

TMTC NEWSLETTER

Vol. 10 No. 1 *A publication of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre, a graduate teaching and research centre
May 2002 of Conrad Grebel University College, affiliated with the Toronto School of Theology.*

Searching for Light Amidst Darkness

By Tom Yoder Neufeld
Acting Director, TMTC

This past school year began ominously. Students at my first meeting of class on September 11, 2001, sat stunned, having only minutes before witnessed the collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the bombing of the Pentagon. No one knew what might come next. No one knew what might have been unleashed. I handed out the syllabus, dismissed class, and like so many others headed straight for the television.

I suspect many classes began on that day in some such fashion. Since then no day has gone by which has not in one way or another been marked by this tragic event. Compounding the ambience of crisis has been the ongoing tragedy in Israel/West Bank. Many of us, students and teachers alike, have spent much time in reflection, discussion, reading, and prayer, searching for insight and words. We have not had the luxury of discussing matters of peace, conflict, and war dispassionately. Often we have been silent. Often too we have been called upon to give witness in church, classroom, and media settings; we have been asked to give assistance to folks seeking to understand how God relates to these events and how we might respond faithfully. This burden has often humbled us, laying bare the rudiments of our faith, as well as confusion, bewilderment, and outright disagreement. Questions that only a year ago seemed quaintly out of touch with the new wave of interest in more local

and domestic contexts for conflict resolution—war and peace, church and state—were suddenly back on the agenda. Because of that, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Reinhold Niebuhr, and John Howard Yoder's *Christian Witness to the State* are back at the centre of many of our discussions. I would venture to say that during the past decade many of us, also in the church, have been lulled into a complacent optimism about how far our society had come on questions of violence and conflict. After all, we were wildly successful in getting a hearing in the wider society for alternatives to retaliatory responses to injury. "9/11" and the intransigent brutality of the conflict in the Middle East has sobered us, showing us how close we still were and are to the cave, how primitive the reflexes when attacked, how limited the corporate imagination on how to respond to injury. Most depressing is how superficial has

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Mohammed Farimani (left) and Rene Baergen at a TMTC student event.

been the impact of the Gospel on the Christian community's reflexes.

The Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre, and those associated with it, played its part in the attempt to respond the challenges of the present moment. TMTC took the lead in organizing a panel on February 14 (Valentine's Day!) entitled "Jesus, Hope, and the 'War on Terrorism'" (see Derek Suderman's report, right). One fruit of that effort is that another such exchange is being envisioned, with the impetus coming from others besides TMTC. Stanley Hauerwas' March 14 lecture on Bonhoeffer (see Phil Enns' review of "Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a Political Theologian," p.4) had special poignancy in light of this year of conflict and war, most especially in urging the question of the church's identity and mission in a time when truth is stumbling in the market place. Chris Marshall's visit to TMTC and his book *Beyond Retribution* explored the notion and biblical roots of restorative justice (see p. 7). Jim Reimer's course, "War and Peace in Christian Thought" had its first meeting on September 11 and throughout the course reflected on that event and its aftermath in the broader context of Christian thought and practice over the centuries. While having much broader relevance, Jim Reimer's sabbatical project (see his letter from Princeton, p. 10), focussing on how an Anabaptist might view the positive role of social and political institutions outside the church, no doubt finds itself under particular pressure at a time when those institutions seek legitimation from the church for their manner of responding to conflict and injury.

The coming year will no doubt bring many more opportunities to engage in the common search to bring light into the darkness. The Muslim-Christian dialogue to be held on October 24-27, 2002 between members of the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute in Iran and the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre on the topic "Muslims, Christians and the Challenges of Modernity" has special relevance at a time when the world conflict has such sharp religious edges. The presence of the two Iranian scholars in our midst, Yousef Daneshvar and Mohammed Farimani continues to richly leaven our perceptions of and responses to our conflict ridden world.

Even with such important attempts to

participate in the broader process of critical discernment of what is going on in our world, and what the church's witness needs to be, we are conscious that our efforts to be responsive and responsible

are humble and in constant need to be undergirded and informed by wisdom and grace. May God grant us all, students and teachers alike, such wisdom and grace. ■ TMTC ■

Jesus, Hope, and the 'War On Terrorism'

By Derek Suderman

On February 14, 2002 TMTC sponsored a panel discussion called "Jesus, Hope, and the 'War on Terrorism.'" The panel consisted of three professors from Christian institutions: Tom Yoder Neufeld, New Testament professor at Conrad Grebel University College (Mennonite); Lee Cormie, Theology and Ethics professor at St. Michael's College (Roman Catholic); and Jonathan Chaplin, Political Theory professor at the Institute for Christian Studies (Reformed).

Yoder Neufeld began the discussion by questioning the commonly-held view that "things have changed" after September 11, suggesting instead that we simply discovered the "thickness of the bubble in which we have been living." While there does seem to be a new sense of urgency that something must be done, he reminded us that this was not the first time that innocent people have suffered. And, unfortunately, people seem to assume that a violent response to those horrible events will create greater security.

After briefly assessing the current situation, Yoder Neufeld articulated a hope-filled response. He insisted that Je-

sus should be understood as relevant, not because he brings hope *beyond* these circumstances, but by demonstrating hope for *this world* in which we live. Referring to Ephesians, Yoder Neufeld spoke of the "armour of God" which should be used to wage war on all manner of evil, including warfare itself. He identified "truth" with being biblically prophetic, deconstructing the language of "terrorism" to recognize both where our order has terrorized others as well as our complicity in this terror. Also, Yoder Neufeld suggested that the "gospel of peace" implies speaking truth from the gospel - we are called to live the life of the Christ, who dealt with evil by absorbing it.

Lee Cormie approached the issue from a more liberationist perspective and also proved critical of an armed solution to the quandary of terrorism, but for more practical reasons. He stated that he could not think of any Latin American liberation theologian who would currently back armed struggle, since they see it as counter-productive - it simply does not work. While Cormie insisted that one cannot compare terrors, he echoed Yoder Neufeld in suggesting that we should also recognize other forms of terror such as the growing gap between rich

The audience at the panel discussion on the "War on Terrorism"





Left to right, Phil Enns (moderator) and panelists Tom Yoder Neufeld, Lee Cormie, Jonathan Chaplin.

and poor; the AIDS epidemic in Africa; environmental catastrophes; the growing concentration of (economic) wealth and (political, military, scientific, technological) power.

As a hope-filled response, Cormie called for a more pro-active Christian witness, including work on all aspects of peaceful and just development, seeking alternative understandings of “security” implementing conflict resolution mechanisms, and “‘militant’ but non-violent agitation for change.” Theologically, Cormie suggested that Christians need to qualify “over(ly)-christocentric theologies” by bringing out the importance of the 1st and 3rd persons of the trinity. This, he suggested, would improve the possibilities of inter-religious dialogue. Finally, he too emphasized the importance of seeing the church as the living incarnation of Christ, and challenged people to live up to this calling.

Finally, Jonathan Chaplin addressed the gathering from a Just War perspective. He suggested that a Christian response needs to be based in the conviction that the world did not change on September 11, 2001, but rather in 33 AD when Jesus was crucified and raised again. *This* should ground any Christian response, which in turn seeks the right ordering of all things. Since all political authority is under Jesus Christ, Chaplin suggested that the Just War theory pro-

motes the divine will by articulating the purpose and setting limits and providing guidelines for military engagement. While responses must be wide-ranging, governments are compelled to perform their judicial task of protecting the innocent and bringing to account those responsible for their victimization. Although all private violence is prohibited, governments must exercise their political authority, since this is divinely established – “governments that can’t, or won’t, coerce can’t do justice.”

While Chaplin claimed that September 11 required a coercive, punitive response as one reaction among others, he outlined how it should be conducted under strict, normative constraints with an “agonized Augustinian awareness” of the fallibility of human existence. Chaplin proceeded through several Just War criteria, making a case for both how the current conflict qualifies and also how military action should be constrained. While he suggested that civilian casualties have been too high, Chaplin saw the current military response as appropriate - as a “legitimate authority” the United States government is entitled (but not obliged) to defend itself through coercive force. And, as Christian citizens in the context of a brutal and violent world, we need to recognize the government’s essential role in enforcing justice and protecting the

innocent. At the conclusion of his remarks Chaplin stated that, although he greatly respects a pacifist position, from his perspective this approach fails to provide any limits or control to decisions made necessary by the divinely appointed judicial role of government.

The ensuing discussion was lively and often insightful. In particular, the (mis) use of language was underlined as very important, both in how vital actors and the news media describe current events as well as the ways in which Christian communities attempt to address such issues.

Each presenter proved helpful, while not completely convincing. Yoder Neufeld’s concluding challenge was that our primary task is to become the church, *then* we can address the rest of the world and have some hope to offer. Although presumably not meant in a linear or chronological way, such a perspective is often practiced that way – in other words, we often attempt to work on ourselves first and then (if we get to it) look beyond ourselves. While I largely agree with Yoder Neufeld, if his exhortation results in a largely inner-ecclesial response then it runs the danger of substantiating Chaplin’s critique of a “pacifist position.”

While self-critique is essential, I appreciated Cormie’s more explicit invitation to non-violent action and engagement. However, I do not agree with his theological assessment, particularly that a christological emphasis is a barrier for inter-religious dialogue. In my opinion such interaction is most genuine and fruitful when directed towards an *issue* with which religious communities struggle and can thus address together, without first attempting to find a lowest common denominator from a religious perspective. This said, I think it is true that the strong christocentric characteristic of Mennonites has often led us to pass over valuable resources laying dormant in our tradition.

Finally, while I appreciate Chaplin’s concern for articulating a positive role for governments and agree with his insistence on the protection of the most vulnerable in society, I am skeptical of an appeal to ‘order’ as the grounds for ethi-

. . . continued on p. 12

Hauerwas, Bonhoeffer and the Possibility of Political Theology

By Phil Enns

Stanley Hauerwas, professor of Christian Ethics at Duke University, gave a lecture on March 14, 2002 at the Toronto School of Theology entitled "Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a Political Theologian." The event, sponsored by TMTc, drew a large crowd interested in hearing from, according to *Time* magazine, America's best theologian.

Hauerwas began by noting that, while this is his first essay on Bonhoeffer, nevertheless Bonhoeffer was pivotal in the development of his own theological position. Alongside Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*, Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* convinced Hauerwas that Christology was essential for discipleship. At that time, however, Bonhoeffer was being appropriated by a number of groups, including the "Death of God" movement, with whom Hauerwas did not want to be identified. With this lecture, Hauerwas attempts to acknowledge a debt long overdue.

Having noted the importance of Bonhoeffer for his own position, Hauerwas next addressed, not Bonhoeffer on Christology or discipleship, but Bonhoeffer's role in the attempted assassination of Hitler. This should not be a surprise since Hauerwas, a pacifist, would have to address the issue of whether Bonhoeffer's actions followed from his understanding of discipleship. Yet Hauerwas' treatment of this issue was deeply unsatisfactory. He dismissed this issue with two moves, the first being that we cannot know how Bonhoeffer understood his role in the attempt and the second being that human lives are fragmentary. What makes this so unsatisfactory is that Hauerwas dismisses a theological issue with psychological or sociological explanations. It is almost as if the issue could be resolved if only we could find a letter where Bonhoeffer had explained his motivations.

What made this summary dismissal of Bonhoeffer's involvement in the assassination so striking was that Hauerwas followed it with a lengthy description of how "Bonhoeffer's life becomes an unfolding



Left to right: Fred Schaffer (doctoral student, Toronto School of Theology), Craig Carter (professor of theology and ethics, Tyndale College), Stanley Hauerwas, Pamela Klassen (professor of religious studies, University of Toronto). Schaffer, Carter and Klassen presented formal responses to Hauerwas's lecture.

of his complete commitment to the church." Hauerwas painted a portrait of Bonhoeffer as a theologian who consistently combined a passion for a faithful church with concern for political realities. For example, in 1932, Bonhoeffer took a church position in London in hopes of helping the world understand the danger the Nazis represented. In the same manner, Hauerwas described Bonhoeffer's appointment to the *Abwehr* as a means by which Bonhoeffer could act as a "double agent" appearing to help the Nazis but really working with the Allies. Hauerwas concludes his biographical summary with the claim that Bonhoeffer's life was both theological and political.

If this had been the extent of Hauerwas' claim, it would be uncontroversial if not banal. No one disputes that Bonhoeffer engaged in both theological and political activities. However, Hauerwas continued by claiming that Bonhoeffer's life represents an attempt to reclaim the church's proper space in the world. If this is the case, then Hauerwas cannot simply list the political activities of Bonhoeffer as evidence for the argument. What would be required is a description

of how Bonhoeffer's political activities were theological in character. Yet Hauerwas did not do this. Instead, Hauerwas makes his argument on the basis of Bonhoeffer being theologically committed to discipleship, and so his actions must therefore be understood as theological. As was the case with the assassination attempt, Hauerwas takes the key to understanding Bonhoeffer's political activities to be Bonhoeffer's self-understanding. It is not clear, though, why Bonhoeffer's political activities are not the consequences of the same fragmentary life which resulted in participating in the assassination attempt. That is, if a fragmentary life can produce disparate acts, how can self-understanding produce a "complete commitment to the church"? More importantly, how does self-understanding make a political activity theological?

This problem came into sharper relief as Hauerwas became more explicit in how he took Bonhoeffer to be a political theologian. From Bonhoeffer, Hauerwas takes the conviction that the church's politics is sanctification so that "the holiness of the church is necessary for the redemption of the world." The way that

the church redeems the world is by occupying a space in the world which manifests the reign of Christ. Furthermore, the church marks the difference between itself and the world through both faithfulness and rooting out heresy. Hauerwas argued that this 'political' conviction was at the heart of Bonhoeffer's shaping of the church's witness against Hitler. No doubt this makes sense of Bonhoeffer's efforts to keep Nazi influence out of the church, but it does nothing to help make sense of Bonhoeffer's other political activities. It might be acceptable to label Bonhoeffer's resistance to the Nazi influence on the church as political, but this alone does not constitute a political theology. There is no connection between the insistence on the church occupying a space in the world and Bonhoeffer's activities with the *Abwehr*. There is no connection between the church manifesting the reign of Christ and Bonhoeffer's attempt to warn the Allies about the Nazis. There is no connection between the church's "politics" as sanctification and Bonhoeffer's participation in the assassination attempt on Hitler. In other words, Hauerwas made no attempt to show how Bonhoeffer's non-church related activities could be understood theologically.

It is possible that Hauerwas was addressing this issue when he tried to draw out from Bonhoeffer's writings a political ethics. Here, Hauerwas pointed out that Bonhoeffer rejected any talk of the traditional "orders of creation" in light of the fact that Christ is the reality of all. Hauerwas noted that, at times, Bonhoeffer came under the influence of Constantinianism, yet there are hints of an alternative. In particular, Hauerwas pointed to Bonhoeffer's later writing where he spoke of the church as being seen as an ally to the restraining forces of order. This part of Hauerwas' presentation was disappointingly underdeveloped but presumably what Hauerwas was arguing is that the church exhibits the orderliness God intended and so those institutions which were intended to promote order will find in the church both an ally and a guide towards genuine order.

Yet, this alliance can only be a one way street, with the worldly institutions moving towards the church as the ideal, and therefore hardly represents a political ethics or theology. It is helpful here to bring up Bonhoeffer's life. Hauerwas' description

of the political theology of Bonhoeffer gets us no closer to understanding how Bonhoeffer's actions against the Nazis can be understood theologically. Warning the Allies about the Nazis was not an aspect of church life and clearly Hauerwas does not want to take the assassination attempt as an act of faithfulness. Hauerwas, therefore, leaves us with an impoverished political theology which can be summed up as the church being the church. The obvious reason why it is impoverished is that it lacks the ability to either describe how Christians are faithfully active in the world or to prescribe how Christians ought to act in the world. The best it can do is describe the politics within the life of the church.

Hauerwas began his search for a political theology in the writings and life of Bonhoeffer with Bonhoeffer's participation in the attempted assassination of Hitler and it is therefore fitting that we end with it. I would like to argue that the reason why the attempted assassination is such a hard case for Hauerwas is not because it conflicts with his pacifism, but

because there are no theological grounds for Hauerwas to evaluate the case. By limiting his political theology to only the church, there is no possibility for a comprehensive theological examination of events which lie outside of the church. Any activity in the world therefore represents a foreign activity to Hauerwas insofar as he lacks the theological vocabulary to address them. Hauerwas resorts to self-understanding as the basis for evaluation and is left, then, wondering what Bonhoeffer was thinking. This should be deeply unsatisfactory for us as Christians because if Christ is Lord of all, then the criterion for political activity lies not in self-understanding but in the activity of Christ in the world. As long as Hauerwas cannot account for the activity of Christ beyond the walls of the church, then we cannot be satisfied with his account of a political theology. ■ TMTC ■

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Some Confessions from a Mennonite Law Student

Or, "How I learned to stop worrying and love the law"

By Marcus Shantz

You can see the red brick mansion that houses the Toronto School of Theology from the east windows of the University of Toronto Law School – across the street, just beyond the maple trees in Queen's Park. During my first few months in law school, I often looked across the park to the TST building and wondered whether I was studying on the right side of the street. The study of law is not easy, and much less so when one has to grapple with Mennonite convictions.

Years of Mennonite education and service experience had given me an almost allergic sensitivity to the claim that justice is the object of the law. After all, the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* asserts that the state cannot produce real justice, because of its propensity to set itself in the place of God. The best the state can do, according to our *Confession*, is to articulate a "relative justice" that is preferable to anarchy, and then only to the extent that Christians are able to influence the state towards God's higher standard (Article 23).

In other words, the state produces a kind of provisional justice that flows from the gritty task of ordering fallen society. This provisional justice is not even close to the more perfect justice expressed by the church, but is admittedly better than nothing. The law serves a fallen structure that is apt to rebel against the God that gave it authority. Consequently, Mennonites tend not to expect the law to be particularly virtuous – and suspect that lawyers, judges, social workers, the police and others engaged with law are probably not doing "good" work. Perhaps this is a sloppy overstatement of a more nuanced position, but it at least sets out how a good number of Mennonites interpret their tradition in relation to law and the state.

If Mennonites typically believe that the law is simply a convenient tool by which "the powers" organize society, we have much company. Many jurists have (for different reasons than ours) asserted that the law is reducible to politics, and that law tends to serve whatever ends the dominant

political forces deem useful. These scholars reject the notion that the law's aim is to discern what is just – arguing that if there is such a thing as objective justice, it will not be found in the law.

The trouble is that the law has traditionally made older and more ambitious claims for itself, which students of law must take seriously. Law school required me to confront Thomas Aquinas' claim that justice is a virtue that can be observed using reason. Aquinas (among others) argued that two modes of justice can be discerned. Corrective justice restores right relations between two individuals where one has inflicted some wrong on the other. Meanwhile, distributive justice ensures that when the state distributes benefits and burdens among individuals, all individuals receive proportionately according to some common criteria.

These apparently sparse ideas become more difficult when one tries to sort through all of their implications. Rather than wading into these details, my intent is simply to contrast Aquinas' view with the common Mennonite understanding of the law. If justice can be observed using reason, then one may not require the teachings of a church to grasp it. The very act of legal reasoning tends to turn the mind towards justice rather than injustice. A just result will make sense, while injustice will seem incoherent. Courts and legislatures should therefore be capable of discerning what is just (albeit imperfectly). This raises the possibility that the state may at times have something to tell the church about justice.

Moreover, justice will follow the same pattern in the church as it does in the state – as they seek justice, both institutions grasp for the same thing. It is interesting to note that Mennonites involved in practical "restorative justice" efforts have sometimes found enthusiastic collaborators in police officers, prosecuting lawyers and judges. I suspect that the reason for this is that all involved share a common (and ancient) understanding of what justice looks like.

Finally, if the practice of justice is a virtue, then those who seek to understand justice (whether within the church or the wider society) are engaged in a basically good activity that points them towards God.

I realize that there is nothing new here. Others have articulated these tensions and done a better job of it. Nevertheless, these issues are real and immediate for the many Mennonites who are engaged with the law on a daily basis. One of the more personal items at stake is how we understand the work we do, and whether it can be called "good" in at least a modest and qualified way.

Based on brief experience, I am no longer able to be as pessimistic about the law as my church has tended to be – and I am mindful of the fact that states have from time to time used the law to inflict gross injustices on people, including Mennonites. Although it is capable of terrible distortions, law and legal reasoning tend to bend towards justice. In corrupt states, judges and lawyers have felt led to challenge and subvert unjust laws in much the same manner we believe Christians are called to. This is to say nothing of the teachers and friends I met at law school whose efforts on behalf of human dignity, freedom of conscience, and society's most vulnerable are the equal of the most faithful church workers.

Of course, justice is not everything. Our churches also confesses that the world requires grace, mercy, and forgiveness (among other things), and we Mennonites may have much to offer in this regard. But with respect to justice, Mennonites may have more to learn from the study of law than we are generally prepared to admit. ■TMTC■

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The above article is a shortened form of a presentation made at a TMTC student gathering on February 15, 2001.

A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment

By Susan Kennel Harrison

On November 29, 2002, Professor Chris Marshall of the Tyndale Graduate School of Theology in Auckland, New Zealand, came to TMTC and presented his ideas on retributive justice and the biblical tradition. He is a graduate of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and a leader in the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand. Marshall introduced his interest in this subject as having been germinated by Howard Zehr's book *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* coupled by his own experiences working with community mediation. Marshall shared with TMTC participants his ideas of restorative justice and his belief that the biblical tradition could be a source for thinking about criminal justice. Marshall seeks to contribute to the discussion started by Zehr and expand the New Testament reflection on the subject. Thus, Marshall

writes in his book, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Vol. 5 in the Institute of Mennonite Studies series Peace and Scripture, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), that "restorative" or "transformative" justice "flows directly from the peace-making heart of the Christian gospel and is consistent with the teaching of the scriptures" (xiv).

Beyond Retribution provides an abundant resource for Christians living in Western or European contexts to think through the various aspects of punishment for crime. In this book Marshall provides detailed reflection about punishment for criminal activity, theories around penal codes for criminal activity, and tools to put those theories into conversation with the biblical tradition. Relying primarily on the

exegesis of previous studies he seeks to clarify and synthesize each of the relevant studies to formulate his argument that Jesus' testimony in life and word was one that obliges the follower of the Jesus movement to practice forgiveness and nonretaliation.

Marshall extensively expounds on the notions of forgiveness and nonretaliation in several places in the book. Marshall



Chris Marshall (left) discusses his presentation with Jim Reimer.

also revisits the traditional ideas around Paul's view of justification. He argues against a reading of Paul (albeit his argument is only from texts in Romans) that understands words such as *right*, *righteous*, *righteousness*, as only theological words (35). Rather, we should recognize how Paul is deliberately employing terms and categories of *justice* and *justice making*. Throughout his evaluation of the biblical materials, Marshall actively seeks to demonstrate that justice, whether from God or humankind, has always been meant as an activity of restoring relationship. Because he sees the biblical vocabulary for justice and righteousness as consistently "political" and "public", instead of theological, he can thus focus his study of the biblical tradition towards his goal of advocating "restorative jus-

ture" (which focuses on relationships, reconciliation, reparation for harm done) as an alternative to retributive justice (which focuses on lawbreaking, guilt and punishment).

Marshall's work relates specifically to a western or European penal code/system. In other words, the work cannot be directly applied to an eastern or Islamic context, however, it does provide useful dialogue catalysts for conversations between the various contexts. Of perhaps more interest is the challenge this poses for his task of trying to find value for a textual tradition which

evolved in Semitic and Greco-Roman contexts and systems of thought, including approaches to justice, that have significantly different roots and goals than the contemporary penal code system of the western/European world. Despite this vast historical and cultural gap, Marshall concludes that the biblical tradition does indeed provide a foundation for rehabilitating our

current penal codes into those that have a more restorative function for the criminal and victim. He writes, "There is, then, sound biblical precedent for seeing rehabilitation as a purpose of punishment" (101).

In *Beyond Retribution*, Marshall compellingly gives a reading of the entire biblical tradition as modeling and advocating a restorative justice model. He fails, however, to provide evidence for why it is necessary to take the biblical justice model and apply it to the secular state's juridical duties. Marshall seems to presume that if Christians can move from "immediate emotional reactions to crime" to a position of embracing the New Testament as "compatible with, or may contribute to the vision of restorative justice" (2) that they *should* expect

the state to do so also. This presupposition is also latent in Marshall's statement that the earliest Christian community (as he recreates it) has a history of restorative justice that *ought to* shape Christian contribution to today's criminal justice system" (33, emphasis mine). Marshall also fails to integrate his frequent reflection of the relationship between the biblical tradition and justice eschatology in a way that accounts for his ideal of an imitation hermeneutic. Thus, from a biblical scholars point of view Marshall's arguments appear to be centered primarily on the discussion of secondary literature (with the exception of Chapter 4).

Because Marshall's view of the earliest Christian communities and the canon's witness to their points of view tends to disallow for any diversity in how the earliest communities were sorting through Jesus' love command, nonretaliation ethic, and forgiveness teachings, the book is not as helpful as it might be from the biblical scholarship point of view. However, had "New Testament" not been in the title I may not have been compelled to read his book and would have been the poorer for it.

Marshall's book puts together in one place a lot of information about criminal justice systems with the biblical traditions texts about justice. This wealth of information and reflection combined with Marshall's clear and accessible writing style will make this book a welcome resource for Christians involved with the criminal justice system on all levels: lawyers, those serving jury duty, chaplains, volunteers in Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs, persons working with offenders who are trying to reintegrate into society, social workers, activists seeking to reform criminal justice systems, pastors, as well as providing an excellent resource for Adult Christian Education group study. Also of interest will be Marshall's most recent book *Crowned with Glory & Honor: Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition* (Vol. 6 in the Institute of Mennonite Studies series Peace and Scripture, Pandora Press U. S., Herald Press, 2001). ■ TMTC ■

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Mennonites and Classical Theology

Review of A. James Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2001).

By Jeremy Bergen

The 37 essays by A. James Reimer collected here in a single volume display a wide variety of theological interests, some changes in thought, and a significant theological program. Reimer is a professor of theology at Conrad Grebel University College (at the University of Waterloo), teaches and supervises graduate students at the Toronto School of Theology (at the University of Toronto), and is the director of TMTC. These contexts are important. Reimer is concerned for the Mennonite church's witness but also that Christian theology give a reasoned account in public fora. Most significant perhaps, is the ecumenical context of Reimer's Mennonite theologizing reflected in his resistance to the reduction of Mennonite theology to any single aspect. He engages with Christian traditions, especially Catholic, which have

borne a deep theological (especially trinitarian) orthodoxy explored only occasionally by Mennonites.

The analysis woven through these essays begins with a diagnosis of the main problems of modernity: instrumental rationalism (along with the assumptions about absolute human freedom it imports), technology, optimistic historicism and the loss of transcendence. These dynamics in society generally are reflected in inadequate theology based on fragments, fads, relativism, and narrow ethical-political "relevance." In response, Reimer proposes a retrieval of the classical theological tradition, especially the transcendence of God. Thus, the conditions for the statement: "We desperately need a more traditional view of God, but we cannot believe in such a God" (22).

In retrieving the patristic-creedal affirmations of the trinity of God and the two natures of Christ, Reimer argues that the traditional Mennonite concerns of discipleship and pacifism are not lost but rather placed on the secure foundations of metaphysical truth-claims. Mennonite theology, especially under the influence



Left to right, professors Harold Wells, Iain Nicol and Jim Reimer at the TMTC sponsored book launch of Reimer's *Mennonites and Classical Theology*, November 1, 2001. Nicol, who was director of the Toronto School of Theology (TST) when Reimer began teaching there in the 1980s, reflected appreciatively on Reimer's contribution to the ecumenical life of the TST.



Students Amanda Birchall (left) and Christina Reimer at the book launch of *Mennonites and Classical Theology*.

of John Howard Yoder, has tended to the prophetic-eschatological mode—focusing on the social-political-historical aspects of the faith at the expense of the priestly-sacramental. In spite of Mennonite critique of and sometime physical separation from the dominant society, Anabaptist thought has in fact contributed to modern notions of the progress of history, the voluntarism of the free willing individual subject and the ethical reduction of religion.

The doctrine of God presented in the creeds, which themselves articulate what is implicit in the Bible, can correct Mennonite theology by affirming God the Father's transcendent otherness alongside our usual emphasis on Jesus Christ's historically particular way of being in the world. As well, Reimer calls for a strengthened doctrine of the Holy Spirit which recognizes God's work in politics, economics, the arts and other religious traditions while resisting relativism.

In an essay on "Mennonites and the Church Universal: Ecumenical Gifts of the Spirit," Reimer suggests that the particular spiritual gifts which Mennonites bring to the universal church are discipleship and the peace witness (550), thereby dispelling a concern that trinitarian orthodoxy will erase distinct Mennonite practice and understanding. It is in order to place this tradition more squarely in the ecumenical conversation and to give it the theological tools to stand there that Reimer's project has its momentum.

The book is organized into three parts. The first includes essays diagnosing the crises of modernity, largely in conversation with Canadian philosopher George Grant. The second part "Mennonites and Theology" include essays which survey and critique various Mennonite theological projects and lay the theoretical groundwork for a Mennonite retrieval of classical trinitarian orthodoxy. The third and largest part, "The Classical Imagination," are essays in which we observe Reimer's constructive project in action dealing with themes as varied as the nature of the Bible, angels, homosexuality, ecumenism, nationalism, war and peace, civil institutions.

Given that the essays were written for various occasions, both scholarly and more popular, and written over a 20-year period, the brief introductions to each piece are a strength of this collection. Reimer situates the original audience, his intention and argument at the time and often observes what else he might have said or shifts in emphases he would make today. In this way, the reader observes the author's dialogue with himself, the changing sets of questions he addresses, and gets a handle on a broad range of theological concerns. As a collection of occasional pieces, some repetition of ideas is to be expected. This also means that a class or discussion group would not need to read all of the 647 pages to grapple with the main themes.

I observe several tensions in Reimer's project and I will here name two. I am not convinced that assertions of absolute metaphysical truth for Christian doctrine are necessary or helpful in a retrieval of classical orthodoxy. In my view, such language emerges only with the modern denial of a transcendent reality and as such would be foreign to the patristic period. Furthermore, in his constructive chapters, Reimer successfully uses the *content* of trinitarian doctrine (e.g. transcendence of God the creator in the context of dehumanizing technological rationality) without needing to first define the status of the doctrine in "absolute" or "ahistorical" terms.

Secondly, I am left unclear about the particularity of Mennonite theology and practice within the universal Church. Reimer is critical (rightly, in my view) of Mennonite overemphasis on Christology and Jesus' humanity at the expense of the 1st and 3rd persons of the Trinity. Yet, he suggests that this (discipleship—a "following Jesus") is gift we offer to the wider church. Would the Mennonite church risk its ecumenical contribution if it embodied Reimer's proposal? Furthermore, his critique of Mennonite complicity in modern historicism suggests that a retrieval of transcendence will need to draw primarily from other living Christian traditions. Yet, since he wants dogmatics as a foundation for the particular Mennonite witness, he also needs to find these impulses within Mennonite belief *and* practice.

Having observed these tensions, I hasten to add my general agreement with Reimer's direction as I continue to learn from him. Reimer has done Mennonite theology a huge service putting crucial questions to its chief expositors and by proposing a definite direction for the future. This collection of essays is most welcome and will be useful to scholars, students and study groups within the Mennonite tradition and in ecumenical settings. This book is a superb and highly recommended collation of work-to-date and a creative foundation for more. ■ TMTC ■

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LETTER FROM PRINCETON

By A. James Reimer
May 8, 2002

Sabbaticals are a great invention! Unfortunately, and for this injustice I feel a slight tinge of guilt, although not too serious, they benefit only a small segment of our society (academics). This is my second. The first was in 1994-95 when I spent four months in Harlem/Amsterdam and four months in Regensburg/Bavaria, with a month or two of travel added on at the end. This time I took the half-sabbatical option, mostly for financial reasons. Notwithstanding the temporary separation from my wife and kids, the strings and responsibilities that still keep me attached to institutions back home (there is no such a thing as a pure sabbatical), and the fact that one never gets as much accomplished as one hoped for, my life here in Princeton is academic heaven.

I'm one of a group of 12 scholars (give or take a few depending which month), selected on the basis of a proposal and reference letters, each working on independent theological research projects at the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, New Jersey. We are given an office with full computer equipment and service in the Center, which is housed in a building sandwiched between Princeton Seminary, on one side, and Princeton University, on the other. The Center was founded in 1978 as "an independent, ecumenical institution for advanced theological research," with a special interest in promoting interdisciplinary theological research and writing.

We are also provided with a large furnished town house about three miles from the Center. Most bring their families—my neighbors are Mark Reasoner and his wife Wendy with five kids, for whom I'm making lasagna tomorrow. I walk briskly to work every morning (since I don't have a car here), which takes me about 45 minutes, and back home not so briskly late afternoon. On Saturdays I frequently take my more than 30-year-old "no-speeder" bike and ride in the other direction to the Princeton Shopping Center to buy groceries. I thought I'd lose a lot of weight with all this exercise but so far there is little evidence of that. Too hungry all the time! Far

too many free luncheons, and wine and cheese receptions!

Our obligations are few. There is one type of event which we are all expected to attend, and this is the formal presentation of a paper that each one of us is required to present to the fellow scholars, normally on a Wednesday evening. This is an occasion where we test our ideas in progress expecting critique and advice. Since we have a strong contingent of biblical scholars here I decided to leap into the Lion's den and present my biblical chapter: "I Come Not to Abolish the Law but to Fulfill it"—an expanded version of my presentation at the March 7-9, 2002 Notre Dame conference "Assessing the Theological Legacy of John Howard Yoder." Aside from these formal presentations there are weekly teas (Tuesday afternoon), "prayers" (Wednesday morning) and scrumptious luncheons (Thursday noons). Not too painful!

I have wonderful colleagues here from Duke, Harvard, St. Paul, Belgium, Sweden, Virginia, Princeton, Boston, in a wide range of fields—biblical, systematic, literary. My own project, on the basis of which I was accepted, is tentatively entitled: "When Law and Civil Institutions are Just: Keeping Pacifist Thinking Honest," a twist on John Howard Yoder's 1984 book, *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking*. I am attempting to develop a positive understanding of law and civil institutions for so-called Free Church tradition, locating myself unapologetically within the Ana-

baptist-Mennonite stream.

Beginning with a chapter on Trinitarian foundations, I work my way through certain biblical texts, continue through the Constantinian shift and its identification of "sword" and "cross," consider the Medieval distinctions of eternal, divine, natural and civil laws, look at the Reformation period focusing especially on Pilgram Marpeck as a fruitful model for contemporary Mennonites, and follow this with an examination of the rise of modern nation states. I end with constructive suggestions about the possible future agenda of Christians who take seriously both their active life in the contemporary complex and violent world and their witness to the Christian gospel of peace, nonviolence, love and forgiveness. I try to combine the more negative Platonic-Augustinian, post-lapsarian ("restraining evil") view of civil and state institutions with the more positive Aristotelian-Thomistic pre-lapsarian ("preserving the good") view.

I have tried to divide up my time here into manageable segments with some travels and lectures related to my research and writing. I have just returned from a two-week trip to Croatia. The first week was spent in Dubrovnik, a fine medieval city on the Adriatic coast, which has an internationally supported Inter-University Centre of Postgraduate Studies (IUC). Here short courses are offered in a variety of disciplines and topics, including "The Future of Religion," in which I presented a paper entitled: "Constantine: From Religious Pluralism to Christian Hegemony."

I first went to the former Yugoslavia,

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The website includes newsletters, announcements, and a searchable database of members.

for a month in 1977, and have since been back seven or eight times. Over the years I have developed many friends. On Monday (April 29), I had a lunch with Ivica Mas-truko, now Advisor to the President of Croatia in Church-State relations. We reflected on the war years and on the implications of former President Tudjman's agreement with the Vatican, which in effect gives Roman Catholicism a monopoly on public religious education in Croatia. I first met Ivica in 1977. At the time he was member of the Party, mayor of the commune of Zadar, and came to Dubrovnik on his hot chauffeured Italian sports car—a mind opener for a left-wing liberal like myself with socialist sympathies (at the time). He was then a strong advocate of Tito's "self-managing socialism," and I remember ardently arguing Christianity vs. Marxism with him. I have remained in touch with him over the years, my attempt at Christian apologetics.

I visited Vukovar this past Wednesday (May 1), guided by Peter Kuzmic, the Director of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek (brother-in-law to Yale theologian Miroslav Volf) and a Dr. Lauc, Professor of Economics at the University of Osijek. They had arranged for me to meet with three people, each representing different attempts to foster reconciliation in postwar Vukovar territory. One was a well-known sculptor Ivan Matkovic-Lasta, who led his fellow villagers in a three-month long armed resistance to Serb forces before finally having to flee for their lives. After the war he became an artist, seeking transformation through his sculpting, most of it on religious themes. Another was Prof. Dr. Ljiljana Gehrecke, President of Europa-haus Vukovar who seeks to transform individuals' trauma, fear and hatred into serenity, peace and love through various forms of bio- and psychotherapy.

Finally, we spent a few hours talking to Ivan Vrkic, a longtime political figure from the time of Tito, and then under Tudjman, who was the key figure to manage the unthinkable—the reintegration of Serbs and Croats in the Vukovar area between the years 1996 and 1998. He did this through ingenious shuttle diplomacy and developing of trust between the two factions, a great sense of humour, with the support of the Tudjman government and under the protection of the UN and General Klein.

TMTC Student Gatherings

Several times per semester, Mennonite graduate students at the Toronto School of Theology and the University of Toronto gather to discuss issues relating to their studies. These gatherings are coordinated by Phil Enns. For 2001-02, the leaders and topics were:

Panel discussion of *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* by A. James Reimer. — Mohammed Farimani, Phil Enns and Jeremy Bergen presented short papers. Jim Reimer responded to each presenter (see review, p. 8).

"Spiritual Direction as Prophetic Ministry" — Miriam Frey

"Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime and Punishment" — Professor Chris Marshall (see p. 7)

"Mystery of Grace" — Johanna Wall

My primary purpose for the visit to Osijek last week was to give two lectures at the Protestant Seminary: the first on "The Legacy of Constantine for Law and Minority Religious Communities" the second on "Biblical and Theological Reflections on War and Peace." Both are components of my Princeton research project on a "Theology of Law and Civil Institutions." The moving experience of my visit to Vukovar and the three alternative approaches to peace and reconciliation, highlighted for me the need for Christians to explore many different alternatives to dealing with situations of conflict in our violent world. We do not have the luxury to withdraw into our own communally safe comfort zones, nor dare we compromise our witness by furthering the Constantinian identification of "cross" and "sword." How to manage a sober analysis of social-political realities, a clear-headed engagement with the world on behalf of those who suffer "innocently," as a form of fidelity to the Christian gospel, this is the challenge.

This Croatian trip is only one of a number of so-called "field trips" into the world beyond Princeton during my sabbatical. The last week in May I go Switzerland to give a lecture in German at the University of Luzerne on "Die Kirche als sichtbare Gemeinschaft: Eine mennonitische Perspektive." From there I go to the University of Heidelberg for a small "conference" on interdisciplinary issues

organized by Prof. Michael Welker (May 31-June 1). Then June 6 – 8, I'm in New York presenting a paper on Pilgram Marpeck at a conference planned by John Rempel and his local circle of advisors. Rempel has also hosted me a number of times in New York for discussions on themes arising from my book *Mennonites and Classical Theology*.

There are of course numerous other episodes that give colour to my life here in this university city, that I will not burden you with. On second thought, maybe one. On my tired-looking walk back home one late afternoon, hunched over, over-loaded pack on my back, an ordinary-looking car stops beside me, and a beautiful woman gets out. "Are you Mr. Gibson?" she asks. "No, I certainly am not." "Are you sure you're not Mr. Gibson? I'm a detective from the Princeton area police department and we're looking for a Mr. Gibson who is walking around lost in the area." "No, my name is James Reimer. I may look as if I'm lost but I actually know where I'm going." "Actually, you do look as if you have a purpose, but we just wanted to make sure. Have a good day."

Technically, my sabbatical ends at the end of June and then my real life in the world of academic pressure begins again. All I ask for between now and then, is that I can make it home for a weekend to plant my vegetable and herb garden. I do highly recommend a sabbatical. ■ TMTC ■



Acting director Tom Yoder Neufeld (left) and past director Lydia Harder at a TMTC event.

2002-03 Courses Offered in Toronto

● Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Life and Thought

Theological writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the context of his life: studies, teaching, World Council of Churches, Confessing Church, resistance to Hitler. Sept.-Dec., Tuesdays 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Taught by Dr. A. James Reimer.

● Bible, Authority and Postmodernism

Exploring notions of biblical authority within the context of a variety of communities of interpretation. Attention to the challenges of Radical Reformation, feminist and liberation theology. Jan.-Apr., Tuesdays 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Taught by Dr. Lydia Harder.

● 20th Century German Church and Theology

Major Protestant and Catholic theological and ecclesiastical responses to social and political events in Germany in the first half of the twentieth century. The course will look at the thought of Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Emanuel Hirsch, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Carl Schmitt, among others, in the context of the German Church struggle, as well as the Concordat politics of Cardinal Pacelli and Pope Pius XII in relation to the Jews and the Holocaust. Jan.-Apr., Thursdays 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Taught by Dr. A. James Reimer.

The first two courses are taught at the advanced degree level (M.A., Ph.D.) and the basic degree level (M.Div.). If you are interested in taking a course for credit or audit, contact Jeremy Bergen at the TMTC office, 416-978-6078, mennonite.centre@utoronto.ca The 20th Century German Church course is an advanced degree seminar and may be audited only in exceptional cases.

... continued from p. 3

cal action. There are simply too many examples where arguments based on order have been adopted by those in power to legitimate and strengthen their position, while marginalizing and even criminalizing other perspectives. This difficulty proves inherent within the Just War perspective, since only “legitimate authorities” are allowed to participate, while little attention is given to how a movement or group can *become* legitimate. Thus, the criterion of legitimacy effectively rules out those who do not already have power—the theory ultimately remains stuck in what “is” without sufficient attention to what “ought to be.”

Upon further reflection I see an interesting reflection of the panel discussion in Northrop Frye’s discussion of the balance between faith (belief system) and vision (goal). He warns that vision without faith leads to pragmatic activism, where one is tempted to abandon one’s approach upon determining it as ‘ineffective,’ while faith without vision meanders ineptly, side-tracked by secondary issues. It seems to me that we need to articulate a concrete idea of what we are seeking (not just for ourselves but for the world) while recognizing that the success of God’s vision does not ultimately ride on the foreseeable effects of our actions. We are not alone and not even in charge, but neither should we sit on the bleachers to watch God’s parade go by.

Overall this event was a stimulating success, attended by approximately 40 people from Toronto School of Theology member colleges as well as interested persons from the larger community. One participant’s rhetorical question proved particularly poignant—why are there so few opportunities in our churches and communities to discuss these things, or to consider what the gospel has to say in this situation?

■ TMTC ■

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