengthening Communities for Canadian Children with Disabilities,” January 19, 2012, <http://sandboxproject.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/SandboxProjectDiscussionDocument.pdf> (accessed December 18, 2012). For the same phenomenon with adults, see Deborah S. Metzel, “Places of Social Poverty and Service Dependency of People with Intellectual Disabilities: A Case Study in Baltimore, Maryland,” *Health & Place* 11, no. 2 (June 2005): 93-105.

³⁹ Vanier, *Encountering the Other*, 13.

⁴⁰ Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 142.

his passion he told them, “I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father” (John 15:15). By calling them friends, he revealed that he chose to enter into intimate relationships with people very different from himself. One might think that the different embodiment of a person with a profound intellectual disability would preclude genuine friendship. Yet Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, did this very thing with his obstinate and obtuse disciples! What previously would seem strange indeed—the incarnation of God himself within the broken, limited world of creation—becomes in Christ the key to salvation history.

Part of being a disciple must therefore include engaging in radical acts of friendship making, especially among those the *pax pernicioso* relegates to mere objects of charity. God’s strange *shalom* means that the church must let the Holy Spirit lead it to the edges where outliers dwell, ready to choose them as friends despite seemingly gross asymmetries. Jesus clearly chooses his disciples in spite of their vastly different embodiment. The church is called to the same task. As Swinton, Mowat and Baines write,

God in Jesus enters into friendships with human beings who are radically unlike God’s self. In so doing God lays down a principle of grace that forms the pattern for friendships that claim to be genuinely Christian; friendships that reach towards, embrace and are embraced by those whom society considers to be least like “us.” In so doing the incarnation is radically lived out and becomes an enduring presence in the lives of the people of God as they live lives that anticipate the coming Kingdom.⁴¹

If a crucial aspect of *shalom* witness lies in entering into such friendships, a bold way to practice this would be to make it part of the church’s initiation process. What if part of the process of becoming church members consisted of relating to people with intellectual disabilities in the congregation? If prospective members treat these persons in a respectful

⁴¹ Swinton, Mowat, and Baines, “Whose Story Am I?” 16. See also Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

way, honoring the divine image within them, they could proceed towards baptism, confirmation, or other rites of initiation. But if they do not extend mutuality in their relationship, this would be a sign that they need more time to discover the character of *shalom* relationships. Becoming adequately detached from the cult of normalcy narrative may take time; how candidates relate to the intellectually disabled could indicate the authenticity of their transformation into God's strange *shalom*.

Such a transformation should be seen not only in candidates for baptism or confirmation, but within the church as a whole if members are practicing authentic hospitality. As the intellectually disabled find sanctuary within the body of Christ, their presence will alter the church's "self-understanding and identity in light of the weakness and foolishness of the cross of Christ."⁴² As Nessian argues, becoming a friendly church "entails [a] readiness to be changed by those who are different. Every serious relationship with another person changes everyone involved."⁴³ A church more "strange" with the intellectually disabled at the center embodies Christ's reconciliation as a movement from xenophobia to philoxenia, from fear of the stranger to love of the stranger. The friend-making mission eventually leads to the church becoming a place of expansive belonging, even for the enemy and the outlier.

In the midst of all the violence and corruption of the world God invites us today to create new places of belonging, places of sharing, of peace, of kindness, places where no one needs to defend himself or herself; places where each one is loved and accepted with one's own fragility, abilities and disabilities. This is my vision for our churches: that they become places of belonging, places of sharing.⁴⁴

The church cannot be whole without every part being present and honored, especially the "weakest and least presentable." Living in God's *shalom* means that when marginalized people are absent something is amiss, for as Swinton remarks, "*To be included you just need to be present. To*

⁴² Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*, 115.

⁴³ Nessian, *Shalom Church*, 105. This is seen in the gospel story of the Canaanite woman and her "talking back" to Jesus (Matt. 15:21-28). Rather than accept her exclusion, she challenges Jesus and appears to change his perception about which people apply to his mission.

⁴⁴ Jean Vanier, *Befriending the Stranger* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 12.

*belong you need to be missed.*⁴⁵ When the church truly misses the presence of the intellectually disabled in its congregations and communities, it has become the peace made strange that Jesus came to inaugurate and embody.

Conclusion

God's *shalom* has implications not simply for those with intellectual disabilities but for the whole of humanity. Slowing down to listen and pay attention to their stories and proclaiming narratives of resistance to the *pax pernicioso* has potentially liberating consequences for all God's people. The whole church needs a peace theology founded on grace and vulnerability rather than achievement and strength, if for no other reason than to remain faithful to Jesus and the gospel. Welcoming difference and befriending the strange/r are central to Jesus' gospel of peace. Announcing this peace from the perspective of the intellectually disabled reveals how the *shalom* of God invites us into a wholly new way of embodying God's story.

Certainly the church also needs a theology that can counteract military violence and acrimonious interpersonal and international conflicts. I have tried to show that a deeper, stranger sense of *shalom* is required to expose and heal the often highly subtle violence built into the cult of normalcy. By first bringing people with disabilities into the community of faith and then entering into friendship with them, the church becomes a place of belonging that seeks the outlier's presence and longs for reconciliation. As L'Arche communities show, this vision is not a dream but a reality, one in which people whom the surrounding culture deems expendable can become the teachers and leaders of God's *shalom*. Can we let these messengers of unity guide us into God's strange and joyful future? The church will only be more itself by doing so, and at the same time be a sacrament for a world waiting for a community that welcomes the other in joy and without fear.

Jason Reimer Greig is an MDiv graduate of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana.

⁴⁵ John Swinton, "From Inclusion to Belonging: A Practical Theology of Community, Disability and Humanness," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 16, no. 2 (June 2012): 184.

Assyria the Ax, God the Lumberjack: Jeremiah 29, the Logic of the Prophets, and the Quest for a Nonviolent God

W. Derek Suderman

Introduction

The Anabaptist tradition has long linked Christian discipleship to a life of nonviolent obedience, insisting that the central significance of Jesus' death and resurrection confirms Jesus' life and teaching as the normative guide for Christian ethics.¹ Grounded in this conviction, several contemporary scholars have appealed to a "christocentric approach" to insist upon the nonviolence of God and reject the link between God and violence often present within biblical material. While I agree that a commitment to follow Jesus in life demands a thoroughgoing commitment to nonviolence, I disagree that the nonviolence of *God* provides the necessary grounds for Christian pacifism. Rather, for Jesus as for us, such a conviction emerges from interacting with scriptural documents and a firm conviction about the sovereignty of God.

Jeremiah 29 and its call to "seek the welfare of the city" has been identified as crucial for "Narrative Christus Victor" (J. Denny Weaver) and affirmed in an effort to properly understand God's nonviolent character (Eric Seibert). Upon closer inspection, however, Jeremiah's letter to the Babylonian exiles reflects the same logic and assumptions that undergird Isaiah, where God has the divine prerogative, ability, and willingness to use

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¹ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1994), 1-20.

human empires as instruments to discipline Israel (and others) by violent means. To use Isaiah's imagery: while Assyria may be the ax used to punish Israel, God is the lumberjack who wields it (Isa. 10). Rather than transcend these characteristic prophetic assumptions, Jer. 29 also sees God as both driving Israel into exile and gathering it from the nations.

All is not lost, however. Luke's depiction of Jesus in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4) provides fertile ground for reconsidering a christocentric approach. Rather than providing a theological or ethical rationale for the nonviolence of God, this passage reflects a hermeneutical stance dedicated to interpreting biblical documents in search of the divine will. Placing Jesus at the center of christocentrism challenges those committed to such an approach to follow his example by forming and habitually participating in reading communities devoted to wrestling with biblical documents. Such an approach follows Jesus' lead in arriving at a nonviolent ethical stance through a fundamentally *hermeneutical* commitment—even to those documents that depict God violently—rather than adopting a nonviolent view of God as an epistemological center or criterion that sees any link between God and violence as mistaken.

Portraying such an approach as an effort to defend a violent God misses the point of shifting away from an innovative theological or ethical "construction" of God and towards a renewed commitment to prioritize a hermeneutical orientation and commitment to Scripture. To paraphrase John Howard Yoder, the case I seek to make does not deal primarily with the Old Testament or even a link between God and violence, but with contemporary scholars who assert that the only way to emerge with a nonviolent Christian ethic is to insist upon the nonviolence of God, and so leave large swaths of the biblical witness behind.² As with Jesus, a contemporary Christian commitment to peace emerges from and demands an ongoing hermeneutical struggle with the OT, the only Scripture Jesus and his disciples possessed. Indeed, appealing to Yoder and Jer. 29 to support a nonviolent view of God proves ironic, since neither conforms to such a view; rather, both emphasize

² Yoder introduces his influential work by saying: "The case I am seeking to make has to do not narrowly with the New Testament text but with the modern ethicists who have assumed that the only way to get from the gospel story to ethics ... was to leave the story behind." Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 12-13.

the core prophetic conviction that God is sovereign over creation, history, and the nations. In contrast, the quest for a nonviolent God seeks to limit the divine to our ethical and epistemological expectations while discounting elements of the biblical witness that suggest otherwise. In so doing, scholars tend to replace what they deem to be ancient misconceptions with their own constructions of God, and so turn away from the basic hermeneutical orientation that Jesus (and Yoder) exemplify.

God, Empires, and “Disaster” in Isaiah

Before discussing Jer. 29 I will consider the portrayal of God in several key passages within Isaiah in order to describe the prophets’ logic with respect to God and violence. Indeed, given its extraordinary prominence in and influence on the New Testament, Isaiah looms large in any discussion of Christian hermeneutics.

The “Song of the vineyard” provides a thumbnail sketch of the message of ‘I Isaiah,³ in which the initial metaphor provides a rhetorical ploy to prompt the people to convict themselves (Isa. 5:1-4). For our purposes, the conclusion is key:

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.

I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured;

I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

I will make it a waste...

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel,

and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting;

he expected justice (*mishpat*), but saw bloodshed (*mispah*);

righteousness (*tsedaqah*), but heard a cry (*tse’aqah*)!

(Isa. 5:5-7)⁴

What began as a “love song” turns to condemnation and an announcement of judgment and destruction. The language could not be clearer—God will remove the protective hedge and the vineyard will be destroyed. And, in

³ While scholars commonly refer to I, II, and III Isaiah to differentiate between pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic layers within the book of Isaiah, the scroll defies such easy classification. Nonetheless, this paper employs these terms as heuristic shorthand, placing them in single quotes to indicate the provisional nature of such terminology.

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV.

no uncertain terms, the LORD will be responsible to do all of these things; indeed, the description of God as the “LORD of hosts” or “LORD of armies” underscores the militant imagery here.⁵

The song of the vineyard leads to a series of “woe” oracles (5:8-23) that further indict the people and reiterate what the LORD will do:

Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people,
and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them . . .
For all this his anger has not turned away,
and his hand is stretched out still. (Isa. 5:25)

This verse also introduces a key phrase reflecting a significant motif in Isaiah that is reiterated verbatim four times in chapters 9-10: “For all this his anger has not turned away . . .” (9:12, 17, 21; 10:4). The conviction underlying the “song” is thus repeated: the people’s actions have provoked the wrath of the LORD, who will act in judgment.

Whereas Isa. 5 depicts the LORD’s ability to summon foreign kings and nations as an owner whistles for his dog (5:26-30), Isa. 10 specifies how God will destroy the “vineyard”:

Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger
— the club in their hands is my fury!
Against a godless nation I send him,
and against the people of my wrath I command him,
to take spoil and seize plunder,
and to tread them down like the mire of the streets . . .
(Isa. 10:5-6)

What lay implicit in chapter 5 becomes explicit here: the LORD will use Assyria as an instrument of divine judgment. While the foreign king does so unwittingly, believing his own might and wisdom result in victory (10:12-14), the reader knows better. The audacity of Assyria’s claim here is mocked

⁵ For an overview of the origin and ongoing royal and military connotations of the designation “LORD of hosts,” see C.L. Seow, “Hosts, Lord Of,” in *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 304-307.

with rhetorical flourish:

Shall the ax vaunt itself over the one who wields it,
or the saw magnify itself against the one who handles it?
As if a rod should raise the one who lifts it up,
or as if a staff should lift the one who is not wood! (Isa. 10:15)

The ludicrous analogies further underscore the point. Israel is not destroyed because of having a weak military or making a strategic mistake in the world of *realpolitik*, but because the LORD wills it and uses this foreign empire—and its ruthless military might—to do so. While Assyria may be the ax, God is the lumberjack.⁶

The perspective of ‘I Isaiah’ seems clear. Israel has violated the LORD’s expectations, and God will use a foreign nation instrumentally to bring judgment on this rebellious people. Despite the discomfort they may provoke, the “anger of the LORD” figures prominently and the designation “LORD of armies” underscores the militaristic implications of this understanding. As Walter Brueggemann observes, “The tradition of Isaiah articulates faith on a large scale, resisting any safe, private, or conventional categories.”⁷ Here God is free, active, and in control, even of foreign powers and their military hardware; God is no pacifist in ‘I Isaiah.’

In ‘II Isaiah’ (Isa. 40-55) there seems to be a significant shift. Where earlier chapters speak a message of judgment and impending doom, Isa. 40ff proclaims a message of “comfort,” where scattering has been reversed to ingathering. Many key passages emerge in this context that are later picked up, including the “voice crying in the wilderness” and the “suffering servant” songs that NT writers link directly to the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. Given this substantial shift, we might expect a radical reorientation of the portrayal of God—a divine lobotomy to rid the LORD of the anger and redemptive violence so prominent earlier in the book. However, the understanding of God here reflects the same prophetic logic and assumptions as before.

⁶ For Isaiah’s use of imagery here, see Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 91–94.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

While the proclamation of comfort and the suffering servant in ‘II Isaiah’ tend to garner more attention, Isa. 45 proves key in describing how, why, and to what end God will bring this message of comfort and in-gathering to fruition. The chapter opens with the remarkable statement:

Thus says the LORD to his anointed (*meshiho*), to Cyrus,
whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him
and strip kings of their robes... (Isa. 45:1)

This passage identifies Cyrus, the king of Persia, as the instrument God will use to gather “my servant Jacob” back from exile. What’s more, while the verb “anoint” appears elsewhere, this is the only occurrence of the term *mashiach* (messiah/anointed one) in the entire book. Where ‘I Isaiah’ identified Assyria as God’s instrument for executing judgment, here Cyrus of Persia appears as God’s “anointed” to send them home.

In addition, this passage strongly emphasizes the singularity of God:

I am the LORD, and there is no other;
besides me there is no god (or are no gods).
I (continue to) gird⁸ you, though you do not know me,
so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west,
that there is no one besides me;
I am the LORD, and there is no other (Isa. 45:5-6).

In contrast to the ten commandments, where “you shall have no other gods *before me*” (Ex. 20:3) allows for the possibility of other deities, ‘II Isaiah’ proves more emphatic: there simply are no other gods.⁹ Finally, while English translations often obscure the stridency of vv. 6-7, the wording could hardly be more forceful:

⁸ With no mention of weaponry or armaments, I have modified the NRSV rendering of the term *’azar* from “arm” to “gird,” following the KJV, RSV, and NAS.

⁹ “I am the LORD and there is no other” appears four times in Isa. 45 (vv. 5, 6, 18, 21) and nowhere else in the OT. The phrase “*there is no other*” (*’en ’od*) itself proves unusual, appearing seven times in Isaiah (all within chapters 45-46) to underscore that there is none besides God (45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21, 22; 46:9). Similar uses outside of Isaiah are scattered (cf. Deut. 4:35, 39; 1 Kings 8:60; and Joel 2:27).

I (am) the LORD, and there is no other:
 former of light and creator of darkness
 maker of *shalom* (peace/prosperity/well-being) and creator of *ra'* (evil/
 disaster).
 I the LORD do/make all of these . . . (Isa. 45:6b-7).¹⁰

The prominent use of the term “create” in ‘II Isaiah’ further underscores God’s sovereignty by depicting the LORD as the creator of the ends of the earth (40:28), the heavens (42:5), Israel (43:1), and both darkness and “evil/disaster” (*ra'*) (45:7).¹¹ In effect, the same God who created the world sent Israel into exile and will return it to the land, so that dismantling the connection between God and exile throws the former into question as well.

Finally, like the depiction of Assyria in chapter 10, Isaiah 45 also employs a metaphor for rhetorical effect to describe God’s sovereignty over foreign powers:

Woe to you who strive with your Maker,
 earthen vessels with the potter!
 Does the clay say to the one who fashions it,
 “What are you making”? or “Your work has no handles”?
 Woe to anyone who says to a father, “What are you begetting?”
 or to a woman, “With what are you in labor?” (Isa. 45:9-10)

While the ax of Assyria has given way to the clay vessels of Persia and God the lumberjack becomes the LORD the potter, the point remains the same: God is in control and can use earthly powers at will.¹²

This brief discussion of Isa. 45 demonstrates that the logic of ‘II Isaiah’ proves consistent with that of ‘I Isaiah.’ In both cases God’s will is carried out through the instrumental use of foreign powers (including their use of violence) and can be done without their knowledge or recognition. Where

¹⁰ My translation; the participle form here can be translated as either “I form . . .” or “former of.”

¹¹ “Create” appears even more prominently in Isaiah than Genesis (21 and 11 times respectively, out of 54 occurrences in the OT). Within Isaiah, “create” is a particularly key term in ‘II Isaiah’ with only one occurrence before chapter 40, 3 in 56-66, and the remaining 17 in Isa. 40-55.

¹² Paul employs the same image to insist upon the prerogative of the potter related to wrath and destruction, explicitly drawing on the broader Isaiah scroll; see Rom. 9:19-29.

Weaver seeks to “put the devil back into the equation” to distance God from violence,¹³ Isaiah moves in the opposite direction, claiming that God was, is, and will be in control. In fact, using Weaver’s definition of “the devil or Satan” as “the name for the locus of all power that does not recognize the rule of God,” then within Isaiah God uses “Satan” in the guise of the kings of Assyria and Persia to carry out the divine will, even calling the latter God’s “anointed/messiah.”¹⁴ According to the book of Isaiah’s perspective it would be an idolatrous mistake to suggest that someone or something else prompted the destruction of Jerusalem and Babylonian exile, or the subsequent ingathering of Israel from the nations.

The conviction that God ultimately controls world events, including the rise and fall of brutal empires, reflects a basic understanding of God reflected in *all* of Isaiah—the hopeful message of comfort and gathering in ‘II Isaiah’ as much as that of judgment and punishment in ‘I Isaiah.’ While we may be tempted to sideline such judgment and emphasize the NT’s preference for ‘II Isaiah’ where God proclaims return to those in captivity, the entire book shares the same logic with respect to its understanding of God.¹⁵ And while we may wish to find (or “construct”) a nonviolent God, Isaiah confidently asserts that the LORD is in control of both the disaster of exile and the comfort of return; indeed, to reject this premise makes the book of Isaiah largely unintelligible.

Ironically, attempts to insulate God from the violence of exile by saying that Isaiah and the other prophets were mistaken (Seibert)¹⁶ or by attributing

¹³ J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 213-15.

¹⁴ Ibid., 211. While this perspective sounds odd, it proves similar to the role of “the *satan* (adversary)” in Job, who functions as a prosecuting attorney within God’s heavenly court (Job 1-2). Though a larger discussion, reference to Cyrus as a “messiah” here corresponds to his selection to fulfill a specific task, but clearly not as the idealized, future Davidic king (Messiah).

¹⁵ For a discussion of “Yahweh’s exclusive prerogative” that makes a similar point centered on Isa. 30-31, see Ben C. Ollenburger, *Zion, the City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult*, JSOT Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 104-30.

¹⁶ Eric Seibert argues that, while the destruction of Jerusalem represents “an indisputable historical fact ... Israel’s *theological interpretation* of that event remains open to question.” Eric A. Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 165; original emphasis. For a more extended critique of Seibert’s approach, see W. Derek Suderman, “Wrestling with Violent Depictions of God: A Response

violence and evil to Satan (Weaver)¹⁷ threaten to re-create the dualistic or even polytheistic thinking that Isaiah stridently rejects; here Israel's defeat does not reflect the triumph of foreign armies or gods but the discipline of its own deity. If God did not send Israel into exile, then who or what did? In Isaiah such a question is unthinkable, since "I am the LORD and *there is no other*."

God and "Exile" in Jeremiah 29

In *The Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Brueggemann identifies Jeremiah as "the clearest model for prophetic imagination and ministry" who "embodies the alternative consciousness of Moses in the face of the denying king."¹⁸ Similar to Brueggemann's critique of "royal consciousness," John Howard Yoder describes the "Jeremianic turn" or "shift" as a rejection of the monarchic project and sees life "in exile" as a calling rather than a temporary hiatus;¹⁹ indeed, in his view Jer. 29 provides a key paradigm for the faithful church willing to function without being in control.²⁰ Some who argue for a nonviolent understanding of God have also identified Jer. 29 as particularly significant. For instance, Eric Seibert places it among the "more positive and largely unproblematic" depictions of God,²¹ while J. Denny Weaver identifies it as the key OT passage that allows for the transition to Jesus within "narrative Christus Victor."²² Weaver also views Constantine as the church's fall into a monarchic mode, and appeals directly to Yoder's article just cited to see in Jer. 29 an alternative and the church's true calling. But does this passage prove compatible with an insistence on God's nonviolence?

Where 'II Isaiah' proclaims a new exodus from exile back to the

to Eric Seibert's *Disturbing Divine Behavior*, *Direction: A Mennonite Brethren Forum* 40, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 151-62.

¹⁷ Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 211.

¹⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Second ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 46-47.

¹⁹ John Howard Yoder, "See How They Go with Their Face to the Sun," in *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 60, 64-70.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

²¹ As Seibert states: "when discussing disturbing divine behavior in the Old Testament, it is important to keep it in perspective and not to overemphasize it by neglecting the many positive portrayals included there as well." Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior*, 230-31.

²² Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 66-68.

land, Jeremiah's letter instructs his listeners to "seek the welfare of the city" in their Babylonian setting. While helpful for orienting the church to its contemporary vocation in a post-Christendom world, upon closer inspection Jer. 29 reflects the same orientation and logic operative within the broader prophetic corpus. Where we may wish to link Jeremiah's message to a nonviolent view of God, here too God uses foreign powers instrumentally to punish and protect.²³

Jeremiah's letter immediately reflects this prophetic logic: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles *whom I have sent into exile* from Jerusalem to Babylon . . ." (29:4). The conviction that it was God who sent Judah into exile is then reiterated twice more in the letter. First, Jeremiah's initial call to "settle in" to life in Babylon states:

But seek the welfare (*shalom*) of the city
 where I have sent you (caused you to go) into exile,
 and pray to the LORD on its behalf,
 for in its welfare (*shalom*) you will find your welfare (*shalom*).
 (Jer. 29:7)

While it is appropriate to underscore the threefold occurrence of *shalom* to emphasize God's concern for the exiles' "welfare/peace," this portrayal also directly links God to the exile itself. The same dynamic appears when moving from Jeremiah's depiction of the present to a hopeful future:

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD,
 plans for your welfare (*shalom*) and not for harm (*ra'ah*),
 to give you a future with hope . . .
 I will let you find me, says the LORD,
 and I will restore your fortunes
 and gather you from all the nations
 and all the places *where I have driven you*, says the LORD,
 and I will bring you back to the place

²³ For my purposes, discussion on the compositional background of this passage is unnecessary. Comments offered here are based on the Hebrew (Masoretic) text; readers should consult commentaries for more detailed exegetical information.

from which I sent you into exile . . . (Jer. 29:11, 14).

Once again, even a description of this hopeful, anticipated future reiterates God's involvement in the disaster of the past. Where we may be tempted to separate God's loving restoration of Israel from its experience of exile, Jeremiah's letter holds both together under God's sovereign rule.

In light of the above discussion of Isa. 45, the pairing of *shalom* (welfare) and *ra'ah* (evil, wickedness, disaster) here should also pique our attention. A passage instructing Jeremiah to speak in the temple a few chapters earlier further exemplifies this connection:

Perhaps if²⁴ they will listen, all of them,
and will turn from their evil (*ra'ah*) way,
that I may change my mind about the disaster (*ra'ah*) that I intend to bring
on them
because of their evil (*ro'ah*) doings. (Jer. 26:3)²⁵

Far from repudiating Isaiah's claim that God "makes *shalom*" (weal) and "creates *ra'*" (woe),²⁶ Jeremiah also sees the LORD as responsible for both the "disaster" or "calamity" (*ra'ah*) of exile and the future "welfare" (*shalom*) of the people.

Thus, it is problematic to cite God's commitment to restoration and "peace" (*shalom*) in Jeremiah's letter while neglecting to mention God's sovereignty and link to exile as the basic premise for this perspective. Rather, evil/disaster (*ra'ah*) is a major motif in Jeremiah where the people's "evil doings" and lack of repentance prompt God to eventually carry out the

²⁴ I have modified the beginning of the quotation from the NRSV's "It may be that," which softens somewhat the "perhaps (if)" (*ulay*) aspect of the Hebrew here (compare KJV's "If so be ..."). In effect, this verse introduces a hypothetical "if ... then ..." where the people's rejection of "evil" (*ra'ah*) may prompt God's repealing of "disaster" (*ra'ah*).

²⁵ Cf. Jonah 3:8-10, where the hated Ninevites provide a prime example of repentance using the same language, which results in God "changing his mind." See Suderman, "Wrestling with Violent Depictions of God," 153-55.

²⁶ Derived from the same Hebrew root, *ra'ah* represents the corresponding feminine noun to the masculine *ra'*. While Jeremiah appears to prefer the feminine form, the meaning is equivalent.

“disaster” of exile. While Jeremiah’s letter promises that God will someday bring them back, within Jeremiah the exile was clearly God’s doing: “I caused you to be driven out” and “I caused you to go into exile” (29:14).

In light of several scholars’ appeals to Yoder as foundational en route to insisting upon the nonviolence of God, Yoder’s comment regarding Jer. 29 and the implications of a “Jeremianic model” proves particularly striking:

Since God is sovereign over history, there is no need for them [i.e., 1st-century Jews, “including the first Christians”] to seize (or subvert) political sovereignty in order for God’s will to be done. God’s capacity to bring about the fulfillment of his righteous goals is not dependent upon us. . . .²⁷

As Yoder recognizes, Jeremiah’s call to “not be in charge” derives from a conviction of God’s sovereignty over history, and not God’s essential nonviolence. Building on the work of Millard Lind,²⁸ Yoder’s christocentric approach argues that Jesus lived a life of nonviolent obedience not *despite* the at times violent portrayal of God in the OT but at least partly *because* of it. Perhaps most strident and still jarring, Yoder claims that “Far from constituting an embarrassment for those who follow Jesus’ way of non-violence, Hebrew holy war is the historical foundation of the same.”²⁹ While some dispute his general perspective on this point or sideline this statement as a momentary lapse or isolated mistake, Yoder underscores the significance of this point by footnoting several of his own writings for a fuller treatment of the issue.³⁰

Thus, far from peripheral, Yoder’s reading of Jer. 29 exemplifies his conviction that the nonviolence Jesus embodies represents a further

²⁷ Yoder, “See How They Go,” 67.

²⁸ See Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel*, foreword by David Noel Freedman (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1980). For a similar contemporary view see Paul Keim, “Is God Non-Violent?” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 25-32.

²⁹ John Howard Yoder, “Is not His Word Like a Fire? The Bible and Civil Turmoil,” in *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 85n11.

³⁰ Yoder himself points readers to his: “‘To Your Tents, O Israel’: The Legacy of Israel’s Experience with Holy War,” *Studies in Religion* 18, no. 9 (1989): 85-104; “If Abraham is Our Father,” in *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifisms* (Scottsdale: Waterloo: Herald Press, 1971), 85-104; and “God Will Fight for Us,” in *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1994), 78-89.

development within the ongoing biblical tradition, not a radical departure from it. Where several scholars have used Yoder's work and even the very sources he cites to assert God's nonviolence, Yoder himself did not do so—in fact, such a view seems antithetical to his approach.³¹

So, what to do? Should Christians drop a commitment to nonviolence in the face of the consistent link between violent empires and God in the prophets? Or should they appeal to Jesus in order to claim that the prophets are fundamentally mistaken? Where some scholars have made God's nonviolence a central concern and necessary destination (and foundation?) of a christocentric approach, this tack creates a false dichotomy prompted more by contemporary theological and ethical assumptions than by the biblical portrayal of Jesus' life and ministry. Attending to Jesus' approach to Scripture shifts our attention elsewhere and, since our access to the "earthly Jesus" emerges from his portrayal in the NT, this is an essential place to start.

Recovering Jesus as the Basis of a "Christocentric" Perspective

An abiding concern with the Christian justification of contemporary violence has become an impetus for a christocentric reading of the Bible and an increased insistence upon God's nonviolence, particularly within the Anabaptist tradition. As Ray Gingerich states:

What the writers [of the OT] meant to communicate and what the first readers heard . . . was undoubtedly that God is a warrior. But if we believe in the nonviolence of Jesus, and if we share the common Christian understanding that Jesus was the fullest revelation of God available to humanity, and if we hold the (believers') church to be a present incarnation of Jesus, then it should be clear to us that Yahweh, the God of Jesus, was not a warrior.³²

³¹ Various scholars' claim to "follow Yoder" warrants further discussion that cannot be provided here; see Ray C. Gingerich and Ted Grimsrud, "Is God Nonviolent? The Shape of the Conversation," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 51; Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 13. Suffice it to say, arriving at the same destination (in this case, a nonviolent Christian ethic) does not necessarily entail "following" someone to get there.

³² Ray C. Gingerich, "Theological Foundations for an Ethics of Nonviolence: Was Yoder's God a Warrior?" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 77 (2003): 430. For similar logic, attempting to uncover the "God Jesus reveals," see: Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior*, 185-87.

At first glance, the logic of such a view seems compelling: Jesus was nonviolent; Jesus reveals God; therefore God must be nonviolent. When confronted with a biblical witness that does not easily conform to this perspective (OT or NT), scholars have variously claimed that: OT writers were mistaken in their theological discernment of God's action in the world;³³ the "cosmology of the ancient Hebrews" or their "theological worldview" should be abandoned;³⁴ a nonviolent understanding of God is pragmatically required and simply "needed";³⁵ and so on. Since such arguments consistently claim a christocentric basis for a radical discontinuity between OT and NT, or at least between Jesus and his Scriptures, it is worth reconsidering how the Gospels portray Jesus' approach.

Immediately following Jesus' baptism and temptation, Luke's account of the episode in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4) offers a helpful place to start. Here the Gospel writer describes a scene in which a direct quotation from Isaiah provides the basic "platform" that introduces Jesus' ministry.³⁶ Rather than discuss the content of this quotation, however, I will consider the implications of this passage for a christocentric approach.

When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor . . ."
(Luke 4:16-18)

At first glance this passage may seem somewhat unremarkable. However, like any scriptural scroll in the first century, the one handed to Jesus would not have been divided into numbered chapters and verses, nor did it contain vowels. Faced with what in our Bible constitutes 66 chapters of

³³ Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior*, 164-65.

³⁴ Gingerich, "Theological Foundations for an Ethics of Non-Violence": 434-35.

³⁵ Ted Grimsrud, "Is God Non-Violent?" *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 13-17.

³⁶ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 28-33.

text, the seemingly simple act of “finding the place” is a significant feat.³⁷ The ability not only to read but even to find the place implies that Jesus knew the Isaiah scroll very well.

Most importantly, this passage also identifies the root of Jesus’ ability to read the scroll that was given to him: “he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, *as was his custom*. . . .” (4:16). This is the key here and an essential condition for any discussion of Christian hermeneutics, since it reflects the core partnership underlying Jesus’ hermeneutics and our own: the link between a reading community and a scripture to be read. The scroll Jesus or anyone else read was accompanied by a reading tradition, which was and is only maintained and passed on through a reading community.³⁸

At a pivotal moment near the beginning of Luke’s account, Jesus is handed a scroll without chapters and verses or even vowels, out of which he finds and reads the Isaiah passage that outlines his ministry. In light of our above discussion, this act proves particularly striking. Here Jesus reads from Isaiah 61, a passage sandwiched between two depictions of God as a “warrior.” In Isa. 59, disgusted by a lack of justice and human intervention, God clothes himself as a warrior to bring about salvation/deliverance (59:15-18). A second passage describes God’s cloak being stained from stomping in the wine press as a graphic metaphor for having executed vengeance on the peoples, also described as his “redeeming work” (63:2-6).³⁹ As these passages show, ‘III Isaiah’ is not immune from depicting God as executing vengeance and functioning as a judge. While we may be tempted to see Jesus’ reading from Isaiah 61 in isolation, the broader context of the passage he invokes is

³⁷ While some contend this may have been an assigned reading from the prophets (*haftarah*), Joseph Fitzmyer suggests that “It sounds as if Jesus deliberately sought out this passage.” Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke, I-IX*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 532.

³⁸ Yoder also draws attention to the central importance of the synagogue, calling “the culture of the synagogue ... the most fundamental sociological innovation in the history of religions.” Yoder, “See How They Go,” 71.

³⁹ For an extended discussion of the “divine warrior” in Isa. 59, with some discussion of Isa. 63, see Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Put on the Armour of God: The Divine Warrior from Isaiah to Ephesians* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 15-47. Yoder Neufeld has also fruitfully explored the transformation of this image in the NT: see “Divine Warfare in the New Testament,” in *Killing Enmity: Violence and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 122-49; and *Ephesians* (Scottsdale; Waterloo: Herald Press, 2002), 290-316.

far from 'pacific' in its portrayal of God.

Where a connection to such a depiction of God lies implicit in Luke 4, the Gospel writers portray Jesus explicitly drawing upon various "disturbing" aspects of 'I Isaiah' to describe his own ministry. For instance, all three synoptic Gospels link Jesus' extensive use of parables with the "call" of the prophet in Isaiah 6 (Mark 4:10-12; Matt. 13:13-15; Luke 8:9-10):

Make the mind of this people dull,
and stop their ears and shut their eyes,
so that they may not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and comprehend with their minds,
and turn and be healed. (Isa. 6:10)

In effect, Jesus and the Gospel writers link his use of parables with an attempt to cloud rather than make plain a call to repentance. In the Gospels this reference both explains why many fail to "hear" his message and signals a message of judgment on the contemporary generation. Similarly, in all three synoptics Jesus draws explicitly upon Isaiah's "song of the vineyard" and its judgment motif, inserting himself as the "son" into this passage to condemn the religious leaders of his day (Matt. 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19). Although some contemporary scholars downplay the link between Jesus and judgment, the Gospel writers depict Jewish leaders as immediately recognizing this element of the parable, which Matthew and Luke then tie directly to the leaders' animosity towards and persecution of Jesus.⁴⁰ Rather than antithetical, the judgment motif underlying the perspective

⁴⁰ For instance, while Ted Grimsrud discusses Jesus' parable of the vineyard he neglects to address either its retributive orientation or the significant continuity between Jesus' teaching and the OT on this topic. His portrayal of the vineyard as the temple and not the people also proves puzzling in light of its precedent in Isaiah. Ted Grimsrud, *Instead of Atonement: the Bible's Salvation Story and Our Hope for Wholeness* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books. 2013), 104-105. For contrasting perspectives on the judgment motif in Jesus' parables, see Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, "Forgive, or Else!" in *Killing Enmity: Violence and the New Testament*, 36-56, and Eric A. Seibert, "Appendix A: Reexamining the Nonviolent God," in *Disturbing Divine Behavior*, 245-54. Contra Seibert, the judgment in the "vineyard" parable does not appear to be eschatological in nature but one with immediate implications.

of the Gospels here proves similar to the prophets' view of exile as God's punishment.

Finally, like his Jewish counterparts then and now, in the Gospels Jesus celebrates Passover. Thus, while Seibert claims that "Jesus never endorses or promotes a view of God as a divine warrior who fights physical battles on behalf of a 'chosen people,'"⁴¹ Jesus *does* celebrate God as revealed in the Exodus, which recounts the story of God's deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptians and provides the paradigmatic portrayal of the LORD as a "warrior." Again, far from a mere tangential element, this celebration in turn provides the context for the "last supper" and the basis for communion or the Lord's Supper in the Christian tradition.

Thus, in light of the Gospel portrayals of Jesus, appealing to a christocentric approach as a basis for asserting the nonviolence of God proves problematic. For instance, Seibert contends that "while certain passages in Isaiah might lead one to believe that God is violent . . . it is clearly not the way Jesus understood God."⁴² However, limiting the link between God and violence to "certain passages in Isaiah" does not account for how deeply this issue permeates this book and other prophetic material. Nor does it adequately recognize the extent to which Isaiah in particular informs the NT material, including its portrayal and understanding of Jesus.

While it may be tempting to assume that Jesus affirmed the comfort and restoration of 'II Isaiah' but rejected the divine anger and judgment prevalent within the larger Isaiah scroll, in the Gospels he not only appeals to the breadth of this document but plays upon its basic conviction that God is sovereign and willing to intervene to execute judgment. Similarly, NT writers do not quote this or that passage while disputing Isaiah's basic orientation. Indeed, along with the Psalms, they cite and allude to Isaiah more than any other scriptural scroll, so that it provides a primary lens for viewing Jesus' life, ministry, death, and ongoing significance. Far from tangential, this prophetic tradition and its insistence on God's sovereignty orients NT material and its portrayal of Jesus.

Is God compassionate and merciful, abounding in steadfast love? Most certainly. Is this Jesus' innovation? Not at all, but a central OT creedal

⁴¹ Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior*, 195.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 195.

affirmation.⁴³ In this sense Jesus exemplifies again how the patience, compassion, and mercy of God lead to a deferral of judgment.⁴⁴ However, is God also angered by injustice and committed to render judgment in order to set things right? Absolutely. Does Jesus reject such a view of God? By no means! Where some suggest we must choose between such attributes so that “God either is or is not merciful,”⁴⁵ the biblical witness, including its portrayal of Jesus, defies such easy categorization. Instead of depicting God as nonviolent, the NT as well as the OT holds divine judgment and mercy in a creative, uneasy, and provocative tension.⁴⁶

Scripture and Community: On Recommitting to “Christocentric Hermeneutics”

While some scholars portray the nonviolence of God as a necessary theological foundation for Christian ethics, a christocentric approach grounded in how the Gospels portray Jesus interpreting *his* Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, shifts the discussion substantially. In effect, where Yoder insisted that the “politics of Jesus” should be recognized as central for Christian ethics, we could say that the “hermeneutics of Jesus” should also be recognized as significant for ongoing Christian interpretation. And rather than “construct” a nonviolent God to ground his nonviolence, the Jesus of the Gospels studies, memorizes, and re-interprets the Scriptures he treasured. Where some posit a radical discontinuity between the testaments, or between Jesus and OT material linking God to violence, Luke witnesses to Jesus’ habitual participation in a reading community, dedicated to ongoing interaction with Isaiah and other scriptural scrolls.

When viewed in light of Jesus’ hermeneutics, a christocentric approach

⁴³ See Ex. 34:6-7, which Fretheim identifies as “the most oft-repeated Old Testament confession regarding God.” Terence E. Fretheim and Karlfried Froehlich, *The Bible as Word of God: In a Postmodern Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 120-21.

⁴⁴ See Neh. 9, which presents a biblical theology in miniature that builds directly on the compassion and mercy of God depicted in Ex. 34: “But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love ...” (Neh. 9:17b).

⁴⁵ Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior*, 173.

⁴⁶ For appeals against a reduction of this tension in OT and NT material respectively, see Suderman, “Wrestling with Violent Depictions of God” and Yoder Neufeld, *Killing Enmity*. Indeed, as the latter points out, judgment lies implicit within the very idea of mercy, so that eliminating the former removes the possibility of the latter as well (53-54).

does not provide a criterion for dismissing parts or concepts of the OT—even links between God and violence or the depiction of God as a “warrior”—so much as a model for how to re-interpret and live in light of these Scriptures that values, builds upon, and transforms them. For instance, far from dismissing the Hebrew cosmology or worldview as outdated, NT writers draw directly from the very scrolls and specific passages contemporary scholars find problematic. Like these writers, attending to Jesus pushes us to draw on the breadth and depth of the scriptural tradition instead of abstracting from the Gospels a theological or ethical center regarding God’s nonviolence.

Thankfully, the prophetic view linking suffering to wrongdoing and divine judgment is not the only one in the OT or NT, and we do well to explore the diversity within the Bible. However, the prominence of this perspective within the biblical tradition also means that it should not be dismissed or deemed fundamentally mistaken, but taken seriously as a legitimate possibility requiring contextual discernment. Where some treat the Bible as a complicated tangle from which to emerge with a relatively homogeneous view of a nonviolent God, the biblical tradition provides the training ground and hermeneutical arena in which to make sense of the world and our place in it.⁴⁷ Far from tame, the prophets’ depiction of God is *supposed* to make us uncomfortable, just as it unsettled their early listeners.

In our day as in the time of Jesus we witness contested interpretations of the Bible and tradition. Some appeal to “God as a warrior” to legitimate militarization, human violence, and contemporary occupations; some employ biblical vocabulary to support claims of national exceptionalism; some use God’s commitment to the king in the OT to insist upon their “divine right” or “manifest destiny” in the present realm. However, ongoing abuse of a link between God and violence does not mean that we should jettison concepts or parts of the Bible, but rather that we should insist on taking the prophetic conviction of God’s sovereignty more seriously.

⁴⁷ Waldemar Janzen, “A Canonical Rethinking of the Anabaptist-Mennonite New Testament Orientation,” in *Reclaiming the Old Testament: Essays in Honour of Waldemar Janzen*, ed. Gordon Zerbe (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 2001), 14-21. In a similar vein, Gordon Matties’s “hospitable hermeneutics” allows even the difficult book of Joshua “to have its say within the larger chorus of voices we call Scripture” Gordon H. Matties, *Joshua* (Harrisonburg, VA; Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2012), 20.

For instance, for Isaiah and other prophets the claim “in God we trust” renders horses and chariots—in our day, tanks and bombers—utterly obsolete. The debate lies not between a leaner but more advanced armament that has left horses and bayonets behind and the commitment to make the military so strong “no one will dare to challenge us,”⁴⁸ but rather a reliance on the *LORD* of hosts (instead of the President as Commander in Chief) as ultimately in control. While contemporary pundits may couch claims of American exceptionalism in biblical vocabulary to justify military expenditure, the prophets point to God’s sovereignty to *negate* the need for militarization.⁴⁹ Where military powers today use biblical euphemisms to depict themselves as instruments of divine judgment,⁵⁰ the prophets insist that God is free and able to use even foreign powers to execute judgment on Israel. Where some portray contemporary geopolitical struggles as a battle between good and evil that points the finger elsewhere and functionally places ourselves above reproach, the prophets call for repentance and *self-critique*.

In no way outdated, the prophets offer the basis for pointed contemporary critique. However, coming to these biblical books with an *a priori* conviction of God’s nonviolence threatens to dismiss this material and dismantle its insights relevant for our day. For instance, if the prophets were fundamentally mistaken in their understanding of God, how can we appeal to their persistent call for social justice? Further, if we “construct” God ourselves, on what basis can we criticize those who appeal to the rise of global “terror” and the uncertainty of our times in order to construct a *violent* God, rejecting biblical elements that suggest otherwise?

In his context Jesus did not refrain from interpreting Scripture

⁴⁸ During a televised debate in the 2012 US election campaign, incumbent President Barack Obama articulated the former perspective and Republican challenger Mitt Romney the latter.

⁴⁹ As Ben Ollenburger concludes regarding the implications of biblical “divine kingship,” particularly for North American Christians: “It is just because God exercises the royal prerogative exclusively that no other attempts, human or divine, to exercise this prerogative are legitimate.” Ollenburger, *Zion the City of the Great King*, 159.

⁵⁰ For instance, naming military drones “Reaper” and corresponding missiles “Hellfire” implies that, in the words of John Sifton of Human Rights Watch, “the United States was fate itself, cutting down enemies who were destined to die.” Daniel Schwartz, “From ‘Bug-Splat’ to ‘Targeted Killing,’ the Drone-Speak Lexicon,” *CBC News: World* (February 8, 2013), www.cbc.ca/news/world.

because others were misusing it, but rather entered the fray, engaged in vigorous debate, and articulated an alternate perspective. In a similar manner, we dare not abdicate the interpretation of the OT while insisting on a NT perspective.⁵¹ Adopting a christocentric approach should inspire *more* commitment to OT interpretation rather than less, orienting believing communities to the hermeneutical task of “reading” ourselves and our times in light of the testimony of Scripture.⁵² Like Jesus, we find ourselves in the midst of an interpretive struggle that requires an ongoing commitment to become, and continuously embody, the reading community Scripture both creates and requires.⁵³

Thus, while the challenge of a christocentric approach lies in following Jesus’ lead, this is primarily a contextual, hermeneutical issue rather than an abstract philosophical one. Upholding Jesus as an ethical or epistemological center departs from a purported christocentric orientation when it sidelines the continuous wrestling with Scripture he exemplifies. In effect, when we deem the Bible so ambiguous or outdated that we construct God with our own acumen, the hermeneutical struggle is over before it has begun. In contrast, Jesus’ life of nonviolent obedience emerges from a hermeneutical wrestling grounded in immersing himself in his Scripture as part of a reading community.

Now as then such a community is formed, sustained, and passed on only by reading, studying, and debating the strange language of the Bible. For those devoted to a christocentric approach, the Gospels’ portrayal begs the question: as we witness to Christ’s peace, are *we* committed to follow in the way of Jesus by forming reading communities committed to wade through

⁵¹ For a critique of the contemporary Anabaptist tendency to privilege the NT over the OT, including a contrast of the function of this perspective in the Reformation and today, see Waldemar Janzen, “A Canonical Rethinking of the Anabaptist-Mennonite New Testament Orientation.”

⁵² Despite my concerns with his approach, Seibert’s sustained efforts to this end are particularly noteworthy: see his *Disturbing Divine Behavior* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) and *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament’s Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).

⁵³ For an extended discussion of this topic related to the contemporary role and function of biblical lament, including violent imprecation, see W. Derek Suderman, “The Cost of Losing Lament for the Community of Faith: On Brueggemann, Ecclesiology, and the Social Audience of Prayer,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6, no. 2 (2012): 201-18.

verse after verse, chapter after chapter, scroll after scroll? Do we dedicate ourselves to wrestle with difficult, seemingly foreign “texts,” refusing to let go until we emerge with a blessing?⁵⁴ Adopting a christocentric approach invites us to follow Jesus’ example by studying what *we* call the Old Testament to attend to the very voice of God—even and perhaps especially when it clashes with our own expectations or assumptions.

Conclusion

Despite appeals to Jer. 29 by scholars who insist upon a nonviolent understanding of God, this passage bursts the bounds of such a concept. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah’s letter asserts that God both seeks the welfare (*shalom*) of Israel and is responsible for the disaster (*ra’ah*) of exile. Here too the LORD can use foreign powers, including their military might, to carry out divine judgment and restoration. Rather than a theological mistake to be corrected, this perspective underscores Christian Scripture’s basic claim regarding God’s sovereignty over Israel, history, and creation.

This article has called for a shift away from constructing God to fit our theological or ethical categories and towards discipleship as the most appropriate grounds for a Christian commitment to peace. In so doing, I have argued that following Jesus entails adopting a hermeneutical stance that seeks to hear the voice of God by attending closely to the theological witness of Scripture. In effect, a christocentric approach should prompt those committed to follow after Jesus to value and study the Scriptures that informed, inspired, and set the direction for his ministry—what we call an “Old Testament” but were the only Scriptures he had. Thus, rather than a means for functionally excluding biblical material linking God to violence on one hand or concepts such as the understanding of God as a warrior on the other, a christocentric approach should instead prompt immersion in the very Scriptures Jesus and NT writers treasured.

Living as Christians necessarily represents a hermeneutical task, forming communities that are able not to be “in charge” because they believe that the God of resurrection and life is ultimately in control. Doing so does not require an abridged Bible or an innovative construction of God so much

⁵⁴ Yoder Neufeld helpfully points to the account of Jacob wrestling in Gen. 32 as an image for engaging Scripture: *Killing Enmity*, 151-52.

as sustained, profound, and convicting encounters with the divine through the breadth and depth of Christian Scripture. But for Scripture to function as such it requires an interpreting community, and it is this fundamental partnership between scriptural text and communal context that, with the guidance of the Spirit, provides the basis for christocentric hermeneutics. Indeed, it was largely the innovation of the synagogue and just such reading communities that allowed the Jewish and later Christian traditions to survive—from exile in Babylon, through the destruction of the second temple, to the ends of the earth.

In sum, christocentric hermeneutics builds on a confessional stance that dares to believe, against persistent appearances to the contrary, that God is ultimately in control and can be trusted to bring history to its culmination. While some claim that dropping the concept of God as a warrior or links between God and violence strengthens our commitment to peace, as Yoder insisted it is rather the prophets' conviction of God's sovereignty that provides the necessary basis for both the nonviolence of Jesus and contemporary Christian pacifism.

In living out Jesus' gospel of peace, we do well to attend to this simple passage:

When [Jesus] came to Nazareth . . . he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. . . . He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Luke 4:16-18)

For those committed to a christocentric perspective, the continuing challenge lies in embodying the reading and interpreting communities that this passage assumes by redoubling our own commitment to this crucial custom that grounded Jesus' life and ministry.

W. Derek Suderman is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Theological Studies at Conrad Grebel University College and the University of Waterloo in Waterloo, Ontario.

Peace and Wrath in Paul's Epistle to the Romans

Mary K. Schmitt

Introduction

In Romans 1:18, the Apostle Paul writes, “the wrath of God is being revealed against the godlessness and the unrighteousness of humanity. . . .”¹ The Greek noun ὀργή (“wrath”) appears more frequently in Romans (1:18; 2:5 [twice], 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22 [twice]; 12:19; 13:4, 5) than in any other Pauline epistle.² In an epistle in which God's wrath is clearly an important topic, it is interesting that Paul also uses the noun εἰρήνη (“peace”) more frequently in Romans (1:7; 2:10; 3:17; 5:1; 8:6; 14:17, 19; 15:13, 33; 16:20; cf. the verb εἰρηνεύειν 12:18) than in any of his other epistles.³ Even more significant for the purpose of this essay, he brings together the concepts of wrath and peace at three key points: 2:5-10; 5:1-11; and 12:18-21. These three passages belong to what many commentators see as three distinct sections of the epistle (chapters 1-4, 5-8, and 12-15).⁴

This article and three others in this issue on the theme “Judgment and Wrath of God” are based on presentations made at the Mennonite Scholars and Friends Forum, AAR/SBL annual meeting, Chicago, November 17, 2012. The others are: W. Derek Suderman, “Assyria the Ax, God the Lumberjack: Jeremiah 29, the Logic of the Prophets, and the Quest for a Nonviolent God” (CGR 32, no. 1 [2014]: 44-66); Grant Poettcker, “Reassessing Anselm on Divine Wrath and Judgment: A Girardian Approach for Mennonite Atonement Theology” (CGR 32, no.1 [2014]: 80-90); Justin Heinzekehr, “When Anabaptists Get Angry: The Wrath of God in a Process-Anabaptist Perspective” (CGR 32, no. 1 [2014]: 91-101).

¹ All translations are my own.

² 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9

³ 1 Cor. 1:3; 7:15; 14:33; 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:2; 13:11; Gal. 1:3; 5:22; 6:16; Phil. 1:2; 4:7, 9; 1 Thess. 1:1; 5:3, 23; Philemon 3; cf. εἰρηνεύειν 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:13.

⁴ E.g., Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. C.C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1949); C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 1975-79); Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Zurich: Benziger, 1978-82); Paul Achtemeier, *Romans* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993); Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven/London: Yale Univ. Press, 1994); Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegeville, MN: *The Conrad Grebel Review* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 67-79

In this paper I would like to accomplish two things. First, I will draw attention to wrath and peace in Romans, focusing on the three passages in which the terminology of wrath and peace occurs in close proximity: 2:5-10; 5:1-11; and 12:18-21. Second, I will comment on how Paul's concept of the relationship between wrath and peace is worked out in the unfolding of the epistle. In particular I will argue that, read together, these passages are points on a trajectory toward the spread of God's peace. Whereas in the early chapters of Romans, it seemed impossible for sinful humanity to experience God's peace, Paul proclaims in chapter 5 the gift of God's peace, which in turn leads to an exhortation to be agents of God's peace toward all in chapter 12. In contrast, in each of the three passages, Paul attributes wrath to God and only to God.

Procedurally, it will be beneficial to deal first with each passage on its own terms before asking how these parts relate to the whole. A helpful image for this investigation is that of a triptych, with its three individual panels. Each panel is independent, yet when they are considered together they influence the interpretation of the whole piece. So, in Romans, each of these passages provides important insights into Paul's understanding of wrath and peace, but these insights are re-cast, even challenged, when considered in light of the epistle as a whole.

Romans 2:5-10

In Romans the Greek words for wrath (ὀργή) and peace (εἰρήνη) occur together for the first time in 2:5-10. In these verses Paul posits a day of wrath yet to come, when the righteous judgment of God will be revealed; wrath and peace stand as two possible outcomes of this judgment. On the one hand, to those who do good God will give glory, honor, life, and peace. On the other, those who do evil, disobey the truth, and are persuaded to obey

Liturgical Press, 1996); Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., *Pauline Theology Volume III: Romans* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002); Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007). Cf. Thomas H. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in its Contexts: The Argument of Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004). Tobin has slightly different divisions than the other commentators listed here, but he still sees these three passages as belonging to three different sections of Romans. See comment below about the other section of Romans, chapters 9-11.

unrighteousness will receive wrath, anger, tribulation, and distress.⁵

In Romans 2:5 Paul warns about a coming day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed: "But you, because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Here he seems to imply that the day of wrath is yet to come. The phrase "day of wrath" occurs elsewhere in Scripture as a reference to the final judgment.⁶ That Paul sees the day of wrath as future is underscored by the image that he uses in 2:5: "storing up" wrath. The image of the storehouse is typically one of preparing for future preservation (e.g., storing grain for use as food). However, here it is ominous. Rather than storing up life-giving sustenance, Paul warns his audience that they are storing up wrath for the day of wrath, a reference to eschatological judgment.

How surprising it must have been for Paul's audience to hear him warning them about this coming day. In Romans 1, he announced God's wrath is already being revealed against the godlessness and unrighteousness of humanity (v. 18). The text proceeds with a list of godless and unrighteous behaviors such as idolatry, sexual promiscuity, and murder. The recipients of Paul's letter probably would have supported the verdict that such persons have no excuse (ἀναπολογήτος, 1:20). They might have been flabbergasted when in Romans 2 he turns his invective against them. To the one who judges (presumably, the one who judges those who are committing the acts listed in Romans 1), he declares: "You are without excuse" (ἀναπολογήτος, 2:1).⁷ To paraphrase Paul: *You who think you have avoided God's wrath are*

⁵ A second word for wrath—θυμός—also occurs in 2:8. Thus, Paul uses two words that could both be translated wrath in v. 8: ὀργή καὶ θυμός. Θυμός only occurs in this verse in Romans. To distinguish between these two words in translation, I have translated θυμός here as "anger."

⁶ In the Septuagint (hereafter, LXX), see e.g., Ps. 109 [110]:5; Job 20:28; Zeph. 1:15, 18; 2:2, 3; Ezek. 22:24; also see Rev. 6:17. The most notable exception to viewing "day of wrath" as denoting a future day of judgment is Lamentations, where several times the day of wrath is described as having already occurred (1:12; 2:1, 21, 22). However, the author of Lamentations likely considers the destruction of Jerusalem, an event that has already occurred, as the day of God's final judgment. A number of other New Testament texts do not use the phrase "day of wrath" but reference a coming wrath. See, e.g., Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 11:18.

⁷ It is reasonable to assume that Paul addresses the same interlocutor in 2:5-10: the one judging—the one who is without excuse—is also the one storing up wrath for herself on the

the ones storing up wrath, and you are the ones in need of a warning about the coming day. The day of wrath that is to come is here, and you who think you are secure are not exempt from God's righteous judgment. Moreover, if the wrath of God in Romans 1 already is being revealed, the immediacy of the warning in 2:5-10 is heightened.⁸

Alternatively, Paul hopes for a different outcome for some on the day of wrath. For those who do good and seek eternal life, he anticipates glory, honor, life, and peace.⁹ He even introduces the day of wrath with a note about the wealth of God's kindness, tolerance, and patience (2:4). God's tolerance and patience in no way diminishes the justness of God's wrath; Paul will make this point explicit in 3:5-6. However, a recurring theme in Romans is the delay of God's wrath as an opportunity to demonstrate God's mercy.¹⁰ According to Paul, it is not God's intention that all perish but that all will be saved.¹¹

At this point in the epistle, Paul appears to present the two potential outcomes—either “wrath, anger, tribulation, and distress” for those who do evil or “glory, honor, life, and peace” for those who do good—as equally plausible results of God's righteous judgment on the coming day.¹² However,

day of wrath.

⁸ Paul seems to speak of two different occasions of wrath in the initial chapters of Romans: wrath being revealed in the present (1:18) and a future day of wrath (2:5). It is probably best to think of the wrath already being revealed in Romans 1 as the beginning of God's final, eschatological day of wrath as anticipated in Romans 2:5-10. The two time periods are not fundamentally distinct. Parallels between 1:17 and 1:18 further suggest that the revelation of God's wrath in 1:18 belongs to “the eschatological breaking in of a new age in Christ.” Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 101-102.

⁹ In 2:7, Paul declares that to those who seek eternal life, God will give glory, honor, and immortality (ἀφθαρσία), which Paul appears to equate with eternal life in the same verse. In v.10, peace replaces eternal life in the triad: glory, honor, and peace. The experience of the day of wrath for those who do good will be glory, honor, life, and peace. The correlation of life and peace in 2:7-10 anticipates 8:6, in which the indwelling of the Spirit is life and peace.

¹⁰ E.g., see 9:22-23; 11:17-24; 11:30-32; cf. 3:19-20; 8:20-25; 12:19-20; 15:4. Some might argue that in Romans 1 the “handing over” of godless humanity (vv. 24, 26, 28) is God's delay of wrath until God hands over the Son to deliver humanity (8:32). See Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “God Handed Them Over,” in *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 113-23, 194-97.

¹¹ Paul's clearest statement of this position in Romans is 11:32.

¹² This two outcome judgment scenario is common in Jewish and Christian literature: e.g.,

Paul does not think that anyone does what is good. In chapter 3, he marshals an impressive collection of Scriptural witnesses which testify that “There is no one who is righteous, not one” (v. 11; cf. vv. 12-18). No one knows the way of peace (3:17). While he anticipates two possible outcomes of eschatological judgment, the reality as he perceives it is that everyone is deserving of wrath and no one is deserving of peace. Nevertheless, Paul hopes for peace on the day of wrath: if humans are going to experience the peace that God has in store for them, God will need to intervene and bring it about.

Romans 5:1-11

Paul returns to the topic of peace and wrath in Romans 5:1-11. In this second pericope, he claims that the justified *already* possess peace with God, who has given believers peace and has reconciled them to God's self. On the basis of this, believers have confidence that they will be saved from the wrath to come.

This passage provides a transition to a new section of the epistle; peace introduces this section and serves as the sign for the next part of the argument. In contrast to chapter 3, where no one is righteous and no one knows the way of peace, here Paul declares that “having been justified (or made righteous), “we have” peace with God . . . (v. 1).¹³ Moreover, whereas peace was expected in the future in chapter 2, here it is already the experience of the justified. The indicative verbs in 5:1-2 accentuate the certainty with which Paul states that believers experience peace now.¹⁴ Not only do they

¹ *Enoch* 45:4-6; *Ps.* 34:14-15 [LXX 33:15-16], 37 [LXX 36]:27-28; *Obad.* 15-21; *Joel* 3:11-21; *Matt.* 25:31-46; *4 Ezra* 7:21.

¹³ A textual variant in 5:1 has led commentators to speculate on whether Paul considers peace to be the present experience of Christians (ἔχωμεν) or whether he exhorts his hearers to strive for peace (ἐρχόμεν). The manuscript tradition is evenly divided. The context of 5:1 has led a majority of interpreters to support the indicative reading ἔχωμεν. However, perhaps the debate has created a false dichotomy between peace as gift and peace-making as an activity to which Christians are called. In Romans, God secures peace, but Paul also calls believers to live out God's peace, especially in the latter chapters.

¹⁴ Paul uses the same verb ἔχω in 5:1 and 5:2. An indicative ἔχωμεν in v. 1 would balance the indicative ἐσχήκαμεν (“we have access into this grace in which we stand”) in v. 2. The comparable statements regarding peace and grace in 5:1-2 reiterate a connection Paul has established between the two concepts as early as his greeting in 1:7—“grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” In 5:2 and 5:3, the verb καυχώμεθα could

have peace, they also have access by faith into grace, in which they currently stand. On the basis of the experience of peace and grace in the present, they are able to boast in the hope of God's glory, being assured of that which is yet to be fulfilled.

Paul's concept of peace with God in Romans 5:1-11 is further elucidated by his statements about reconciliation.¹⁵ Cilliers Breytenbach argues convincingly that the apostle draws his language of reconciliation from the Greco-Roman political sphere, where the term refers to the act of making peace between warring parties.¹⁶ Paul's usage of such terms reflects this Greco-Roman perspective nicely. According to Paul, formerly we were God's enemies, but at that time God took the radical step of reconciling us to God's self; peace with God is the sign of our change in status from enemies to those who have been reconciled.¹⁷

In Romans 5, what God already has accomplished through the Son determines our present experience and gives us assurance for the future. Paul describes himself and his audience as those who were formerly enemies of God (v. 10), but now have been justified, have been reconciled, and are assured of salvation from the coming wrath. In the past we were weak (v. 6), we were sinners (v. 8), and we were enemies of God (v. 10); we were incapable of rectifying our estranged relationship with God. Yet God through Christ has altered our situation, making it possible for us to have peace with God. Christ has redeemed us from the coming wrath (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:10). This is cosmic language expressing the alteration of the power dynamic. Formerly, we were estranged from God and incapable of changing our own circumstances. But now, as those for whom Christ died, we are justified (v. 9; cf. v. 1), we are reconciled (vv. 10-11), and we have peace with God (v. 1). Moreover, this reversal of status makes it possible for believers to look forward in hope, boasting in God's coming glory (v. 2; cf. vv. 3, 11) and being

be read either as an indicative ("we boast") or as a subjunctive ("let us boast"). I read these verbs as indicatives.

¹⁵ In Rom 5:1-11, the close connection between peace and reconciliation is signaled by an *inclusio* of vv. 1-2 and vv. 9-11.

¹⁶ Cilliers Breytenbach, *Versöhnung: Eine Studie zur paulinischen Soteriologie*, WMANT 60 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1989), 56-57.

¹⁷ Cilliers Breytenbach, *Grace, Reconciliation, Concord: The Death of Christ in Graeco-Roman Metaphors*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 135 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 172-77.

assured of salvation from the coming wrath (v. 10; cf. v. 11).

Paul anticipates in Romans 5, as in Romans 2, the imminent wrath of God; however, here he offers assurance of salvation in the face of it. Wrath in 5:9 is God's wrath.¹⁸ The revelation of God's wrath has been a theme since 1:18. In addition, as we have seen, the expectation of wrath in Scripture frequently refers to God's final judgment.¹⁹ God's wrath is as real and imminent in chapter 5 as it was in chapter 2; however, here Paul expresses certainty that those who have been justified can expect to be saved from it. The present experience of justification, reconciliation, and peace with God fills believers with confident hope. Of course, peace is not the source of hope; the source is Christ, whose death has brought about their peace and whose life sustains their confidence. For Paul, what God has done through Christ has altered their status—formerly enemies, now at peace with God; thus, Paul anticipates salvation on the day of wrath.

Before proceeding to Romans 12, I want to compare wrath and peace in Romans 5 with Romans 2. In chapter 5, wrath is something to be expected, just as Paul warns about the coming day of wrath in chapter 2. Wrath and peace in the two chapters denote two very different experiences: either the experience of being "enemies," warned about the coming day of wrath, or that of being "reconciled," having "peace with God," and on the side of life. In chapter 2, wrath and peace are both anticipated results of future judgment; yet peace with God is not possible, because Paul thinks no one does what is right. However, in chapter 5 he proclaims that God has altered the power dynamics. As a result believers already possess peace with God, which provides confidence of salvation in the face of the coming wrath.

In this paper, I am addressing three passages in which the Greek terminology for wrath and peace occurs, and for reasons of space will not discuss Romans 9-11. However, similar themes are found in those chapters (e.g., reconciliation [11:15], God's love for enemies [11:28], the delay of wrath for the purpose of mercy [9:22-23]). In my opinion, they contain a similar understanding to that underlying the portrayal of wrath and peace in chapter 5: namely, Paul attributes wrath solely to God (5:9; 9:22) and

¹⁸ The Greek word θεός ("God") does not occur in 5:9; however, the context makes it clear that Paul is referring to the wrath of God here.

¹⁹ See n. 6 above.

anticipates God's transformation of Israel's enmity on account of God's love (5:8-10; 11:28).²⁰

Romans 12:18-21

In Romans 12, the role of peace in the experience of believers is expanded horizontally to living peacefully with all. This chapter builds on the trajectory that Paul has already established: peace, which is anticipated in chapter 2, becomes a reality of peace with God in the present for believers in chapter 5. For this reason Paul in chapter 12 is able to exhort believers out of the peace they have received with God to live in peace with everyone. In contrast to the exhortation to live peacefully, believers are excluded from the realm of wrath and are instructed not to take revenge but to leave wrath to God.

Here, for the first time in the epistle, Paul explicitly appeals to peaceful human interactions: "live peaceably with all persons" (12:18).²¹ In chapter 3 he claimed that no one knew the way of peace. One result of the change in status in chapter 5, from enemies to those having peace with God, is that Paul can now exhort believers to put into practice the peace they have received from God.²² J. Louis Martyn refers to this alteration of status resulting in the

²⁰ I look forward to insights that may arise from a more complete study of how wrath and peace relate to Paul's vision of Israel in Romans 9-11, which I will be pursuing in my dissertation on the topic.

²¹ While the exhortation to live peacefully may be implied in 5:1, the first time that Paul explicitly exhorts his hearers to live peacefully is 12:18. The past few decades have seen growing scholarly interest in the relationship of chapters 12-15 to the rest of the epistle. The trend has been to emphasize the coherence of the letter as a whole. See William S. Campbell, "The Rule of Faith in Romans 12:1-15:13," and Mark Reasoner, "The Theology of Romans 12:1-15:23," in *Pauline Theology Volume III: Romans*, 259-86, 287-300; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 101-102; Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in its Context*, 383. Thus, Paul's exhortations in 12-15 should be seen as appropriate conclusions to the trajectory of the argument in 1-11, not as introducing something new or different.

²² In this final section of the epistle, the exhortations to peacefulness continue to be grounded in the reality of God as the source of peace through the agency of the Spirit. For Paul, the basis for pursuing the things of peace in 14:19 is his prior claim in 14:17 that the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Similarly, in 15:13, he concludes both his response to the divisions among Roman Christians in 14:1-15:6 and the body of the letter as whole with a wish that the God of hope will fill the Romans with all joy and peace ... by the power of the Holy Spirit.

possibility of living for God as the creation of “addressable communities.”²³ The immediate communal implications of peace are seen in chapter 14, where Paul's solution to the divisions plaguing the Roman Christian communities is that they pursue peace and the building up of one another (v. 19).²⁴ But he does not limit peace to fellow believers. They are called to participate in bringing God's peace to *all*. By virtue of the peace they have received from God through Christ, he can exhort the Roman Christians to pursue peace both within the Christian community (14:19) and with all persons (12:18).

In contrast to insisting that his readers live peaceably with everyone, Paul says they should leave room for God's wrath (12:19).²⁵ Elsewhere in Romans, as we have seen, he attributes wrath to God's purview. In 1:18 the wrath of God is being revealed against the godlessness and unrighteousness of humanity; in 2:4 the day of wrath is also the day of the revelation of God's righteous judgment; in 3:5 God is just in bringing wrath upon us. That Paul intends for wrath in 12:19 to be understood as God's wrath is clear from the citation of Deuteronomy 32:35: “Revenge is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.”²⁶ Paul in these verses claims for God the exclusive right to do what Paul forbids his hearers from doing.

This passage has proven difficult for interpreters. Paul seems to say that our nonviolent response to all, including enemies, hinges upon an eschatological expectation that God will ultimately destroy our enemies.²⁷ However, to read him in this way disregards the central claim of Romans 12:

²³ J. Louis Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 263-64. Martyn here is writing about Galatians. However, see Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 157-59, 205) for the parallel argument in Romans, especially 12:1ff.

²⁴ For the argument that the divisions in Romans 14-15 are between different Christian house churches rather than individual Christians, see Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

²⁵ Again, θεός (“God”) does not occur in 12:19; however, the context makes it clear that Paul is referring to the wrath of God.

²⁶ The phrase “says the Lord” is not found in Deut. 32:35; Paul adds these words perhaps to further clarify that revenge is not to be taken by believers but left to God. The connection between wrath and revenge with regard to God is also found in Romans 13:4. See n. 31 below.

²⁷ For an example of this argument, see Krister Stendahl, “Hate, Non-Retaliatio, and Love: 1 QS x, 17-20 and Rom 12:19-21,” *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962): 343-55. For other views on this text, see list in Moo, *Romans*, 788 n. 98.

live in peace.²⁸ In addition, what he says in chapter 12 about God's wrath and enemies must be read in light of the preceding chapters. In 2:4-5 the coming wrath is delayed by the wealth of God's kindness, tolerance, and patience. In 5:1-11 God has provided a way through the death of God's Son to be saved from the coming wrath. Moreover, the death of God's Son that reconciles us to God occurred while we were God's enemies.²⁹ If the rest of Romans is any indication of how God treats enemies, then perhaps there is reason yet to hope that the God of peace has peace and life in store even for *our* enemies.

Putting the Pieces Together

Having briefly examined wrath and peace in Romans 2, 5, 12, let me suggest a few insights that might be gleaned from these individual exegetical inquiries in light of the epistle as a whole.

First, these three passages in which wrath and peace are prominent topics highlight Paul's fundamental distinction between God and humanity. Wrath and peace are both characteristics associated with God; wrath in these chapters is God's wrath. Paul does not shy away from attributing wrath to God, affirming in 3:5-6 that it is not unjust. At the same time the most frequent Pauline epithet for God is "the God of peace."³⁰ God can encompass both wrath and peace without contradiction, but the same is not true for believers. Believers receive peace from God and are called to live into that peace; they are never called to be agents of God's wrath.³¹ The fundamental

²⁸ In my dissertation, I argue that the central statement of Romans 12 is Paul's appeal, "if you are able, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably (εἰρηνεύοντες)" (v. 18). For the structure of chapter 12, see Walter Wilson, *Love without Pretense* [Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2nd series, 46] (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991).

²⁹ Perhaps Romans 9:22-23 intimates a similar understanding of God's wrath being delayed for the purpose of the revelation of reconciliation: while willing to make God's wrath known, God endures with patience "in order that he might make known the riches of God's glory to vessels of mercy."

³⁰ Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:23; cf. 2 Thess. 3:16; Heb. 13:20. In addition, Paul claims that the result of the Spirit's indwelling is life and peace (Rom. 8:6).

³¹ There seems to be one exception in Romans in which a human is an active agent in the avenging wrath of God. In 13:4-5, Paul appears to present the authority bearing the sword as one who enacts God's wrath and serves God by taking revenge. This passage is not addressed in the present article. However, I will make two observations. First, Paul does not live in a period when the authorities are Christian. He is trying to explain what he sees around him,

sin is failure to recognize the distinction between Creator and creation. Peace is what believers are called to embody; wrath remains firmly in God's purview.

Second, in these passages there is an interesting trajectory of the spread of peace. In chapter 2, Paul expects peace in the future; however, he insists that the way to peace is not available to humans, since there is no one who does right (chapter 3). Nevertheless, in chapter 5, Paul witnesses to God's in-breaking peace. As a result of God's actions to reconcile people to God's self, believers can experience peace now through life in the Spirit (8:6). While this peace is not the final victory of God's peace over all enemies (16:20), it does result in a new reality. Those who formerly did not know the way of peace are exhorted in chapter 12 to live God's peace horizontally, towards all. Paul's expectation of peace for humans has gone from peace as an impossible future, to peace as God's gift even now, to peace as God's mandate towards all. Thus, the apostle's proclamation of the gospel in Romans could be summed up as the spread of God's reign of peace.

Third, we should note that occurrences of the word "wrath" decrease in the latter chapters of the epistle while "peace" is a prominent theme.³² The topic of wrath seems to fade away in the final section. In an epistle that began with the revelation of God's wrath (1:18), the infrequent use of "wrath" in chapters 12-15 does not justify the claim that it was less important by the end. Nevertheless, as Paul turns toward a vision of Christian living and community, it is peace, not wrath, that seems central. Furthermore, while wrath is introduced in 1:18 as God's apocalyptic revelation, it is the God of peace who receives the final word in 16:20. The increasing emphasis on peace

not exhorting the rulers of his day. Second, even in this instance he ultimately attributes wrath and vengeance to God. There is no strong basis for assuming that wrath in 13:4-5 is not God's wrath. The one bearing the sword does so in keeping with God's wrath. This point is further supported by the close verbal connection Paul draws between the servant of God in 13:4 who is the *ἐκδικος* ("avenger") and the clear affirmation in 12:19: "Vengeance (*ἐκδίκησις*) is mine; I will repay," says the Lord." If vengeance belongs to God, then Paul is giving God credit for the vengeance enacted by God's servant. For a parallel argument from the Hebrew Bible, see the essay in this issue by W. Derek Suderman, "Assyria the Ax, God the Lumberjack."

³² In Romans 12 the exhortation to live peacefully lies at the center of the chapter's literary construction. Also, Paul's solution to the problems facing the Roman Christians is peace (see 14:19; cf. 15:13, 14:17). Paul twice in these chapters refers to God as the "God of peace" (15:33; 16:20).

in the final chapters suggests that Paul's primary eschatological category is ultimately not God's wrath but God's peace.

Conclusion

To summarize, the Greek terminology for wrath (ὀργή) and peace (εἰρήνη) occurs in three passages in Romans (2:5-10; 5:1-11; 12:18-21). Taken together, these passages point up a fundamental distinction for Paul between God and humans. Paul attributes wrath only to God (e.g., 1:18; 2:5-10; 3:5-6; 5:9; 12:19-20). In contrast he exhorts human recipients of God's peace to become agents of peace in the world and in the Christian community. These three passages thus serve as points on a trajectory toward the spread of peace: from peace as an impossible goal in chapters 1-3, to peace with God as a gift through Christ (5:1-11), and finally to the exhortation for believers to live God's peace in the world and in the Christian community (12:17; 14:19).

One implication of this study is that Romans 2:5-10 must be read in light of the trajectory of peace in the epistle. Romans 2:5-10 presents two equally plausible outcomes of eschatological judgment on the day of wrath: wrath, anger, tribulation, and distress for those who do evil, or glory, honor, life, and peace for those who do good. Paul presses the implications of this model to their logical conclusion in light of his conviction that no one is righteous (3:10; cf. 3:11-18, 23). If no one is righteous, no one can experience peace on the day of wrath (3:17); all will be subject to it. Yet, his gospel is the proclamation of a different reality: namely, God through Christ has brought about the reality of peace (5:1). The trajectory of this new reality is that those who have received peace with God can be exhorted to be agents of God's peace (12:18; 14:19).

The result of Christ's bringing about peace for the justified is not the reinstating of two possible outcomes; rather, Christ's peace creates a new trajectory, not based on what humans do but on what God through Christ has done. Those who are justified no longer anticipate the two outcomes judgment scene in 2:5-10; they have peace with God through Christ (5:1).³³

³³ The statement that the two outcomes judgment scene does not apply to the justified does not answer the question of how one attains the status of having been justified. This question invokes long-standing debates in Pauline scholarship as to what Paul's vision is: whether the source of justification is Christ's faithfulness or our faith in Christ as a response to what he has

Where does this leave the concept of “wrath” in Romans? On the one hand, Paul does not deny the reality or justness of God’s wrath; he leaves room for it in 12:19-20 (cf. 3:5-6; 5:9). Neither does he claim that God’s wrath leads to peace (contrast with *1 Enoch* 91:7ff). It is not God’s wrath but God’s love that is demonstrated in Christ dying for us, the result of which is our reconciliation with God and the assurance that we will be saved from God’s wrath (5:8-11). Moreover, Christ died while we were still sinners (5:8), enemies (5:10), and deserving of God’s wrath. Thus, not through wrath but despite the fact that we deserve God’s wrath, God through Christ has justified us, bringing about peace with God (5:1).

On the other hand, wrath is not a central issue for Paul as he turns towards a vision of Christian life in the epistle’s latter chapters. Those who have been justified no longer live in fear of God’s wrath (5:9). He seems to distance them even further from God’s wrath in chapter 12 by claiming they are not to concern themselves with enacting it (12:19-20). Wrath belongs solely to God’s purview. Thus, Paul seems content to affirm the prerogative of God’s wrath, but at the same time he directs attention away from it and towards exhortations for believers to be agents of the new reality of God’s peace in the world (12:18) and within the Christian community (14:19). God’s wrath remains a mystery that he affirms, but his exhortation to believers is to live as agents of God’s peace.

Mary K. Schmitt is a Ph.D. Candidate at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey.

done—or a combination of these positions. The question is not easily answered. Nevertheless, the abrupt address of 5:1 to those who have been justified and the unfolding of the epistle from this point forward suggest it is addressed to those inside the designation “having been justified,” not to those still needing to be justified. Romans is addressed to believers.

Reassessing Anselm on Divine Wrath and Judgment: A Girardian Approach for Mennonite Atonement Theology

Grant Poettcker

Introduction

This article seeks to build upon recent reassessments of Anselm for Mennonite atonement theology.¹ I hope to address the biblical themes of divine wrath and judgment by way of a Girardian reading of Anselm's *Why God Became Man* (*Cur Deus Homo*).² There is a certain irony to my approach. As Tom Yoder Neufeld notes in *Killing Enmity*,³ those most deeply critical of Anselm are often influenced by the critiques of sacrifice and redemptive violence offered by Girard. The reading developed here, however, employs a Girardian optics of the victim to analyze the prevailing Anabaptist/Mennonite reception of Anselm and his arguments. Analyzing our reading of *Cur Deus Homo* through Girard should heighten our sensitivity to our own desire to strike a path to a new future by deploying a violent hermeneutic when reading Anselm. Allowing Girardian empathy for victims to reach its full measure means giving them a voice. So I will use Girardian techniques of literary analysis to illuminate disavowed trajectories in Anselm, particularly

This article and three others in this issue on the theme "Judgment and Wrath of God" are based on presentations made at the Mennonite Scholars and Friends Forum, AAR/SBL annual meeting, Chicago, November 17, 2012. The others are: W. Derek Suderman, "Assyria the Ax, God the Lumberjack: Jeremiah 29, the Logic of the Prophets, and the Quest for a Nonviolent God" (CGR 32, no. 1 [2014]: 44-66); Mary K. Schmitt, "Peace and Wrath in Paul's Epistle to the Romans" (CGR 32, no.1 [2014]: 67-79); Justin Heinzekehr, "When Anabaptists Get Angry: The Wrath of God in a Process-Anabaptist Perspective" (CGR 32, no. 1 [2014]: 91-101).

¹ See especially Rachel Reesor-Taylor, "Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* For a Peace Theology: On the Compatibility of Non-Violence and Sacrificial Atonement" (Ph.D. diss., McGill University, 2007).

² Anselm, "Why God Became Man," in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies, G.R. Evans, and Janet Fairweather (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 260-356. All references to this work are by book and chapter number.

³ Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Killing Enmity: Violence and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 83.

those highlighting problematic tendencies in Girard that Anabaptists and Mennonites nonetheless find attractive.

Girard's "Anti-soteriology" and Critique of Sacrificial Christianity

For René Girard, human desire is mimetic: we pattern our desire upon the desires of others. This leads to rivalry and violence; we each seek to possess our rival's object of desire, which we value because the other values it. Mimetic conflict slowly spreads and escalates until both rivals grasp for a supreme violence. Each rival believes wielding this violence will end the conflict, but it actually threatens to destroy the entire community. At a crisis point, however, a sacrificial victim emerges who appears to both rivals as the *true* cause of the mimetic conflict. Both rivals redirect their violence onto the victim, and the community, formerly fractured by rivalry, is reunified as a sacrificial mob arrayed against the victim. This is how the "scapegoat mechanism" secures peace, according to Girard.

After the sacrifice, the community mythologizes the sacrificial event. Everyone agrees that the victim committed crimes, transgressed divinely-instituted limits, and thereby called divine wrath down upon himself or herself. This serves to justify sacrifice; each community member says, "Our violence is pure, a manifestation of divine violence." Girard summarizes: "the sacred is the sum of human assumptions resulting from collective transferences focused on a reconciliatory victim at the conclusion of a mimetic crisis."⁴ He calls the sacrificial economy that manages violence in this way the "primitive sacred."⁵

Girard argues that Jesus took the place of the victim in this sacrificial drama in order to reveal the brokenness of the mythic sacred. Securing true peace through violence is impossible. Jesus reveals the innocence of the victim and the blindness of the persecuting mob, and the Passion reveals it is human violence, not divine, that orders the victim's death. Rather than a mythic soteriology in which the substitution of the sacrificial victim saves the community, Girard offers what commentator Patrick Kirwan calls an

⁴ René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1987), 42.

⁵ René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1989), 43.

“anti-soteriology”;⁶ Girard shows that the Passion and the Gospels enable an escape from the drive to sacrifice and from the blindness that drives us to mythologize. In *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Girard asserts that there is “nothing in the Gospels to suggest that the death of Jesus is a sacrifice, whatever definition (expiation, substitution, etc.) we may give for that sacrifice.”⁷

Nonetheless, Christianity has often become one more sacrificial religion. In *Things Hidden*, Girard argues that a sacrificial reading of Jesus’ death begins in the Epistle to the Hebrews. He goes on to say that it is “most completely formulated [by] the medieval theologians . . . it amounts to the statement that the Father himself insisted upon the sacrifice.”⁸ He specifically mentions the idea that God “feels the need to revenge his honour.”⁹ Thus, while not naming Anselm specifically, Girard undoubtedly envisions him as among the architects of medieval Christendom’s sacrificial Christianity. For him, Christendom is a culture “based, like all cultures (at least up to a certain point) on the mythological forms engendered by the founding mechanism,”¹⁰ and he suggests it would not have been possible without the sacrificial reading of the crucifixion.

In *The Scapegoat*¹¹ Girard describes the criteria guiding the jaundiced vision of the sacrificial mob in its moment of crisis. The mob will accuse the victim of having committed order-destroying crimes that brought God’s wrath upon the community. The victim will possess characteristics making him or her a favorable target for violence; he will be marked, like Oedipus, with a limp,¹² or she will be a marginal insider, like the foreign-born queen Marie Antoinette, who was alleged to have committed the order-destroying crime of incest.¹³ Above all, the sacrifice of the victim cannot elicit a violent response. It must function cathartically, releasing the community from captivity to violence.

⁶ Michael Kirwan, SJ, “Being Saved From Salvation: René Girard and the Victims of Religion,” *Communio Viatorum* 52, no. 1 (2010): 30.

⁷ Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 180.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹¹ Girard, *The Scapegoat*. See especially Chap. 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

In his works Girard vacillates between two descriptions of his own role in articulating the scapegoat mechanism. At some moments his articulation of this mechanism is his own epoch-making discovery. He describes it this way most often when attempting to show how mimetic theory outstrips Freud and Freud's psychoanalytic theory;¹⁴ so one might conjecture that this tendency is itself a mimetic phenomenon. At other moments Girard describes himself as simply unfolding what was always already present in Jesus' action of taking the victim's place and in the Gospels' identification of the victim as innocent.¹⁵ Girard seems most tempted to perform a kind of hermeneutical violence upon Anselm and the other unnamed medieval theologians when he wants to claim the scapegoat mechanism as his discovery. He clearly wants to support those seeking to build a culture sensitive to the temptation to make scapegoats. But if demonstrating the exigency of this task tempts him to make scapegoats, surely those of us who take up this task are equally tempted. This suggests we ought to be highly circumspect about our treatment of those in our midst—and our memory of those in our history—who could become our victims.

Anselm as a Stumbling Block for Anabaptists and Mennonites

For many Mennonites, Anselm is at best a marginal insider within the Christian tradition. He was an archbishop, a member of the episcopacy which the Anabaptists rejected. His *remoto Christo* ("without reference to Christ") style of argument could be seen as a hobbling step assisted by a proto-Scholastic logical cane. In arguing that the reward due Christ for his service flows instead to the rest of humankind (II, 19), Anselm appears to split soteriology and ethics in the fashion typical of Constantinian Christendom theology. Most troubling of all, he seems to contend that "Jesus' death was necessary in order to satisfy the offended honor of God"¹⁶ (to use a typical formulation). For many, this demonstrates the extent to which Anselm's God is precisely an instance of Girard's "primitive sacred"; this God demands that human blood be spilled before he will be propitious toward humankind.

¹⁴ Consider especially Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, book III.

¹⁵ Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 163.

¹⁶ J. Denny Weaver, "Narrative Christus Victor: The Answer to Anselmian Atonement Violence," in *Atonement and Violence: A Theological Conversation*, ed. John Sanders (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 3.

Girard argues in *Things Hidden* that “this line of reasoning has done more than anything else to discredit Christianity in the eyes of people of goodwill in the modern world.”¹⁷ So, Anabaptist-Mennonite theologians charged with creating a culture of peace find themselves asking, would we not be better off excluding Anselm from our canon? Does he not bring divine wrath down upon himself?

Scapegoats can mean well and still become guilty. Girard’s go-to example is Oedipus,¹⁸ who only means to save Thebes from the plague and the Sphinx. Many would locate Anselm’s error in the hubris of *Cur Deus Homo*, arguing that Anselm overreaches in trying to “delete the devil”¹⁹ from the soteriological picture and removing reference to Christ in his specificity with the *remoto Christo* style of argument. Indeed, these are precisely the points at which Anselm appears to depart from a biblical theological style and from a narrative approach to metaphysics. For Mennonites suspicious of such “methodologism,”²⁰ this is his order-destroying crime. That the style of argument in *Cur Deus Homo* seems to suggest it offers the *final* or the *normative* treatment of the issue only makes it more worrying for those who, like Mark Baker,²¹ want to highlight the diversity within scriptural atonement imagery.

Taking Anselm off the Altar

The Girardian impulse can, however, drive us to rehabilitate our memory of Anselm, and to wonder “whether the actual text of *Cur Deus Homo* has not been lost to view, behind the welter of adverse judgments brought to bear on it.”²² Reference to the actual text quickly reveals how provisional and contextually adapted are its formulations. Indeed, Anselm states (in I: 18)

¹⁷ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 182.

¹⁸ A representative and brief example of Girard’s usage of Oedipus is found in *The Scapegoat*, 25-29.

¹⁹ Weaver, “Narrative Christus Victor,” 7.

²⁰ John Howard Yoder, “Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism,” in *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey C. Murphy, and Mark Nation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 77-90.

²¹ Mark D. Baker, “Go and Do Likewise,” in *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 187-90.

²² D. Bentley Hart, “A Gift Exceeding Every Debt: An Eastern Orthodox Appreciation of Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo*,” *Pro Ecclesia* 7, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 340.

that his argument is “not to be accepted as having any validity beyond the fact that it seems for the moment to be [valid].” He even stipulates that his work is offered in response to “your questioning.” He demonstrates much greater awareness²³ of the origins of the logical premises with which he operates than is typically assumed. For this reason, those who claim he is arguing on a “strictly logical” basis for an audience of “logical persons” misread him²⁴ as badly as those who claim he is illegitimately relying upon medieval political concepts and juridical norms acceptable only to medieval Normans.²⁵

To better understand Anselm’s contextually adapted mode of argument, we should take another cue from a Girardian hermeneutic: we should remove the victim from the sacrificial altar and restore him to membership in the community—even *or especially* if this reveals our own tendencies to violence. To this end I suggest we read *Cur Deus Homo* as contributing to an effort in which we can make common cause with Anselm, namely missiology. All missional theology carefully considers its audience and involves incarnational witness. Anselm identifies his audience: he writes for his Christian students like Boso. But he also writes for those whom they encountered, especially the *infideles* (commonly translated as “unbelievers”—see I: 3, 4, 6, 8), and *paganos* (commonly translated as “pagans”—see II: 22). There are good reasons to believe, however, that by *infideles* Anselm specifically means Jews²⁶—those who do not believe in Jesus as Messiah—and that the *paganos* were Muslims²⁷ whose tents surrounded Anselm when he was exiled in Capua in 1098, the year of this work’s publication.²⁸ Indeed,

²³ David Brown summarizes Karl Barth’s claim on this awareness: “Anselm’s premises were all in any case implicitly derived from revelation.” David Brown, “Anselm on Atonement,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 283. Brown is referring to Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, trans. Ian W. Robertson (London: SCM Press, 1960), 55–57.

²⁴ Despite her status as one of the best contemporary Anselm scholars, G.R. Evans helps to perpetuate an anachronistic reading that views Anselm’s choice of methodology through the lens of Scholasticism when she describes Anselm as having “chosen the hardest route so as to gain the proof which will convince the largest number of people.” G.R. Evans, *Anselm* (London: Continuum, 2001), 72.

²⁵ J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 192.

²⁶ Evans, *Anselm*, 71.

²⁷ This is Brown’s estimation as well. See Brown, “Anselm on Atonement,” 283.

²⁸ Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England*, trans. Geoffrey Bosanquet (Philadelphia:

at the very conclusion of *Cur Deus Homo*, Boso states explicitly that it is Jews and pagans that Anselm's argument should "satisfy" (II: 22). When this context is kept in mind, the danger of attempting to summarize Anselm's work in, say, thirteen logical points²⁹ becomes apparent.

Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* is a rhetorical performance designed to win over those who believe that the divine-human relation admits of a quasi-legal and quasi-economic construal, and that "atonement is possible without an incarnation"³⁰—as Jews and Muslims do. Anselm thus writes with biblical and Abrahamic concepts in mind—sin, grace, expiation, and redemption—and with biblical and Abrahamic images of God in mind, because he knows he holds these categories and images in common with his interlocutors.

In Girardian fashion, then, we should attend to the mimetic effects Anselm intends his text to generate. In I: 1 he says he adopts the dialogical style because it aids understanding. But it also aids the work's missiological purpose: "Anselm presumes a rapprochement between believers and unbelievers predicated on the desire for understanding."³¹ In the dialogue, Boso becomes a *mimetic model* for Anselm's students and for his interlocutors. Anselm hopes that, by imitating Boso, his students would fulfill their desire to strengthen their faith with understanding. He also hopes that the "unbelievers" and "pagans" will pattern their desire after Boso's. For Boso has become, like them, one requiring demonstration. Anselm hopes that when these others observe (following the dialogue in Book I)³² that Boso has not become unreasonable when he recognizes the need for the God-

Dufour, 1965), 101. See also F.B.A. Asiedu, "Anselm and the Unbelievers: Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the *Cur Deus Homo*," *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 530-48.

²⁹ R.W. Southern, *St. Anselm: Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 206.

³⁰ Brown, "Anselm on Atonement," 283.

³¹ Asiedu, "Anselm and the Unbelievers: Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the *Cur Deus Homo*," 536.

³² There are two key divisions in the logical structure of Anselm's text. At I: 11 Anselm adopts the *remoto Christo* style in its most rigorous form for the rhetorical purpose I have outlined. With the beginning of the second book (II: 1) he again refers to the fittingness of the atonement presented in scripture, though in veiled terms. His belief that the second part of Book I should convince those who do not believe in Jesus as messiah that an incarnation is necessary for atonement is the key to the logic underpinning the shift in Book II toward more open discussion of Christ in his specificity.

man even apart from scripture, they might also pattern their desire upon his. They might then come to see (following the dialogue in Book II) that Jesus' coming and fulfilling righteousness is also "fitting" in an aesthetic sense.

Far from being a matter of mere pedagogical convenience, then, the dialogical style of *Cur Deus Homo* is crucial to its witness. While we may say that the "incarnational" aspect of its witness is undercut by the fact that Boso can only be a character in the dialogue, he actually was a student of Anselm's, someone with whom "unbelievers" and "pagans" could have conversed. In Girardian terms we may say that by writing this text as a dialogue, Anselm avails himself of a positive mimetic effect.³³ In *Cur Deus Homo*, Boso becomes marginal to the Christians for a missional purpose—so that these others could be drawn into fellowship with those saved by Christ.

A Missiological Objection

It may be objected that Anselm approaches missiology wrongly. The objection contends that Judaism and Islam may not adequately address the question of atonement—which Anselm identifies in I: 25: "how God saves mankind, when he does not forgive a person for his sin if the person in question does not give back what he owes on account of that sin." Instead of claiming that Christian doctrine has an answer to this question, the objection continues, Anselm should have pointed out that it is not a Christian question to begin with! The Christian God is a God of grace, not legalism. Anselm concedes too much to his legally-oriented and sacrificially-minded interlocutors, and distorts the Gospel as a result. His missiological purpose may make his use of legal and sacrificial frameworks understandable, but his articulation of the atonement remains problematic.

To answer the objection, I return to the themes of wrath and judgment in Anselm. By tracing his logic to its origin in scripture we can see how he redefines law and sacrifice as he explains the operation of grace.

In the New Testament as in the Old, divine wrath is poured out upon those who sin. Anselm's apparent innovation is to claim that God's wrath is poured out because sin revokes God's honor (I: 12). A true or total revocation

³³ On the concept of positive mimesis, see Rebecca Adams and René Girard, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard," *Religion & Literature* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 25-27.

of it is impossible, however, since “nothing can be added to, or subtracted from the honour of God, *in so far as it relates to God himself*” (I: 15). The sinner rather “dishonours God, *with regard to himself*,”³⁴ since he is . . . disturbing . . . the order and beauty of the universe” (I: 15). The distinction is between the inward, inviolable honor of God and an outward honor owing to God in virtue of God’s simultaneously just and gracious ordering of the universe. These two kinds of honor map quite perfectly onto the biblical language of “glory” found, for example, in Psalm 8:1: God’s inward glory is set inviolably “above the heavens” and God’s outward glory is displayed for all creatures as “majestic . . . in all the earth.”

By sinning, the sinner disturbs the directness with which the created order testifies to God’s glory. Anselm uses a series of metaphors in explaining the “unfittingness” of sin. All of them trade on the asymmetry between divine justice in creating and maintaining order, and human injustice in disturbing it, an asymmetry that features prominently in God’s responses to Job out of the whirlwind (Job 38:2ff). God gives the gift of a capacity for blessed happiness. But when the sinner³⁵ seizes it for himself, God revokes it and thereby points both to the fact that the gift was given and to the way it may be properly enjoyed (I: 14). Anselm argues that God created human beings such that they find fulfillment in contributing to the beautiful order of creation through obedience. When they are disobedient and fail to find their place in this order, they thus find themselves unfulfilled—even “subjected to torment” (I: 14) by God in and by their disobedience.

That disobedience elicits wrath is not evidence of a God who is vindictive or who demands retribution in maintaining a heavenly sacrificial economy. On the contrary, wrath “regulates” sin (I: 14) for the benefit of humankind. If God’s wrath did not do so, God’s character would be like that of the capricious pagan gods who are unconcerned with human righteousness, punishing or pardoning on a whim. If God’s wrath did not regulate sin, this would strip human beings of a moral resource for reorientation to their true

³⁴ Emphases added.

³⁵ The proximity of the reference to Job may suggest I am insinuating that God allowed him to suffer because of unrighteousness on Job’s part. It is not my intent to be a latter-day version of one of Job’s friends! It bears mentioning, however, that by suffering the revocation of his blessed happiness, Job demonstrates how far this blessedness consists in loving God for God’s own sake, and Job’s righteousness testifies to God’s glory.

fulfillment. The experience of alienation from God functions as evidence that one has opted out of God's good order.

Justice, conceived abstractly does not *require* God's creative act, nor does it require God's command to obey. But both are given as gifts of divine grace. And to these gifts a third must be added, namely Christ's obedience, which reveals the path to salvation for humankind. That this is an order of grace and gift rather than of law and economy becomes clear when we read separately the parable from II: 16 and the (openly scripturally-dependent) description of Christ's service from II: 18. The king from II: 16 is so pleased by the hero's act that he enacts a law which pardons *everyone*, living or dead, past or present, in view of that act. What human law is like this? One could claim that, humanly considered, such a king would look ridiculous and indulgent of his people. Despite the obvious limitations of the metaphor, it underscores the kenotic nature of the Trinitarian acts of incarnation and atonement.³⁶ Likewise, as we see in II: 18, it is humanly impossible to reckon one infinity against another. The impossibility of this "calculation" thus forestalls the formulation of a mechanistic economy of salvation rather than enabling it. Indeed, in inventing the concept that commentators have called "supererogatory service," wherein the infinite worth of the God-man's service paradoxically exceeds the infinite debt into which humankind has fallen through sin, Anselm shows how divine grace cannot be reduced to a human calculation.

Rather than offering explanatory theories "acceptable [only] to the medieval mind"³⁷ in Book II, Anselm is grappling *a posteriori* with the actuality of the atonement: God, the author of necessity, saw this course as fitting for the salvation of humankind. *Cur Deus Homo* manages to describe how Christ's sinlessness gives his work the quality of being *beyond* any that could be performed by any other human being, even as Christ nonetheless remains exemplary in performing it. In pursuing righteousness even unto death Christ shows that obedience involves loving God for God's own sake—which is true for all members of his race. This allows Christ's life to be ethically informative even as, beyond this, it can be described as uniquely

³⁶ On the kenotic dimension of these Trinitarian acts, see especially Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: The Action*, vol. 4., trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).

³⁷ Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 182.

offered *for* or *on behalf* of humankind. It is this quality that allows Christ's sacrifice of obedience to be a sacrifice "once, for all" (Hebrews 9:27), and this is fitting if that sacrifice is to resist historicization and to remain the unassailable model for all who would be his disciples.

Empty Cross: Empty Altar

In a 1993 interview Girard was asked to reconsider his treatment of the book of Hebrews in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. In that interview he offers the following:

I say at the end of *Things Hidden* . . . that the changes in the meaning of the word 'sacrifice' contain a whole history, religious history, of mankind. So when we say 'sacrifice' today inside a church . . . we mean something which has nothing to do with primitive religion. . . . So I scapegoated Hebrews, and I scapegoated the word 'sacrifice'—I assumed it should have some kind of constant meaning, which is contrary to the mainstream of my own thinking.³⁸

Girard admits that his impulse to make a scapegoat of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and to expel the very term "sacrifice" from the Christian lexicon arose within the context of what could be called missiological pressures. But this does not mean we should simply discard *Things Hidden*. Rather it shows we should repent of the messiness that inevitably arises when we, in a similar fashion, find ourselves speaking languages "mixed together helter-skelter,"³⁹ and we should work patiently to name the distortions we discover. It is when we become too convinced we have transcended scapegoating that we end up making scapegoats. This also means that as a point of theological method, we should offer the same generosity that we offer Girard to our marginal insider Anselm, and to those who continue to use his atonement language of satisfaction.

Grant Poettcker is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Briercrest College in Caronport, Saskatchewan.

³⁸ Adams and Girard, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard," 29.

³⁹ Yoder, "Walk and Word: The Alternatives to Methodologism," 81.

When Anabaptists Get Angry: The Wrath of God in a Process-Anabaptist Perspective¹

Justin Heinzekehr

I

As peace churches with a strong commitment to scripture, Anabaptists are in a particularly difficult position with regard to divine wrath. On the one hand, the biblical stories of divine wrath, sometimes culminating in divinely mandated acts of violence, are not only embarrassing to us but also dangerous to others in a world where religious rhetoric is so often used to justify violence. Too often, even within the church, we use the concept of divine wrath in a violent manner to threaten those with whom we disagree.² In common parlance, which greatly simplifies the traditional notion of wrath, the term means “taking revenge,” “losing your temper,” or “holding a grudge.” These behaviors are hardly fitting for a church that seeks to follow a path of nonviolence. There is a reason, after all, that wrath has its place as one of the seven deadly sins.

This article and three others in this issue on the theme “Judgment and Wrath of God” are based on presentations made at the Mennonite Scholars and Friends Forum, AAR/SBL annual meeting, Chicago, November 17, 2012. The others are: W. Derek Suderman, “Assyria the Ax, God the Lumberjack: Jeremiah 29, the Logic of the Prophets, and the Quest for a Nonviolent God” (CGR 32, no. 1 [2014]: 44-66); Mary K. Schmitt, “Peace and Wrath in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans” (CGR 32, no. 1 [2014]: 67-79); Grant Poettcker, “Reassessing Anselm on Divine Wrath and Judgment: A Girardian Approach for Mennonite Atonement Theology” (CGR 32, no. 1 [2014]: 80-90).

¹ The original title of this paper as presented at the American Academy of Religion in 2012 was “When Mennonites Get Angry: The Wrath of God in a Process-Anabaptist Perspective.” The use of the term “Mennonite” was not meant to be exclusive of other Anabaptist groups, but mostly for rhetorical effect. The term has been changed here to be more precise.

² See, for example, Paul Gotwals Landis, “God’s Wrath, Love,” *Mennonite World Review*, March 12, 2012, www.mennoworld.org/2012/3/12, or Lowell Delp’s sermon at “Affirming the Faith,” a 2010 gathering in Lansdale, Pennsylvania of Eastern District Conference and Franconia Mennonite Conference members, reported by Heidi Martin, “Conference Affirms Teachings on Sexuality,” *The Mennonite*, February 1, 2010, www.themennonite.org/issues/13-2.

Yet the disappearance of wrath from the Anabaptist theological toolbox would leave us significantly impoverished. After all, wrath does seem to be a key component of the biblical tradition, not as a petty display of anger but as a passionate judgment against unrighteousness or idolatry. Much of the prophetic literature, for instance, speaks in the name of divine wrath against greed, militarism, and apathy. To the extent that Jesus sees himself in the line of the prophets, one might even say that wrath (i.e., passionate judgment) is a foundational element of the nonviolent ethics that can be derived from the New Testament. Certainly Jesus seemed to have moments of wrath; the picture of the gentle Jesus beckoning the children to him should be balanced by that of the Jesus who calls people “a brood of vipers” (Matt. 23:3) or names a person “a child of hell” (Matt. 23:15).³ Biblical nonviolence seems to grow out of wrath; it does not stand in contradiction to it. As Walter Wink says, “We need to be able to bring anger, power, passion, and an iron intransigence to our nonviolence.”⁴ Nonviolence without wrath is at best bland and at worst acquiescent or voyeuristic towards violence and injustice.

The conundrum, as I see it, is how do we think about the concept of wrath through the lens of the nonviolent God revealed in Jesus? How do we maintain the authority of the church as a nonviolent witness without falling into authoritarianism, in which we use the idea of divine wrath (a false idea, in this case) to foster exclusion, polarization, and narrow-mindedness?

I will argue that a creative dialogue between process and Anabaptist theologies, especially their respective Whiteheadian and Yoderian versions, offers fertile new ground for just such a paradigm. In this paradigm, divine wrath is the aspect of the creative transformation of the world in God that challenges the violence and intractability of conflict. Insofar as the church

³ It is sometimes argued that the Bible attributes wrath to God alone, that it is a divine prerogative rather than a human one. See, for example, Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 395. While it is true that in scripture the destruction of the unrighteous or of enemies is solely God’s function, many individuals in the Bible feel no qualms about giving voice to God’s judgment, or perhaps, to take a more critical view, attributing their own judgment to God. Either way, humans in the Bible certainly participate in the activity of judgment and condemnation, which seems to me to be the core of the concept of wrath.

⁴ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 289.

engages in nonviolent hermeneutics, it is the manifestation of divine wrath. But the community is not automatically an agent of God's wrath; the violent or exclusive actions of a community are by definition counter to the insistence of God and are therefore the objects of God's wrath rather than its representatives. This means that God's wrath is inherent in the church's process of discernment and interpretation but also comes from outside the church through the provocation, spoken or unspoken, of those currently excluded by any given consensus of the community.

Given John Howard Yoder's articulation of ecclesiology, wrath should have an important function in the hermeneutics of Anabaptist faith communities. According to Yoder, the church is supposed to be a hermeneutic community, having the authority to interpret and to make judgments. This is the "binding and loosing" of Matthew 18. But if the church is to be a hermeneutic community, it must be able to identify the things in this world that run counter to the spirit of God. This seems to entail getting "angry" (maybe even wrathful) about certain realities, and speaking out against them. Some Anabaptists have realized that nonviolence should not mean keeping quiet in the face of injustice, and our language has been changing over the last century from Guy Hersberger's "nonresistance" to the more active "nonviolent resistance."⁵

The importance of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), the founder of process thought, to this discussion is the way that his theology mirrors Yoderian ecclesiology and ethics. In process theology, God receives all that occurs in the world and harmonizes the conflicting elements into a coherent whole. Whitehead calls this the "consequent nature" of God.⁶ In simpler terms, God is the ultimate example of nonviolent consensus. God's judgment on the world is not enacted by simply excluding those people or points of view that do not match a pre-established divine vision, just as Yoder suggests with Gandhi that the church should include the enemy in its pursuit of

⁵ Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994).

⁶ "The consequent nature of God is [God's] judgment on the world. [God] saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of [God's] own life. It is the judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved. It is also the judgment of a wisdom which uses what in the temporal world is mere wreckage." Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978 [1930]), 346.

truth.⁷ Instead, God's vision is constituted by the transformation of conflict into a creative, novel solution.⁸ It is a vision that adapts to the changing circumstances, the concrete suffering and successes, of creation.

One of the early process theologians, Bernard Loomer, noted that Whitehead's theology advocates an alternative conception of power. The common view is what Loomer calls "linear power," defined by its ability to actualize its own interests against the competing interests of others. In this paradigm, one's "size" or stature is measured by the amount of unilateral influence one has over others, or how much one can limit the other's power. By contrast, process theology assumes that power is relational. Relational power is the ability to be influenced without losing one's own freedom or identity.⁹ In a relational paradigm, one's stature depends on the ability to incorporate seemingly contradictory elements into a cohesive whole.

Another important aspect of process theology is that God's vision is a mere abstraction without the world. The world gives concreteness to what Whitehead calls "the kingdom of heaven."¹⁰ God's role is to organize and harmonize this content into an aesthetic whole. God's vision then flows back into the world as a persuasive force towards creative advance to which the world must then respond. This is what Whitehead means by his noted antitheses: "It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World. It is as true to say that God transcends the

⁷ "The reason one renounces violence in social conflict, said Gandhi, is not (not only, not merely) that bloodshed is morally forbidden; it is that the adversary is part of my truth-finding process. I need to act nonviolently in order to get the adversary to hear me, but I need as well to hear the adversary." John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992), 69.

⁸ For Whitehead, creativity and novelty do not connote newness for its own sake but the achievement of an aesthetic intensity or widening of perspective, which includes but goes beyond more traditional concepts like justice, righteousness, and, I would argue, peace. See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 105.

⁹ "The world of the individual who can be influenced by another without losing his or her identity or freedom is larger than the world of the individual who fears being influenced. The former can include ranges and depths of complexity and contrast to a degree that is not possible for the latter. The stature of the individual who can let another exist in his or her own creative freedom is larger than the size of the individual who insists that others must conform to his own purposes and understandings." Bernard Loomer, "Two Conceptions of Power," *Process Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 5-32.

¹⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 350-51.

World, as that the World transcends God. It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God.”¹¹

While some process theologians have described God’s vision as providing a specific, concrete plan, I believe Catherine Keller’s interpretation is closer to the spirit of Whitehead. She says, “Rather, I am trying to think a complex goodness . . . which is not in fact offering a positive lure for every occasion. . . . The specific lure, as the initial aim of every occasion, need not be understood as encoded with a particular, father-knows-best . . . sort of content.”¹² Instead, Keller proposes an aim that is better characterized as the ground of an entity’s well-being. God does not privilege a particular outcome as God’s unambiguous “will,” but rather demands that each entity embark on a creative venture to transform their context into something greater. In a sense Whitehead’s system prefigures John Paul Lederach’s theory of conflict as a cyclical process of change between concrete episodes of conflict, and a transformative platform that provides a foundation for processes of constructive response.¹³

These characteristics of process theology make Whitehead’s theology very conducive to a nonviolent ethics, even though Whitehead was not writing as a pacifist. In fact, just as 16th-century Anabaptists saw their ecclesiology as a return to the origins of Christian life, he considered his theology a reclamation of the “Galilean origin of Christianity”:

When the Western world accepted Christianity, Caesar conquered; and the received text of Western theology was edited by his lawyers. . . . The brief Galilean vision of humility flickered throughout the ages, uncertainly.... But the deeper idolatry, of the fashioning of God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian, and Roman imperial rulers, was retained. The Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar.

[The Galilean vision] does not emphasize the ruling Caesar, or

¹¹ Ibid., 345.

¹² Catherine Keller, “The Mystery of the Insoluble Evil: Violence and Evil in Marjorie Suchocki,” in *World Without End: Christian Eschatology from a Process Perspective*, ed. Joseph A. Bracken (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 63.

¹³ John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003), 40-47.

the ruthless moralist, or the unmoved mover. It dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love....¹⁴

This should start sounding familiar—one should recognize in this passage a cousin to John Howard Yoder’s critique of Constantinianism or to J. Denny Weaver’s suspicion of creeds. They share a commitment to reclaiming theology from its co-option by the state and Christianity’s subsequent justification of violence.

Even more important to this discussion is how process thought develops certain ecclesiological themes that are core to Yoder’s theology, specifically Yoder’s definition of the church as an interpreting community aiming to resolve conflicts restoratively rather than punitively. One of Yoder’s key points is that the authority of the church to engage in this kind of work is actually a divine authority. God empowers the church to interpret and judge in God’s name:¹⁵ “To be human in the light of the gospel is to face conflict in redemptive dialogue. When we do that, it is God who does it.”¹⁶ If we accept Yoder’s argument, there is a correspondence between the church’s activity and God’s activity, or between the church’s judgment and God’s judgment. But the authority of the judgment depends on several factors: it aims at restoration rather than punishment, it assumes that both parties can “win,”¹⁷ and it requires a voluntary community.¹⁸

Notice that Yoder’s claim that “when we do that, it is God who does it” has not only ecclesiological but theological consequences. Read one way, it says something about the church (it is invested with moral authority); read another way, it says something about God (the church’s process of judgment is a window into God’s own process of judgment). Anabaptist ecclesiology therefore has theological implications, namely that God’s judgment is based on a non-competitive, restorative, communal dialogue.¹⁹ But we have already

¹⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 342-43.

¹⁵ Yoder, *Body Politics*, 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁹ This may seem counterintuitive, since we usually think of ecclesiology as derivative from theology, or even more so from scripture, in the case of Anabaptists. In my opinion, the fact

seen this worked out in Whitehead's thought, though his starting point was philosophical rather than ecclesiological. It may come as a surprise to see such a heterodox (some might say heretical) theology converging with Anabaptism; but remember that the Anabaptists were once heretics themselves. The similarity of motivation and content suggests that these different systems might work together to solve the problem of envisioning a nonviolent divine wrath.

II

In light of these common notions from process and Anabaptist theologians, how should we define wrath? If God's judgment is based on a creative harmonization of conflicting elements, God's wrath, or negative judgment, will be directed at practices or systems that tend to block such transformation. Of course, many concrete practices tend to foster exclusion instead of creativity—such evils as racism, greed, and violence. Insofar as they do prevent transformation of conflict, we must imagine them to be an object of God's wrath. Wrath is not vengeance, not even the justice of "an eye for an eye." Wrath is the courageous stance against those things that stifle us or others.

However, God's vision for the world should not be thought of as a pre-existing list of good and bad actions; ultimately it is the world itself that provides the content of God's judgment. For example, God is angered by racism because it denies an entire group of people the right to contribute to the resolution of a conflict, not because it offends an abstract notion of justice or deviates from a plan that God has scripted out into eternity.

The church, then, is simply the deliberate effort of a community to bring about the "kingdom of heaven," the transformation of the world that occurs within God. Insofar as the church achieves a true consensus (i.e., not coercive or exclusive), it represents or even helps to construct this divine vision. Of course, the church is always a limited, local transformation in comparison to the infinite receptiveness of God. A church will have a finite size or stature, as Loomer would say, compared with the infinite stature of God. A finite community can incorporate only so many disparate elements

while maintaining a unified identity. There is always some “outside” to a community of which it has not yet taken account. Or, as Yoder says more elegantly, “all communities of moral insight are provincial. . . .”²⁰ This has both positive and negative implications for the church’s ability to represent God’s wrath.

On the one hand, the church is empowered to be a prophetic witness against practices preventing the restorative, creative movement that transcends the barriers created by conflict. Where the church protests against the diminishment of creative transformation, God’s wrath is made manifest. This wrath operates with the constant hope that the situation can be transformed into a win-win solution where all parties can be respected and restored to a healthy relationship.²¹ The church’s wrath, which correlates to God’s wrath, is a nonviolent anger because it does not seek to exclude the other but to call the other, and perhaps itself as well, out of the narrowness of their initial perspectives.

This assumes that the oppressor comes from outside the community of faith, which itself is composed of or allied with voices that have been ignored or excluded. That is, in order to represent the wrath of God, the church must identify itself with the poor, the outcast, the sick, et al. One of the biblical narratives usually interpreted as a story about God’s violent anger is Matthew 25, about the sheep and the goats. Although the story ends with the goats being led away to eternal punishment, the point is really how these two groups were aligned with the voiceless in their society. Verses 44 and 45 read: “Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’” In the process-Anabaptist view, this story is not merely hyperbole: God is really made present when a community reconciles to itself those thought to be irredeemable outsiders. Conversely, whenever a community excludes the outsiders, it becomes an

²⁰ John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 41.

²¹ This idea probably has more resonance with Anabaptist contributions to the fields of conflict studies than to theology, but one can see in Yoder too the claim that the enemy should be approached under the assumption that a wider truth embraces both of us. See n. 6.

object of God's wrath, not a representation of it.

In fact, because the church is a community that is conscious of its role as God's representative, it is particularly susceptible to the divine wrath that constantly demands a broader consensus. Because the church makes the radical claim to be a community invested with hermeneutic authority, it must also take account of the limitations of its own consensus.

To the extent that the church is a finite community with a limited moral perspective, it can represent God's wrath only within a limited sphere. One community may have done more work on integrating a particular issue or voice and therefore has the responsibility to exhibit a divine wrath in this respect. But the same community may, in regard to some other issue, actually be engaged in excluding voices that need to be heard. Often this is either unconscious or the result of an uncritical acceptance of cultural norms. Here, it would be necessary to listen to the wrath of God that may reveal itself through another community, whether sacred or secular.

Wherever the church itself uses power to silence particular voices, it has lost its role as representative of the wrath or the vision of God, and stands in need of reformation. This is not an occasional need but a constant one. A finite community can nevertheless grow in size or stature (see Loomer's remarks cited earlier) and challenge itself to reflect more of God's infinite vision. If the church does not continue to expand its moral vision, it will stagnate. Here we could apply Whitehead's statement about civilization in general to the church (changing a few words to suit the context): "A [church] preserves its vigour so long as it harbours a real contrast between what has been and what may be; and so long as it is nerved by the vigour to adventure beyond the safeties of the past. Without adventure [the church] is in full decay."²² The adventure in this case is to be constructively responsive to the ways God's wrath is directed against us.

The church is therefore always simultaneously the agent and the object of God's wrath, and it often takes significant discernment to decide how these two roles play out in a particular context. In fact, there will never be a way to define God's wrath universally and objectively, not only because this requires a community capable of an infinite receptivity but because the context of our judgment is always in flux. Even within the divine vision, any harmonization

²² Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 279.

of conflicting elements is relevant only to the current context; it waits for the world to make the next step into the future so that it can continue to adapt. This keeps us from claiming a perfect correlation with God's will, as many evangelical preachers have been tempted to do. It does not condemn us to a complete relativism, but it does mean that our representation of God's wrath is always partial and context-bound.²³ God's wrath will spring up in new and unexpected places, and the church, if it seeks to embody the reign of God more fully, must be constantly on the alert. Again, as a nonviolent wrath, we should also expect this anger will be transformative rather than punitive, no matter in which position we find ourselves relative to it.

Under this view, it becomes impossible to define God's wrath universally and concretely at the same time. To define it universally would be to describe an abstraction devoid of content, merely as the prevention of creative transformation in whatever form that may take. And when God's wrath is made concrete by a community, it is always a local rather than a universal manifestation. This becomes a sort of "uncertainty principle" for the church—but not a debilitating one. Every instantiation of divine wrath, so long as it arises through a process of nonviolent discourse,²⁴ is valid up to the boundaries of that discourse. To use a political analogy, that one state's laws do not apply to the neighboring state doesn't mean they are relative; they are binding within a jurisdiction because the process of instituting them was confined to that jurisdiction. At the same time, these laws may affect the way people in other states and countries view their own legislation. As Yoder says, "The community pulls back from any claim to catholic generalizability and infallibility, yet it is believingly, modestly ready to say of consensus reached today, 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us,' and to commend

²³ "To say...that there exists no nonprovincial general community with clear language, and that therefore we must converse at every border, is in actuality a more optimistic and more fruitful affirmation of the marketplace of ideas than to project a hypothetically general insight which we feel reassured to resort to, when our own particularity embarrasses us, but which is not substantial after all when we seek to define it." Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 41.

²⁴ As opposed to violent discourse, which could occur in several ways. For one, contradictory voices could be suppressed or dismissed rather than incorporated into a creative solution. Or, the terms of a discourse could be such that they preclude some perspective from being voiced in the first place.

this insight . . . to other churches.”²⁵

This theological vocabulary allows us to talk about God’s wrath in a way that preserves the integrity of both God’s stance against injustice and the revelation of the nonviolent God through Jesus. Given Yoder’s articulation of the authority of the hermeneutic community, together with the theological framework of process thought, there is a correspondence, though never a perfect one, between the activity of God and the activity of the church. If the church is the manifestation of God’s reign on earth, then God’s wrath must be made manifest in the faith community. If the church’s wrath must be a nonviolent, restorative wrath, then this must also be the character of God’s wrath. The wrath of God cannot be utilized to self-righteously define one’s own group against others thought to be hopelessly outside God’s grace. The wrath of God is precisely the movement of a community to identify exclusion and to work uncompromisingly towards a creative transcendence of conflict. This puts the church constantly at odds with those who benefit from the status quo, but it leads to embrace rather than abandonment even of those who stand in the way of creativity. To paraphrase Teresa of Avila, “God has no wrath on earth but yours.” This should be both an empowering and humbling realization.

Justin Heinzekehr, a doctoral candidate in religion at Claremont Lincoln University, is an adjunct professor at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas.

²⁵ Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 35. The quotation that Yoder uses here is from Acts 15:28.

Eric A. Seibert. *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.

Is there a third way of addressing the problem of violence in the Old Testament, one that does not either ignore the violence or justify it? Eric Seibert, associate professor of Old Testament at Messiah College, proposes a third way in *The Violence of Scripture*. With sensitivity he demonstrates that the legacy of violence in the OT is not a matter of dead letters on a page, but a serious matter of past and present ethical concern for the witness of the Church. Accordingly, he makes a persuasive argument that Christian communities seeking to be obedient to God must read scripture in a way that acknowledges and critiques the virtuous violence embedded within its pages.

The book begins with an exploration of violence throughout the OT. The author notes that while the OT certainly upholds a notion of “wrongful violence,” as in the case of David’s murder of Uriah, it more often than not tells stories that perpetuate the belief that violence can be “virtuous,” as in the Sunday school classic of David and Goliath (28-38). Also troubling are the texts where God is involved in acts of violence either directly, as in the case of the drowning of the Egyptian army, or by way of sanction, as in the case of the annihilation of the Canaanites. Furthermore, the structural violence of patriarchy and slavery can, according to Seibert, also fall under the category “virtuous,” as these structures are simply assumed and largely unchallenged throughout scripture (37).

Seibert’s basic point is that virtuous violence in the OT is too often ignored or sanitized in the church’s reading, with the impression that the church endorses virtuous violence where it should critique it (43). If this passive endorsement can be understood as a kind of violent reading, then critiquing the violence, for Seibert, is a way of reading nonviolently.

According to the author, in order to read nonviolently the church needs to learn how to be “conversant” rather than “compliant” readers of scripture (54-56). If we recognize that texts have agendas and that their agendas may not always be worth supporting, engaging texts conversantly is necessary (47). Reading conversantly, however, does not ensure we will be able to critique the violence found therein. Here Seibert proposes basic rules

that should guide readers in ethically critiquing virtuous violence. We should ensure that our “interpretation increases our love for God and others,” and that we read with a concern for “those who have been wronged, oppressed, and violated” in order to “be life affirming for *all* people” (68-69, emphasis in original). Any reading that does not result in an interpretation thoroughly informed by these rules should be put aside so we can “read again” (68).

With these rules in place, Seibert looks at the account of the “Canaanite Genocide” in Joshua, several war texts scattered throughout the OT, and a variety of texts that condone violence against women, in order to offer nonviolent readings. He reads these accounts from the perspective of those being violated and harmed, instead of from that of those doing the “virtuous” harming. These readings are especially provocative and share a biblical parallel in the story of the prophet Nathan confronting David about his sin. On Seibert’s view, the stories of Canaanite genocide, Israel’s “virtuous” wars, and violence against women could be stories read against us, revealing the guilt of a privileged western readership whose history continues to be stained by the colonial project.

Seibert’s proposal, while persuasive at many points, should be challenged on the level of its implicit assumptions about the rightness of nonviolent readings. Any method of reading, no matter how *truly* virtuous its cause, runs the risk of being violent to the text and its use in modern contexts, if it is assumed that the particular method being employed is universally valid. Thus, when Seibert states that we must be ready to critique “Israel’s culturally conditioned assumptions,” we must similarly demand that we do the same regarding the culturally conditioned assumptions of nonviolent readings of scripture (118). His proposal is thus most important and most in jeopardy when it reveals how critiquing the virtuous violence in scripture should itself be an act of persistent self-critique, opening our sure methods and readings to the judgment of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Zacharie Klassen, Master of Theological Studies student, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario

C. Norman Kraus. *The Jesus Factor in Justice and Peacemaking*. Theological Postings, Volume 1. Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2011.

C. Norman Kraus has written this book for people engaged in Peace and Conflict transformation studies and work. Writing as a Mennonite theologian, he intends it for non-Mennonite Christians, as well as for persons from other religions and cultures than those of the United States. His goal is to show how Jesus factors into “the politicized process of professional conflict transformation and peace-building” (14). In many respects this volume reviews much that has previously been written by those who understand Jesus to set the paradigm for Christian peace witness. What it seeks to add is to make explicit how Jesus relates to the professional work of conflict transformation and peacemaking, and to explore how the perspective of Jesus’ approach to peacemaking relates to peace in other religious traditions.

The author sometimes leans precariously close to apologetics over against Christian traditions that view the peace God offers in Jesus as “the assuaging of God’s anger,” as an “inner release from a burden of fear, guilt, and inadequacy to keep God’s just commandments,” or that see peace as a Christian political strategy. Key to his argument for “the Jesus Factor”—what Kraus calls Jesus’ “style” or Gestalt (meaning the whole of Jesus’ life)—is the conviction that it is Jesus’ style, not only his saving action on the cross, that formed “a pattern change in the moral basis for peacemaking” (50, 51). With Jesus, God’s intention for *shalom* by reconciliation, not retribution, is most fully revealed.

Throughout the book Kraus engages with intramural Christian theological debates between pacifists and realists by inserting provocative questions, particularly around the relationship of Jesus to nonresistance and nonviolent coercion, and about how Jesus relates to contemporary social responsibility. A unique addition to the conversation appears in Chapter 3, where the author interacts with the wisdom found in other religious traditions. I appreciated his recognition that other religions have their own approaches to, and definitions of, peace that may share values with Christian traditions. His description of a Buddhist-Christian dialogue in this section is especially noteworthy.

While maintaining that God's will for humanity is *shalom*, a thick just peace, Kraus states that humans can fulfill this destiny only by finding God's "true and living way" through self-sacrificial love and nonviolence. Although he asserts that Jesus embodied "this only way," he also says people can find it "regardless of their culture and religion" (41). Kraus claims that the Jesus factor requires us to question religious exclusivism, since exclusivist truth claims are rooted in competition between religions that demand violent solutions rather than cooperation in mediation, conflict transformation, and reconciliation. He takes exclusivist claims to preclude dialogue, listening, confession, and collaboration—"the very methodology and goals of peacemaking" (36).

The author's insistence that we understand Jesus in his Jewish textual and socio-historical milieu is important. Kraus recognizes that Jesus is connected to Second Temple Judaism historically, ethically, and spiritually, but he misconstrues things by reading the New Testament too literally as a "historical" account of Second Temple Judaism, thereby participating in the polemic we inherit in the text: the Jewish community is portrayed in a singular, reductionist, and distorted manner. Amy-Jill Levine, author of *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (HarperCollins, 2007), observes that anti-Jewish, supersessionist readings construct Judaism and Jews as negative in order to show "how Jesus is in solidarity with the poor, with women, with the Palestinian population or any other oppressed group," thereby defining Judaism as "legalistic, purity obsessed, Temple dominated, bellicose, greedy and exclusivist" (Levine, 167). In his depiction of the law and the Temple, Kraus is prey to these pitfalls and fails to represent adequately the wide variety of Judaisms prior to, and contemporary with, Jesus' life. More worrisome is that in portraying what Jesus uniquely brings to peacemaking he fails to note explicitly the discontinuity of the First and Second Temple Judaisms with contemporary Rabbinic Judaism.

This volume is organized into eight chapters of about ten pages each, making it suitable for class assignments and group study. However, without an index and bibliography it does not point readers to where they could further pursue a given perspective. And, given the book's audience, I have

a quibble with the author's inconsistent use of terms such as peacemaking, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping.

Susan Kennel Harrison, Ph.D. candidate in Theology, Emmanuel College of Victoria University in the University of Toronto

S. (Steve) K. Moore. *Military Chaplains as Agents of Peace: Religious Leader Engagement in Conflict and Post-conflict Environment*. Toronto: Lexington Books, 2013.

The author of this book is an ordained elder with the United Church of Canada who served as a chaplain in the Canadian Forces for twenty-two years. His main purpose is to offer a vision of “Religious Leader Engagement” (RLE) as an evolving domain of ministry among military chaplains internationally within the larger framework of the potential role of religion in peacebuilding in conflict and post-conflict situations. RLE comprises military-supported systematic efforts to affirm, network, and partner with local, regional, and, sometimes, national religious leaders who share a commitment to peace and reconciliation.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I—Theoretical Consideration of the Role of Religion in the Conflict Environment—has four chapters, beginning with an introduction that describes the challenges of the contemporary context of conflict and the need for comprehensive integrative approaches. It continues with a discussion of a theory of conflict and the praxis of peacebuilding employed in the rest of the account. Chapters that follow consider the role of religion in conflict and peacebuilding, and RLE as an emerging role for military chaplains.

Part II—Case Studies from the International Military Chaplaincy Community—contains five chapters that illustrate and analyze the RLE experience of a number of chaplains from Canada, France, the United States, New Zealand, and Norway. Part III—Religious Leader Engagement in Application—includes a chapter on the implementation of RLE, and another with a practical theology of reconciliation in theaters of war.

The content of the book reveals that the author has systematically

developed an interdisciplinary, practical-theological approach with its four necessary phases: empirical-descriptive observation, interpretive analysis, evaluative and normative discussion, and pragmatic-strategic guidelines for further reflection and praxis. His creative work of theory building, which includes important sources for this project (for example, René Girard and Miroslav Volf) is particularly noteworthy.

Moore successfully demonstrates that RLE is an emerging domain which can advance the cause of reconciliation via the religious peacebuilding of military chaplains in today's "theaters of war," and that it is a model which applies especially to military-supported reconstruction and humanitarian efforts. Chaplains can, under certain circumstances, foster trust building through dialog that facilitates inter-religious encounter among estranged faith community leaders for the sake of mutual re-humanizing and community building. By effectively partnering with those leaders they can be catalysts for meeting identified community needs, promoting peace and reconciliation, and creating integrative approaches to inter-communal collaboration.

Together with a complete presentation of the benefits of RLE, the author also considers some of its limitations, including brief references to problematic questions directly related to such chaplaincy ministry, such as influence activities as part of so-called "Information Operations" for military advantage, information gathering for intelligence purposes, and the protected non-combatant status of chaplains (238-46). One could add the risks of "stabilization" as an exercise in imposing a kind of Pax Romana among populations subject to the political and military control of Western powers. Related to this point, it would have been helpful if Moore had discussed further the significant differences between the *strategic* and the *tactical* levels of "operations" when referring to US-led RLE and smaller military partners (197).

While recognizing the potential for military chaplains to be caught in serious ethical binds, Moore's presentation betrays the inherent dilemma they face: their specialist officer status makes them part of the military's authoritarian structure and subordinated to their commander; they must support the "mission" and thus the policies of the sending governments. It is therefore hard for them to be duly prophetic in the face of violence and

injustice committed, allowed, or condoned by the forces they serve. Moore's otherwise comprehensive account seems to assume that benevolence is always the motivation and guiding virtue of Canadian and other military "operations." The author could have avoided the criticism of ideological captivity had he forcefully addressed the dilemma.

That criticism notwithstanding, *Military Chaplains as Agents of Peace* is an important contribution to two fields rarely viewed as intersecting, namely military chaplaincy and peace studies. It is wide in scope and well documented, and includes an index and a bibliography that recommend it to practitioners, academicians, students, and researchers in those fields.

Daniel S. Schipani, Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana

Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together. Edited by Steve Heinrichs. Harrisonburg, VA; Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2013.

The inspiration for this book came from editor Steve Heinrichs's experience in 2011 when he listened to a Mi'kmaq elder who called for "two-eyed" seeing, for "Indigenous and Western knowledges teaching each other" (22). In reviewing the collection which has emerged from that experience, it is almost limiting to call it "two-eyed": what it contains is a multitude, a collection teeming with visions (and omens) about justice, creation, and Indigenous/Settler relations.

The diversity of contributors allows for much more than a back and forth, point and counter-point debate, and opens readers to voices ranging from Emergent church leader Brian McLaren and Indigenous scholar Tink Tinker to anti-civilization activist Derrick Jensen. But it is not only a diversity of authors that distinguishes this book. Equally important are the genres they employ: most of the chapters are traditional essays, but framing them are poetry, biographical reflections, graphic narrative, trickster storytelling, and prayers.

The cohesive factor in the midst of such diversity is that all the voices converge on the acknowledgement that things must change if there is to be hope for “life together” as the book’s subtitle suggests. Life together requires a space—a physical, material space. Several contributions deal with continuing environmental shifts. While debate is justified on the finer points of climate change, from an Indigenous perspective it is no exaggeration to say that colonialism has constituted an apocalyptic event. Contributors offer a range of proposals; for example, restoring and implementing ancient Indigenous languages and traditions (Leanne Simpson, Daniel Wildcat), and creating jobs in the midst of questionable corporate practices (Will Braun).

Life together also requires conceptual space. One of this volume’s significant strengths is offering this sort of space—one that does not assume what should be considered foundational or non-negotiable for the conversation to happen. This space allows not only for voices of integration seeing the harmony of Indigenous thought and Christian theology (Randy Woodley) but also for those of sharp criticism, as when Tinker states unequivocally that “the key problem is that the deep structural realities of the two worlds, those of euro-Christianity and American Indians, are inherently opposite to one another” (171).

Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry does not wield editorial authority to mediate these conversations but seeks to create room for them to happen. Many voices have been excluded; the space being attempted is in many respects new, and so voices supporting the status quo are not given the authority they typically enjoy. Various procedures had to be enacted, as reflected in the first three sections, “Naming the Colonial Past,” “Unsettling Theology,” and “Voice of Challenge and Protest,” titles that imply that mutual space has not been present, and that for it to exist, theology must become unsettled.

How will this space inevitably expand or contract, and which voices will influence the process? This book could be viewed with suspicion, and disregarded by those in the church who view such space as a compromise or a rejection of orthodoxy. Another concern is that the voices here will be acknowledged but then assimilated into the dominant paradigm.

One criticism I have relates to the prayers offered by Brian McLaren. “We must never again preach Christianity or promote Christianity,” he says (228). Coming from someone so embedded in the American evangelical world, this is hard to swallow. He is trying to say that we promote Christ

and not Christianity, but this gesture towards disavowal is disingenuous. We cannot avoid the social structure that our accounts of Christ have historically represented. But this is the vulnerability of such a space, and a reminder that oversight and boundaries are required in maintaining a space that challenges present powers.

This book deserves a broad audience, not only for its contribution to Indigenous and Church relations but for the example it offers the church in how to frame the space needed for other important conversations. With all the difficulties and criticisms that come with creating this space, I hope we are also attuned to the healing that can come from it.

I am good
I am clean
I have a strong voice
I have good words to share
I am not a ghost in my own land (60)
– Cheryl Bear (*Nadleh Whut'en*)

David Driedger, Associate Minister, First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba

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