



The Conrad Grebel Review

Volume 20, Number 3

Fall 2002

Foreword 3

The 2002 Bechtel Lectures in Anabaptist-Mennonite Studies

Hauerwas: Why I'm a Reluctant Convert to his Theology
A. James Reimer 5

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology
Stanley Hauerwas 17

Bonhoeffer on Truth and Politics
Stanley Hauerwas 40

Why Bonhoeffer, Why Now? A Response to Stanley Hauerwas's
"Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology"
Pamela E. Klassen 58

Response to Stanley Hauerwas
Fred Shaffer 62

Faculty Forum with Stanley Hauerwas 69

The 2001 Eby Lecture

Text, Music, and Meaning in Congregational Song
Kenneth R. Hull 81

Book Reviews

- Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader: Stanley Hauerwas*
Reviewed by Jeremy M. Bergen 107
- Timothy J. Geddert, *Mark. Believers Church Bible Commentary*
Reviewed by William Hulitt Gloer 109
- Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World:
A History of North American Christianity*
Reviewed by Walter Klaassen 110
- John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology:
Christology and Theological Method*
Reviewed by Craig R. Hovey and John Perry 113
- Marlene Kropf and Kenneth Nafziger, *Singing: A Mennonite Voice*
Reviewed by Laurence Martin 115
-

Bechtel Lectures in Anabaptist-Mennonite Studies

The Bechtel Lectureship in Anabaptist-Mennonite Studies is the gift of Lester Bechtel, a generous donor to Conrad Grebel University College. Lester and his first wife, Alma, both of whom grew up in Waterloo County, valued education highly. Following Alma's death, Lester established the H.L. and A.M. Bechtel Endowment through the Mennonite Foundation. Lester and his current wife Dorothy believe that the health and future of the Mennonite Church are linked to understanding its past life, thought, and practices. To facilitate this vision Lester, with Dorothy's support, established The Bechtel Lectureship, which calls for public lectures on Anabaptist-Mennonite history, theology, peace, and life to be given annually at the College by a noted scholar.

Benjamin Eby Lecture

Benjamin Eby (1785-1853) typified, and possibly even inaugurated, Mennonite culture in Upper Canada. He and his wife Mary arrived in Waterloo County from Pennsylvania in 1807. By 1812 he was ordained bishop, and in 1815 he was overseeing the building of the area's first schoolhouse. He provided outstanding leadership in the church and in education throughout his life, all the while supporting his family as a farmer. Scholarship, for this pioneer, was a necessary and logical extension of his Christian faith. The Benjamin Eby Lectureship, established in the mid-1980s, offers Conrad Grebel University College faculty members an opportunity to share research and reflections with the broader College and University community.

Foreword

Special lectures mark this issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review*, which is largely devoted to the work and thought of noted American theologian Stanley Hauerwas, who is the Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina. We take pride in presenting lectures given by Hauerwas at Conrad Grebel University College in March of this year. The two addresses on Dietrich Bonhoeffer constituted the 2002 Bechtel Lectures, a recently established series named in honor of donor Lester Bechtel.

These lectures and several related pieces, all skillfully introduced by James Reimer, comprise the “tribute to Hauerwas” section of this issue. Readers will appreciate Reimer’s personal perspective and his insights into the deeper, “grain of the universe” aspects of Hauerwas’s theology.

In a different — but, we think, complementary — vein we offer another special address, the sixteenth annual Benjamin Eby Lecture, given in October 2001 by Kenneth Hull, an associate professor of music and director of the Institute for Worship and the Arts at Conrad Grebel University College. Hull explores “Text, Music, and Meaning in Congregational Song,” using the familiar hymn “Amazing Grace” to illustrate the dynamic interaction of text and music.

For a diversion from all these lectures, if you need one, we provide a spate of book reviews as well, covering recent releases in Biblical studies, history, and other subjects.

* * * * *

This issue of the *Review* also sees a change in personnel. After five years as the journal’s editor, Marlene Epp has relinquished that role in order to devote herself to administrative and academic duties at Conrad Grebel University College, where she serves as Academic Dean. Arnold Snyder, the *Review*’s former editor, has returned as academic editor, while I have taken over as managing editor. Hildi Froese Tiessen continues as literary editor, Arthur Paul Boers as book review editor, and Carol Lichti as circulation manager. (Special thanks to Lauren Anderson for tape transcription for this issue.)

All of us on the *Review's* production team appreciate the support offered by our authors, peer reviewers, book reviewers, subscribers, and readers. We look forward to continuing and enhancing our association with you as our journal enters its third decade of publication. We welcome manuscripts from members of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholars Network — and equally from other writers and researchers — who share our interest in thoughtful, sustained discussion of spirituality, ethics, theology, and culture from a broadly-based Mennonite perspective.

Stephen A. Jones, *Managing Editor*

Hauerwas: Why I'm a Reluctant Convert to his Theology

A. James Reimer

I

This issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review* is devoted largely to lectures given by Stanley Hauerwas at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo and at Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre on March 14-15, 2002. The overall theme of the series was “Bonhoeffer, Yoder, and political ethics.” In Toronto Hauerwas lectured on “Bonhoeffer as a political theologian,” and was responded to by Fred Shaffer (a Knox College doctoral student in theology), Pamela Klassen (religious studies professor at the University of Toronto), and Craig Carter (Dean of Tyndale College, Toronto). This first lecture, together with responses by Shaffer and Klassen, appear below. Hauerwas repeated this lecture in Waterloo and gave a second lecture there, “Bonhoeffer on truth and politics,” which also appears below. Hauerwas is at his most delightful and outrageous when he departs from his text, allows his mind to spin into tangential ramifications of what he has just said formally, or talks more informally and unguardedly in question-and-answer situations. One such occasion was a noon-hour meeting with faculty and friends of Conrad Grebel University College and the University community. There we encountered a rich, extemporaneous Hauerwas reflecting about his life and thought and the various personalities and movements that have influenced him. This discussion appears in edited and shortened form below.¹

In his first lecture, Hauerwas says that although “This is the first essay I have ever written about Bonhoeffer, . . . it is certainly not the first time I have read him.” In fact, he says, “I first learned what I think from reading Bonhoeffer (and Barth).” The other thinker who had an equally important influence on him is John Howard Yoder. Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship*,

A. James Reimer is professor of Religious Studies and Theology at Conrad Grebel University College and at Toronto School of Theology.

he contends, prepared the way for his later reading and reception of Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*. The reason that Hauerwas did not write on Bonhoeffer earlier was to avoid being identified either with what he considered a misinterpretation of Bonhoeffer's later *Letters and Papers from Prison* by the "death of God" theologians of the 1960s or with Joseph Fletcher's reading of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* as a form of "situation ethics." Hauerwas is now, finally, acknowledging "a debt long overdue."

Another reason Hauerwas hesitated so long to publicly appropriate Bonhoeffer's theology was that as a pacifist he had difficulty understanding, let alone accepting, the German theologian's involvement in the conspiracy to kill Hitler. The first part of Hauerwas's lecture is a wonderful summary of the life of Bonhoeffer leading up to his conspiratorial activities, his arrest for "subversion of the armed forces," and finally his death by hanging on April 9, 1945 on Hitler's personal order. The greatness of Bonhoeffer lies in the fact that his life and thought, faith and action, theology and politics could never be separated. We may disagree with his final choices, but his martyrdom, if one can call it that, followed ineluctably from how he had lived and from what he had taught and written. What makes Bonhoeffer's theology so congenial to Mennonites, and so similar to Yoder's thought, is his ecclesiology. Departing from traditional Lutheran two-kingdom theology, Bonhoeffer (and Hauerwas) makes the church as Christ's concrete, visible community of discipleship the keystone of his whole theology. Already in his first book, *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer describes the church in theological-sociological terms as Christ's ongoing presence in history. His theology was a frontal attack against the Protestant liberal (including the Pietist) accommodation of the church to the world—its attempt to justify Christianity to the present age.

It is when Bonhoeffer attempts to offer a positive theology of social and political institutions (as "orders of preservation" or "mandates" rather than the prevalent Lutheran "orders of creation") that Hauerwas contends Bonhoeffer does not go far enough in distinguishing himself from Lutheran two-kingdom thinking, although he was probably moving in that direction when he proposed an "Outline for a Book," which he never got to write because of his premature death.

While the first lecture leaves us thinking that in the end Bonhoeffer's life may have been more politically engaged than his theology, Hauerwas's

second lecture attempts to rectify this by exploring a theme rarely considered in Bonhoeffer studies: lying, deception, and truth in politics. Hauerwas's thesis is that when in the political process compromise rather than truth-telling (especially in democratic regimes) becomes the primary end, then "politics abandons the political realm to violence." One of the most significant political contributions that the Christian church can thus give to society is the witness to truth and the refusal to lie. What Bonhoeffer found most disturbing about his experience in America in 1930-31 was the tendency to subordinate truth-telling to upholding fairness and community. Tolerance of diverse opinions, rather than confessional and creedal truth claims, becomes normative, a tolerance which leads to indifference and finally to cynicism and violence, despite its rhetoric of peace. Without truth-telling there can be no peace or justice in any social order, and for both Bonhoeffer and Hauerwas, "Only the peace of God [in which forgiveness of sins is the essence] preserves truth and justice."

This is no "situational ethic." Joseph Fletcher had it wrong. True, Bonhoeffer did say that the particular context has a bearing on what it means to tell the truth in a given situation, but what he tried to convey is that truth is never an abstraction; it must always be a living truth that is true to concrete reality. As such, telling the truth requires skill and must be learned, an insight that is consistent with Hauerwas's narrative understanding of the church as a community of spiritual and moral formation (a virtue ethic that depends on developing habits of right thinking and acting within the context of a community). The caveat is that since the Fall, being truthful sometimes requires secrecy and reticence. When public language becomes debased, as in National Socialist Germany, and the various orders of life get confused (family, labor, nation, state, church), words become untrue. Therefore, speaking the truth in such an age of "organized lying" (Hannah Arendt's term) means ultimately witnessing to the truth by living it, and "living the truth" requires the existence of "a community . . . that has learnt to speak truthfully to one another," one that knows "that to speak truthfully to one another requires the time [and patience] granted through the work of forgiveness." This is the church as Jesus Christ present in history.

II

I have undergone three conversions in my life, and the third of them has brought me — reluctantly — to the distinctive Barthian “‘natural’ theology” of Hauerwas.

1) *Conversion One*. My first conversion followed very closely the pattern Hauerwas describes in his autobiographical reflections printed below. Hauerwas’s experience as an evangelical Methodist in the American South and mine as an evangelical Mennonite in Southern Manitoba must have been quite similar, except that my attempt to get saved by answering the altar call in numerous revival meetings, conducted by both Mennonite and non-Mennonite evangelists, took place against the backdrop of a religious, cultural, and ethnic minority group that lived on the periphery of mainstream culture.

This minority group had lived in relatively well-defined communities for almost 500 years with its own language (my first language was low German), its own schools (private schools where the German language and religious education was part of the curriculum), its own culture (music festivals where young people were nurtured in both religious and folk music); a mixture of Dutch, German, and Russian cuisine celebrated in its cookbooks; village life with house-barns where people performed rituals that come with such small rural communal existence; and its own religious tradition (going to church on Sunday, listening to sermons both in German and English, learning the catechism with its 200-odd questions and answers as a condition for baptism as a 16-year-old upon a personal confession of faith — a catechism and confession that was orthodox in all its basic tenets with additional weight on a transformed life of discipleship, including the rejection of all participation in war and violence). Church was the most important, but not the only, aspect of this people’s existence.

Although a personal confession of faith had been central to the Mennonite religious experience, a more individualistic, subjective American evangelical emphasis on personal conversion was something relatively new, and it came hand-in-hand with assimilation and the “liberalizing” of Mennonite language, education, culture, and theology, playing a significant role in the break-up of Mennonite communal existence. This highly personal, existential experience of salvation — like Hauerwas, I could never get it quite right — left a profound

imprint on how I think about God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It is something which I still value deeply and wish I could pass on to my children in one form or another. It was the primary impulse that led me to study theology at college. Later, however, I realized that what I learned at university in the form of liberalism (the historical critical method, Feuerbach, Freud, Marx) — which I now considered to be a radical critique of my earlier “evangelical” experience — was in many ways the logical outcome of the subjectivism and experientialism of revivalism, and ultimately a threat to all traditional, communal authority structures.

2) *Conversion Two*. Discovering the historic communal roots of my own tradition was the beginning of the second conversion. It was only the beginning, and partial at that, for the Anabaptism that I first discovered thought of our sixteenth-century historical and theological forebears as the harbingers of modernity and democratic liberalism. For Harold S. Bender, the fundamental democratic assumptions of the modern world — freedom of conscience, separation of church and state, voluntarism in religion: presuppositions “so basic in American Protestantism and so essential to democracy” — are ultimately “derived from the Anabaptists of the Reformation period, who for the first time clearly enunciated them and challenged the Christian world to follow them in practice.”² Most recently Mennonite Islamic scholar David Shenk has argued even more strongly: “As a minority movement, the Anabaptists shattered the state church system, and opened Europe to pluralistic cultures and religious freedom. A century later the philosophers of the Enlightenment picked up these Anabaptist themes of personal freedom and choice and applied them to the philosophical foundations for modern democracy. But it was the Anabaptists who led the way in transforming Europe forever. By insisting on adult baptism they were blazing the way forward for the global commitments today to human rights, religious freedom, and pluralistic culture. The ‘powerless’ and persecuted Anabaptists practiced freedom of religion within Christendom, thereby beginning the process that has resulted in transforming Christendom into societies where freedom to believe or not to believe is a deeply held commitment.”³ For Shenk, this liberal, democratic understanding of pluralism is a happy historical development essential to inter-faith dialogue.

This second conversion was completed with my discovery of the “poverty of liberalism,” by reading neo-Marxist critical theorists of the Frankfurt

School but, most decisively, by my encounter with the person and thought of the late Canadian Christian philosopher George P. Grant. There I found the first powerful, intelligent defence of the classical conservative vision, including both Greek Platonic-Aristotelian and Judeo-Christian thought, both of them having more in common with each other than with either modern or postmodern thought — namely, that there is an eternal horizon within which history and human action takes place and receives its meaning and moral import. Although I have come to see the shortcomings in Grant’s historical pessimism, his analysis continues to influence my critical reading of contemporary theology, including that of Barth, Yoder, and Hauerwas. They still strike me in some ways as too liberal, and too western. Grant has also influenced my reading of Anabaptist sources and Mennonite history.⁴ Reading Grant has convinced me not only of the poverty of liberalism but the inadequacy of all forms of historicism, including certain forms of narrative that appear to make time as history the primary theological category. Essential to the classical vision is a realism that holds to the reality of invisible universals — an invisible eternal horizon, whether comprehended in terms of Platonic ideal forms or in the dynamic relations of the immanent Trinity, which is the transcendent basis of all historical particulars. In my view, contemporary theologies that collapse the immanent and economic Trinities fall into a historicism in which inevitably not all historical moments can be considered equidistant from God. For me, such equidistance is a *sine qua non*. This is why I am a *reluctant* convert to the “natural theology” of Hauerwas.

3) *Conversion Three*. I am a reluctant convert to Hauerwas’s natural theology for both formal and material reasons. Formally, I love the freedom with which Hauerwas does theology. He pays little heed to the niceties of academic and church life, loves to burst the bubbles of established arrogance and presumption, without ever sparing himself — all in the service of what he considers to be theology’s fundamental task: to give witness to Jesus Christ and his church. His most strident critique is aimed at the pretensions of neutrality found in modern liberalism and pluralism, with its not-so-hidden assumptions about universal reason, freedom, democracy, equality, peace, and justice that are in fact linked to violence. He is a fearless, aggressive, and militant pacifist, one of the few dominant American theologians to speak out clearly against the “war on terrorism” presently conducted by his own country. I admire the freedom and courage with which he witnesses to the Gospel of peace and nonviolence.

III

Materially, I'm a reluctant convert to the substance of Hauerwas's theology. Hauerwas has written innumerable occasional articles, authored, co-authored, and edited many books,⁵ but his most recent monograph, his 2001 Gifford Lectures *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*, is where one has to turn in order to wrestle with the depth of his theology.⁶ In the introductory chapter Hauerwas says he will be proposing a theologically-based natural theology. This is a surprise for those who had thought that he, along with Barth and others, was against all natural theologies. In fact, Hauerwas claims Barth and even Thomas Aquinas as allies in his proposal. The natural theology that Hauerwas develops claims that theology knows and witnesses to the way things really are. Hauerwas relies heavily on Yoder's way of doing theology, including Yoder's assertion that "It is that people who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe One does not come to that belief by reducing social processes to mechanical and statistical models, nor by winning some of one's battles for the control of one's own corner of the fallen world. One comes to it by sharing the life of those who sing about the Resurrection of the slain Lamb." There can be no deeper reality than cross and resurrection, and this reality is known only theologically — that is, in the revelation of Christ.

Another surprise is that Hauerwas parts company here with his philosophical compatriot Alasdair MacIntyre, for whom philosophy is independent of theology and helps to prepare the way for it. Aquinas, says Hauerwas, would not recognize such a natural theology, in which philosophical reason creates an apologetic foundation for subsequent "confessional" claims. The rest of the book shows how two previous Gifford lecturers, William James and Reinhold Niebuhr, had it wrong, and a third, Karl Barth (along with Aquinas), had it right, and ends with a conclusion in which Pope John Paul II and Yoder find themselves in the same camp. Here we have another instance of the wonderful freedom with which Hauerwas theologizes and breaks conventional stereotypes.

William James seeks to make a case for religion psychologically and phenomenologically for people living within modernity, "an expression of pietistic humanism" for which Hauerwas has little sympathy. Hauerwas does have

some affinity for James' pragmatism in which "will" and "belief" are "shaped by passion-formed habits," and the world and existence has an "unavoidable moral character." But James's understanding of the religious sensibility as "primordial" and of fundamental theological claims as "over-beliefs" gives Hauerwas much trouble. Essential Christian doctrines, like the Trinity or Creation, are of no value in James's apologetics. For James, our religious experience, not the objective reality of that to which our experience refers, is critical. Prayer, for instance, is the soul of religion, but whether God exists or not is irrelevant; what is important is the subjective experience of prayer. The truth of theological ideas, in James's pragmatic account, depends entirely on their relation to other ideas and their functional value in concrete life. God is real because he produces certain effects. This particular critique by Hauerwas is exceptionally important, because the narrative school of theology, of which Hauerwas is a member, has sometimes been interpreted as making truth claims dependent on internal coherence, self-referentiality, and livability. This misunderstanding of his theology Hauerwas strongly disavows later on in the volume.

According to Hauerwas, William James displaces Christianity with American liberal democracy: James "thinks democracy is not just a social and political arrangement but the very character of the emerging universe." Not the cross and resurrection but modern, liberal, democratic values are the "grain of the universe." What is most chilling about this prospect, and what some Mennonites have not realized who claim that Anabaptism is the forerunner of essential aspects of modernity, is that democracy as envisioned in the American experience needs violence to sustain itself. Hauerwas persuasively shows how the privatized religiosity that James espoused and identified with liberal democracy pushes Christianity to the edges and in effect condones violence. James thought that the coercion and violence necessary to sustain a democracy — for example, the freedom to overcome poverty and accumulate and protect capital — could also be relegated to the edges of society. If Hauerwas is correct, then Mennonites who claim that they and their Anabaptist forebears are the harbingers of modern liberal values find themselves supporting a strange antinomy: lauding the dominant assumptions of modernity while rejecting the violence intrinsic to it.

In Hauerwas's view, Reinhold Niebuhr's 1939 Gifford Lectures, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, are "but a Christianized version of James's account

of religious experience.” Niebuhr believed that Christian claims must be validated by science and experience — that is, tested by generally accepted empirical and rational norms, and by their ethical ramifications. He was a great preacher, but his congregation was “a church called America.” He too was a Jamesian pragmatist, one who tests the truth of theological ideas by whether and how they work. Religious supernaturalism and metaphysics (ancient creeds and dogmas) are not objectively true; their truth as permanently valid myths (Niebuhr’s version of James’s over-beliefs) resides only in their ability to illumine human experience. Theology is “first and foremost an account of human existence,” and talk about God is “but a disguised way to talk about humanity.” Hauerwas puts Niebuhr, James, Troeltsch, and contemporary Chicago ethicist James Gustafson in the same camp when he describes them as sharing the view “that there is no purpose other than the purpose that humans are able to impose on purposeless ‘nature.’”

The one doctrine that was so central to Niebuhr’s anthropology and that allegedly distinguished him from Protestant liberalism was that of “original sin.” On this basis Niebuhr tries to develop a natural theology. “Niebuhr’s project,” says Hauerwas, “is to provide an account of the human condition that is so compelling that the more ‘absurd’ aspects of ‘orthodox Christianity’ — such as the beliefs that God exists and that God is love — might also receive a hearing.” Hauerwas does not question Niebuhr’s deep faith in the God of Jesus Christ, but in the end “the revelation that is required for us to know Niebuhr’s god is but a reflection of ourselves.” Christ’s death on the cross reveals God’s love in a way that transcends history; his life and death are symbolic for the divine *agape*, “the perfection of love as self-sacrifice.” But it is a cross and a self-sacrificial love that characterizes human existence as such and is our destiny. For Niebuhr God, even when described in trinitarian terms, is little more than the name for the human need to believe in the ultimate unity and coherence of reality transcending the world of chaos.

The critical consequence of this is how it affects Niebuhr’s ethics: one has to accept the way things are because that’s the way they have to be. Niebuhr’s view of justice as “the most equitable balance of power” was a perfect match for the world following World War II. While the Christian love of God and love of neighbor are not counsels of perfection for a few but the ideal for all, because of sin, self-sacrificial love is never possible when a third

person is involved, where justice requires the balancing of interests, best negotiated in a democracy. Like James, Niebuhr “assumes democracy, and in particular American democracy, is the political system that most perfectly exemplifies ‘justice’ so understood.” Justification by faith is the heart of Niebuhr’s ethics. Loosed from its Christological basis, it frees humans to act in a fallen world. The church as an alternative community, while perhaps a sociological necessity, was never an epistemological or ethical necessity for him. In the end Niebuhr was “a theologian of a domesticated god capable of doing no more than providing comfort to the anxious conscience of the bourgeoisie.” Hauerwas is even more critical of Niebuhr than of James because Niebuhr, like a Trojan horse, enters the inner sanctum of Christian theology and debases its very language explicitly to support a world of violence.

The hero of *With the Grain of the Universe* is Karl Barth. In a remarkable twist of argument, Hauerwas presents Barth as the true rationalist and natural theologian, one who represents a frontal attack against the irrationalism so prominent in his time. Barth becomes the stellar apologist for how the world is to be understood, and differs dramatically from James and Niebuhr. Hauerwas, though, is not an uncritical Barthian. Barth is not sufficiently catholic in his view of the church and never adequately explains “how our human agency is involved in the Spirit’s work.” Barth correctly saw that when theology is done as liberals do it, including James and Niebuhr, then Feuerbach is right. Feuerbach claimed that Christian doctrines are but expressions of human experience — projections and wish-fulfillment. Christians can counter Feuerbach only by claiming that God was objectively, historically, and specifically revealed in Jesus Christ. General revelation can never be the basis of special revelation, but special revelation (divine grace in all of nature as manifested in Christ) must always be the starting point for general or natural theology.

Although Hauerwas seeks to let Barth speak for himself, he makes Barth look like the founding member of the recent narrative school of thought associated with thinkers like Hans Frei and Hauerwas himself. Barth’s *Dogmatics* is a compelling “story” that can only be narrated, not a system of thought that can be described; it is a “nonfoundationalist” account (there is no place outside of theology from which one can begin to do theology). I can’t help wondering, however, whether Barth would not have considered some directions taken by postmodern non-foundationalists like George Lindbeck as

the logical outcome of modernity. Hauerwas indirectly recognizes this when he points out the surprising similarity between the Thomistic understanding of *analogia entis* (the analogy of being) and Barth's *analogia fidei* (analogy of faith). Barth's *Dogmatics* is a great theological metaphysics and ontology that is intrinsic, not extrinsic, to theological speech. At the heart of this natural theology is ethics — not a reduction of theology to ethics as in postmodernity but ethics grounded in the very trinitarian character and activity of God. Christian ethics is neither self-justifying, self-referential, nor a disguised form of humanism, but a *witness* to “the God who is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” This witness, and any rational argument that accompanies it, is itself the work of the Holy Spirit. This witnessing happens in the context of believing communities, of which the martyrs are the most powerful evidence.

Hauerwas concludes his *tour de force* with a tribute to the influence of John Howard Yoder, and makes the surprising claim that Yoder and Pope John Paul II have much in common. He in effect “catholicizes” Yoder. It is this move that finally makes me a “reluctant convert” to Hauerwas's theology, for it is the catholic element that I had always found missing in Yoder and his followers. Now I have reluctantly to re-think this assumption. For Yoder, as for the Pope, nonresistance and non-violent love are grounded in the very character of God as revealed in Christ. “The relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect,” says Hauerwas, “but one of cross and resurrection.” For John Paul II, Jesus Christ and the cross too are the center of history and the universe. In fidelity to this Christ he calls on states not to make war, not to kill, and he offers the church as an alternative to the world of violence and to the “culture of death.”

Hauerwas contends that the Pope is even more radical than Yoder: “Yoder's position . . . pales in comparison to the stance John Paul II takes toward philosophy in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, though just how radical the pope's stance is may not be apparent immediately.” The Pope honors philosophy as a discipline but forcefully argues that philosophical truths must be tested by the truths of revelation, “for the latter is not the product or consummation of arguments devised by human reason but comes to us as the gift of the life of Jesus Christ. That gift gives purpose to the work of reason by stirring thought and seeking acceptance as an expression of love.” In the remarkable denouement of the Gifford lectures, Hauerwas appears to be

suggesting that Athens and Jerusalem converge in a grand natural theology after all — a christology-based natural theology of the Alexandrian type.

Good, but how is this natural theology to be mediated historically? This is precisely where Bonhoeffer had problems with Barth. For Barth special revelation was pure “act.” Bonhoeffer thought this act was mediated historically through the “being” of the church. For all his emphasis on the centrality of the church, it is not clear how, for Hauerwas, ecclesiology in its actual concrete, *institutional* form is a witness to the kind of natural theology he envisions. What distinguishes Pope John Paul II and Thomas Aquinas from Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder, surely, is their doctrine of the church and its mediating role in the world. In this regard we are left wondering at the end of the Gifford lectures. A serious consideration of this issue would lead us into the world of pneumatology in addition to christology, and into the differences between the Eastern and Western understanding of the role of the Spirit in the church, the world, and the cosmos, with profound ramifications for how we perceive natural theology.

Notes

¹ For a more detailed account of his lectures, see my “Provocative theologian lectures on Bonhoeffer,” in *Canadian Mennonite* (April 22, 2002): 29.

² Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1944), 4.

³ David Shenk, “Pluralistic Culture and Truth.” Unpublished paper presented at the “Shi’i-Muslim and Mennonite-Christian Dialogue,” Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre at the Toronto School of Theology, October 24-26, 2002. Used with permission.

⁴ For more on Grant’s influence on my thought, see my *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), Part I.

⁵ For an excellent selection of his writings and a comprehensive bibliography, see *The Hauerwas Reader: Stanley Hauerwas*. Edited by John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001). [See review in this issue.]

⁶ *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology*. Being the Gifford Lectures Delivered at the University of St. Andrews in 2001 (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001). Quotations in this section are all from this book.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology

Stanley Hauerwas

The Fragments That Were Bonhoeffer's Life and Work

The primary confession of the Christian before the world is the deed which interprets itself. If the deed is to have become a force, then the world itself will long to confess the Word. This is not the same as loudly shrieking out propaganda. This Word must be preserved as the most sacred possession of the community. This is a matter between God and the community, not between the community and the world. It is the Word of recognition between friends, not a word to use against enemies. This attitude was first learned at baptism. The deed alone is our confession of faith before the world.¹

So wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 1932 just before the German Church's struggle with Hitler began. This may seem an odd passage to begin an essay on Bonhoeffer's political theology, but it is so only if one assumes a distinction can be made between Bonhoeffer's theology, at least his early theology found in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, and his later involvement with the *Abwehr* [Military Intelligence Department] plot against Hitler. Indeed, it will be the burden of my account of Bonhoeffer's life and theology to show that from the very beginning Bonhoeffer was attempting to develop a theological politics from which we still have much to learn.² He may have even regarded *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* as his "academic theology," which no doubt they were, but I will argue that the theological position he took in those books made the subsequent politics of his life and work inevitable.

Anyone who has read Eberhard Bethge's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* knows it is impossible to distinguish between Bonhoeffer's life and work.³ Marilynne Robinson uses the passage above to challenge those who think the consistency and significance of Bonhoeffer's theology is given a prominence it might not have due to his courageous political activity and death.⁴ It is no doubt true that Bonhoeffer's fame as well as his theological

significance were attributed to his unfinished *Ethics* and his *Letters and Papers From Prison*. Many, quite understandably, interpreted some of Bonhoeffer's own remarks in his prison correspondence to suggest his political opposition to the Nazis had occasioned a fundamental shift in his theology.⁵ I will try to show, however, that Bonhoeffer's work from beginning to end was the attempt to reclaim the visibility of the church as the necessary condition for the proclamation of the gospel in a world that no longer privileged Christianity. That he was hanged by the personal order of Heinrich Himmler on April 9, 1945 at Flossenbürg Concentration Camp means he has now become for those who come after him part of God's visibility.

I am aware that some people reading my account of Bonhoeffer and, in particular, my emphasis on his ecclesiology for rightly interpreting his life and work, will suspect my account sounds far too much like positions that have become associated with my own work. I have no reason to deny that to be the case, but if it is true it is only because I first learned what I think from reading Bonhoeffer (and Barth). This is the first essay I have ever written on Bonhoeffer, but it is certainly not the first time I have read him. I am sure Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship*, which I read as a student in seminary, was the reason some years later John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* had such a profound influence on me.⁶ Both books convinced me that Christology cannot be abstracted from accounts of discipleship or, put more systematically, we must say, as Bonhoeffer says in *Sanctorum Communio*, "the church of Jesus Christ that is actualized by the Holy Spirit is really the church here and now."⁷ The reason I have not written on Bonhoeffer has to do with the reception of his work when it was translated into English. The first book by Bonhoeffer usually read by English readers was *Letters and Papers from Prison*. As a result he was hailed as champion of the "death of God" movement and/or one of the first to anticipate the Christian celebration of the "secular city."⁸ On the basis of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, Joseph Fletcher went so far as to claim him as an advocate of situation ethics.⁹ As a result I simply decided not to claim Bonhoeffer in support of the position I was trying to develop, though in fact he was one of my most important teachers. That I write now about Bonhoeffer is my way of trying to acknowledge a debt long overdue.

One other difficulty stood in the way of my acknowledging the significance of Bonhoeffer for my work: his decision to participate in the plot

to kill Hitler seemed to make him an unlikely candidate to support a pacifist position. How to understand Bonhoeffer's involvement with the conspiracy associated with Admiral Canaris and Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, I think can never be determined with certainty. Bonhoeffer gratefully accepted von Dohnanyi's offer to become a member of the *Abwehr* because it gave him the means to avoid conscription and the dreaded necessity to take the oath of loyalty to Hitler. There is no doubt Bonhoeffer knew the conspiracy involved an attempt to kill Hitler. In spite of his complete lack of knowledge of guns or bombs he offered to be the one to assassinate Hitler. Yet the secrecy required by the conspiracy means we do not have available any texts that could help us know how Bonhoeffer understood how this part of his life fit, or did not fit, with his theological convictions or his earlier commitment to pacifism.¹⁰

That we cannot know how he understood his participation in the attempt to kill Hitler and thus how his whole life "makes sense" is not a peculiarity Bonhoeffer would think unique to his life. The primary confession of the Christian may be the deed which interprets itself, but according to Bonhoeffer our lives cannot be seen as such a deed. Only "Jesus' testimony to himself stands by itself, self-authenticating."¹¹ In contrast, our lives, no matter how earnestly or faithfully lived, can be no more than fragments. In a letter to Bethge in 1944 Bonhoeffer wrote:

The important thing today is that we should be able to discern from the fragments of our life how the whole was arranged and planned, and what material it consists of. For really, there are some fragments that are only worth throwing into the dustbin (even a decent "hell" is too good for them), and others whose importance lasts for centuries, because their completion can only be a matter for God, and so they are fragments and must be fragments — I'm thinking, e.g. of the *Art of Fugue*. If our life is but the remotest reflection of such a fragment, if we accumulate, at least for a short time, a wealth of themes and weld them into a harmony in which the great counterpoint is maintained from start to finish, so that at last, when it breaks off abruptly, we can sing no more than the chorale, "I come before thy throne," we will not bemoan the fragmentariness of our life, but rather rejoice in it. I

can never get away from Jeremiah 45. Do you still remember that Saturday evening in Finkenwalde when I expounded it? Here, too, is a necessary fragment of life — “but I will you your life as a prize of war.”¹²

However, thanks to Bethge’s great biography, we know the main outlines of Bonhoeffer’s life. Bethge’s work makes it impossible to treat Bonhoeffer’s theology apart from his life. Therefore I must give some brief overview of his life, highlighting those aspects of it that suggest his passion for the church. Yet I must be careful not to make Bonhoeffer’s life appear too singular. In a letter to Bethge in 1944, Bonhoeffer observed that there is always a danger that intense and erotic love may destroy what he calls “the polyphony of life.” He continues, “what I mean is that God wants us to love him eternally with our whole hearts — not in such a way as to injure or weaken our earthly love, but to provide a kind of *cantus firmus* to which the other melodies of life provide the counterpoint.”¹³ Bonhoeffer’s life was a polyphony which his commitment to the church only enriched.

It is not clear where Bonhoeffer’s passion for God and God’s church came from. In a wonderful letter to Bethge in 1942 he confesses that “my resistance against everything ‘religious’ grows. Often it amounts to an instinctive revulsion, which is certainly not good. I am not religious by nature. But I have to think continually of God and Christ; authenticity, life, freedom, and compassion mean a great deal to me. It is just their religious manifestations which are so unattractive.”¹⁴ Prison only served to confirm his views about religion. He writes to Bethge in 1943, “Don’t worry, I shan’t come out of here a *homo religiosus*! On the contrary, my suspicion and horror of religiosity are greater than ever.”¹⁵

The source of Bonhoeffer’s faith is even more mysterious, given his family background. He and his twin sister Sabine were born on February 4, 1906. His father, Karl Bonhoeffer, was from a distinguished German family as was his mother, Paula von Hase. The Bonhoeffers had five children, three boys and two girls, before Dietrich and his sister were born. One daughter was born after Dietrich and Sabine. Bonhoeffer’s father was the leading psychiatrist in Germany, holding a chair at the University of Berlin. He was not openly hostile to Christianity; he allowed his wife to use familiar Christian celebrations as family events. In Bonhoeffer’s family Christianity simply seems to have

been part of the furniture upper-class Germans assumed came with their privileges.

Bonhoeffer's bearing and personality were undoubtedly shaped by his class. He took full advantage of the cultural and academic resources available to him. He became a talented pianist, and music was a well-spring from which he drew support in the darkest times of his life. That he existed in such a culturally rich family is one reason no one could understand his quite early decision to be a theologian. There had been theologians on both sides of his family, but given the opportunities before him it was not clear why of all the paths he might have taken he decided to be a theologian.

Yet at seventeen Bonhoeffer began his theological studies at Tübingen. Tübingen was but preparation for his coming back to Berlin to study with the great Protestant liberals — Adolf von Harnack, R. Seeberg, and Karl Holl. Soon recognized as someone with extraordinary intellectual power, he completed his first dissertation under Seeberg's direction, *Sanctorum Communio* in 1927. In spite of being at the center of Protestant liberalism, Bonhoeffer had come under the influence of Karl Barth. In *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer displayed the creative synthesis that would mark all his subsequent work — i.e., the firm conviction that Christian theology must insist that “only the concept of revelation can lead to the Christian concept of the church,” coupled with the Lutheran stress on the absolute necessity that the same church known by revelation is also the concrete historical community that in spite of all its imperfections and modest appearances “is the body of Christ, Christ's presence on earth.”¹⁶

Bonhoeffer was now on the path to becoming the paradigmatic German academic theologian. However, for some reason he felt drawn to the ministry and took the examinations necessary to be ordained and appointed to a church. His family continued to assume Bonhoeffer would ultimately become an academic, but he thought his problem “was not how to enter the academic world, it was how to escape it.”¹⁷ Yet he returned to Berlin, finishing his second dissertation, *Act and Being*, in 1930. In it he develops the Barthian insistence that God's being is act, but he worries that though Barth readily uses “temporal categories (instant, not beforehand, afterward, etc.), his concept of act still should not be regarded as temporal.”¹⁸

Before assuming the position of lecturer at the University of Berlin,

Bonhoeffer spent a year at Union Seminary in New York. He was not the least attracted to American theology, finding it superficial, but he was drawn deeply to the life of the African-American church. Almost every Sunday Bonhoeffer accompanied his African-American friend, Frank Fisher, to the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem.¹⁹ Though Bonhoeffer's characterization of the American church as "Protestantism without Reformation" is often quoted, more important for our understanding Bonhoeffer is his observation that the fundamental characteristic of American thought is that "[Americans] do not see the radical claim of truth on the shaping of their lives. Community is therefore founded less on truth than on the spirit of 'fairness'."²⁰ According to Bonhoeffer the result is "a certain levelling" in intellectual demands and accomplishments.

That truth mattered so deeply for Bonhoeffer may account for an extraordinary letter he wrote to a friend in 1936. The letter begins, "Then something happened." He does not say what happened but he does say it transformed his life. Before "something happened," he confesses he plunged into work in a very unchristian way, but then for the first time "I discovered the Bible . . . I had often preached, I had seen a great deal of the church, spoken and preached about it — but I had not yet become a Christian."²¹ Bonhoeffer continues, confessing he had turned the doctrine of Jesus Christ into something of a personal advantage for himself, but the Bible, and in particular the Sermon on the Mount, freed him from his self-preoccupation. It became clear that "the life of a servant of Jesus Christ must belong to the church, and step by step it became clearer to me how far that must go. Then came the crisis of 1933. This strengthened me in it. The revival of the church and of the ministry became my supreme concern."²²

This letter is remarkable not only because of what it tells us about Bonhoeffer, but because it indicates this change is also linked with his becoming a pacifist. "I suddenly saw the Christian pacifism that I had recently passionately opposed to be self-evident."²³ No doubt coming into contact with Jean Lasserre at Union accounts for Bonhoeffer at least becoming sympathetic to pacifism, but equally important was Bonhoeffer's passion for the truth. In an address to the Youth Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia in 1932, he says,

There can only be a community of peace when it does not rest on *lies* and *injustice*. There is a community of peace for Christians

only because one will forgive the other for his sins. The forgiveness of sins still remains the sole ground of all peace, even where the order of external peace remains preserved in truth and justice. It is therefore also the ultimate ground on which all ecumenical work rests, precisely where the cleavage appears hopeless.²⁴

Bonhoeffer's life becomes an unfolding of his complete commitment to the church. Until he joined the *Abwehr*, his opposition to the Nazis would be fought through the church in and, perhaps as important, outside Germany. In 1933 he was appointed as pastor to the German Church in London in hopes that such an appointment would allow him to make contacts in order to help the world understand the danger the Nazis represented. That danger he took to be nothing less than the "brutal attempt to make history without God and to found it on the strength of man alone."²⁵ While in England Bonhoeffer developed a close and lasting friendship with George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, who worked tirelessly on Bonhoeffer's behalf.

Before leaving Germany, Bonhoeffer with Martin Niemöller had drafted the *Bethel Confession* for the Pastors' Emergency League, which in the strongest language possible challenged the anti-semitism of the German Church. The *Bethel Confession* and the *Barmen Declaration* became the crucial documents that gave Bonhoeffer hope that the church of Jesus Christ not only existed but was sufficient to provide resistance to the Nazis. He could, therefore, declare in 1936 that "the government of the national church has cut itself off from the Christian church. The Confessing Church is the true church of Jesus Christ in Germany."²⁶ He was unafraid to draw the implication — "The question of church membership is the question of salvation. The boundaries of the church are the boundaries of salvation. Whoever knowingly cuts himself off from the Confessing Church in Germany cuts himself off from salvation."²⁷

Bonhoeffer returned to Germany in 1935 in answer to a call from the Confessing Church to direct a preacher's seminary at Finkenwalde. His passion for Christian community seems to have found its most intense expression there. During his time there he not only finished *Discipleship* but also his extraordinary account of Christian community, *Life Together*.²⁸

At Finkenwalde Bonhoeffer not only encouraged seminarians to confess their sins to another member of the community, but he established with a core group the "House of Brethren" committed to leading "a communal life in daily

and strict obedience to the will of Christ Jesus, in the exercise of the humblest and highest service one Christian can perform for another.” Its members “must learn to recognize the strength and liberation to be found in service to one another and communal life in a Christian community. . . . They have to learn to serve the truth alone in the study of the Bible and its interpretation in their sermons and teaching.”²⁹

During his time at Finkenwalde Bonhoeffer continued to be engaged in the ecumenical movement and the work of the Confessing Church. Developments in the latter could not help but be a continuing disappointment to him. No doubt equally troubling was the conscription and death of many of the students he taught at Finkenwalde. Finally in 1940 the Gestapo closed the seminary, which meant Bonhoeffer was without an ecclesial appointment. He was now vulnerable to conscription. Because of his international connections, Von Dohnanyi justified Bonhoeffer’s appointment to the *Abwehr* on grounds that through his ecumenical connections he could discover valuable information for the Reich. In effect Bonhoeffer became a double agent, often making trips to Switzerland and Sweden to meet Bell and other ecumenical representatives in the hope that Bell could convince the Allies to state their war aims in a manner that would not make it more difficult for those committed to Hitler’s overthrow.

Without a church connection Bonhoeffer turned again to his passion for theology, beginning work on what we now know as his *Ethics*. Much of it was written at the Benedictine monastery at Ettal which served as his retreat from the world. But Bonhoeffer knew no retreat was possible, and he was finally arrested for “subversion of the armed forces” on April 5, 1943. Imprisoned in Tegel prison, he was under interrogation in preparation for being tried. There he wrote most of the material for *Letters and Papers from Prison*. On July 20, 1944, von Stauffenberg’s attempt on Hitler’s life failed with the subsequent discovery of Canaris’s files in the Zossen bunker. Those files clearly implicated Bonhoeffer and von Dohnanyi in the conspiracy. Bonhoeffer was moved to Buchenwald and finally to Flossenbürg, where he was hanged on April 9. His fellow prisoners and guards testify that throughout his imprisonment he not only functioned as their pastor but died as he had lived.

Bonhoeffer’s life that was at once theological and political. It was so,

however, not because he died at the hands of the Nazis. His life and work would have been political if the Nazis had never existed; for he saw that the failure of the church when confronted with Hitler began long before the Nazi challenge. Hitler forced a church long accustomed to privileges dependent on its invisibility to become visible. The church in Germany, however, had simply lost the resources to reclaim its space in the world. How that space can be reclaimed — not only in the face of the Nazis but when time seems “normal” — is the heart of Bonhoeffer’s theological politics.

Bonhoeffer’s Recovery of the Church’s Political Significance

In an essay entitled “The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics,” John Howard Yoder makes the striking observation that after the Constantinian shift the meaning of the word “Christian” changes. Prior to Constantine it took exceptional conviction to be a Christian. After Constantine it takes exceptional courage *not* to be counted as a Christian. This development, according to Yoder, called forth a new doctrinal development, “namely the doctrine of the invisibility of the church.” Before Constantine, one knew as a fact of everyday experience that there was a church, but one had to have faith that God was governing history. After Constantine, people assumed as a fact God was governing history through the emperor, but one had to take it on faith that within the nominally Christian mass there was a community of true believers. No longer could being a Christian be identified with church membership, since many “Christians” in the church had not chosen to follow Christ. Now to be a Christian is transmuted to “inwardness.”³⁰

Bonhoeffer is obviously a Lutheran and Lutherans are seldom confused with Anabaptists, but his account of the challenge facing the church closely parallels Yoder’s account.³¹ For example, in notes for a lecture at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer observes that the consequence of Luther’s doctrine of grace is that the church should live in the world and, according to Romans 13, in its ordinances. “Thus in his own way Luther confirms Constantine’s covenant with the church. As a result, a minimal ethic prevailed. Luther of course wanted a complete ethic for everyone, not only for monastic orders. Thus the existence of the Christian became the existence of the citizen. The nature of the church vanished into the invisible realm. But in this way the New Testament message was fundamentally misunderstood, inner-worldliness became a

principle.”³²

Faced with this result Bonhoeffer argues that the church must define its limits by severing heresy from its body. “It has to make itself distinct and to be a community which hears the Apocalypse. It has to testify to its alien nature and to resist the false principle of inner-worldliness. Friendship between the church and the world is not normal, but abnormal. The community *must* suffer like Christ, without wonderment. The cross stands *visibly* over the community.”³³ It is not hard to see how Bonhoeffer’s stress on the necessity of visibility led him to write a book like *Discipleship*. Holiness but names God’s way of making his will for his people visible. “To flee into invisibility is to deny the call. Any community of Jesus which wants to be invisible is no longer a community that follows him.”³⁴

According to Bonhoeffer sanctification, properly understood, is the church’s politics. For sanctification is only possible within the visible church community. “That is the ‘political’ character of the church community. A merely personal sanctification which seeks to bypass this openly visible separation of the church-community from the world confuses the pious desires of the religious flesh with the sanctification of the church-community, which has been accomplished in Christ’s death and is being actualized by the seal of God. . . . Sanctification through the seal of the Holy Spirit always places the church in the midst of struggle.”³⁵ Bonhoeffer saw that the holiness of the church is necessary for the redemption of the world.³⁶

I am not suggesting that when Bonhoeffer wrote *Sanctorum Communio*, he did so with the clarity that can be found in the lectures he gave at Finkenwalde or in his *Discipleship*. In *Sanctorum Communio* his concerns may be described as more strictly theological, but even that early the “strictly theological” was against the background of Protestant liberal mistakes, and in particular Ernst Troeltsch, that made inevitable his unease with the stance of the German churches toward the world. According to Bonhoeffer, “The church is God’s new will and purpose for humanity. God’s will is always directed toward the concrete, historical human being. But this means that it begins to be implemented *in history*. God’s will must become visible and comprehensible at some point in history.”³⁷

Throughout his work Bonhoeffer relentlessly explores and searches for what it means for the church to faithfully manifest God’s visibility. For example,

in his *Ethics*, he notes that the church occupies a space in the world through her public worship, her parish life, and her organization. That the church takes up space is but a correlative to the proposition that God in Jesus Christ occupies space in the world. "And so, too, the Church of Jesus Christ is the place, in other words the space in the world, at which the reign of Jesus Christ over the whole world is evidenced and proclaimed."³⁸ Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology is the expression of his Christology in which the reality of Christ determines all that is.

For Bonhoeffer it is in Jesus Christ that the whole of reality is taken up, that reality has an origin and an end. For that reason it is only in Him, and with Him as the point of departure, that there can be an action which is in accordance with reality. The origin of action which accords with reality is not the pseudo-Lutheran Christ who exists solely for the purpose of sanctioning the facts as they are, nor the Christ of radical enthusiasm whose function is to bless every revolution, but it is the incarnate God Jesus who has accepted man and who has loved, condemned, and reconciled man and with him the world.³⁹

As Christ was in the world, so the Church is in the world. These are not pious sentiments, but reality making claims that challenge the way things are. They are the very heart of Bonhoeffer's theological politics, a politics that requires the church to be the church in order that the world can be the world. Bonhoeffer's call for the world to be the world is the outworking of his Christology and ecclesiology. For the church to let the world be the world means the church refuses to live by privileges granted on the world's terms. "Real secularity consists in the church's being able to renounce all privileges and all its property but never Christ's Word and the forgiveness of sins. With Christ and the forgiveness of sins to fall back on, the church is free to give up everything else."⁴⁰ Such freedom, moreover, is the necessary condition for the church to be the zone of truth in a world of mendacity.⁴¹

Sanctorum Communio was Bonhoeffer's attempt to develop a "specifically Christian sociology" as an alternative to Troeltsch.⁴² Bonhoeffer argues that the very categories — church/sect/mysticism, *Gemeinschaft*/Gesellschaft — must be rejected if the visibility of the church is to be reclaimed. Troeltsch confuses questions of origins with essences, with the result that the gospel is subjected to the world. The very choice between voluntary association and compulsory organization is rendered unacceptable by the "Protestant understanding of the Spirit and the church-community, in the former because

it does not take the reality of the Spirit into account at all, and in the latter in that it severs the essential relation between Spirit and church-community, thereby completely losing any sociological interest.”⁴³

From Bonhoeffer’s perspective Troeltsch is just one of the most powerful representatives of the Protestant liberal presumption that the gospel is purely religious, encompassing the outlook of the individual, but indifferent and unconcerned with worldly institutions.⁴⁴ The sociology of Protestant liberalism, therefore, is simply the other side of liberal separation of Jesus from the Christ. Protestant liberalism continues the docetic Christological heresy that results in an equally pernicious docetic ecclesiology.⁴⁵ Protestant liberalism is the theological expression of the sociology of the invisible church that “conceded to the world the right to determine Christ’s place in the world; in the conflict between the church and the world it accepted the comparatively easy terms of peace that the world dictated. Its strength was that it did not try to put the clock back, and that it genuinely accepted the battle (Troeltsch), even though this ended with its defeat.”⁴⁶

Bonhoeffer’s work was to provide a complete alternative to the liberal Protestant attempt to make peace with the world. In a lecture at the beginning of his Finkenwalde period concerning the interpretation of scripture, Bonhoeffer asserts that the intention “should be not to justify Christianity in this present age, but *to justify the present age before the Christian message*.”⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer’s attack in *Letters and Papers from Prison* on the liberal Protestant apologetics that tries to secure “faith” on the edges of life and the despair such edges allegedly create is a continuation of his attack on Protestant pietism and his refusal to let the proclamation of the Gospel be marginalized. For the same reasons he had little regard for existentialist philosophers or psychotherapists, whom he regarded as exponents of a secularized methodism.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, Bonhoeffer’s suggestion about Barth’s “positivism of revelation” and the correlative need for a nonreligious interpretation of theological concepts has led some to think Bonhoeffer wanted Christians to become “secular.”⁴⁹ The exact opposite is the case. Bonhoeffer insists that if reality is redeemed by Christ, Christians must claim the center, refusing to use the “world’s” weakness to make the Gospel intelligible. He refuses all strategies that try “to make room for God on the borders” thinking it better to leave certain problems unsolved. The Gospel is not an answer to questions produced

by human anxiety but a proclamation of a “fact.” Thus Bonhoeffer’s wonderful remark: “Belief in the Resurrection is not the solution to the problem of death. God’s ‘beyond’ is not the beyond of our cognitive faculties. The transcendence of epistemological theory has nothing to do with the transcendence of God. God is beyond in the midst of life. The church stands, not at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village.”⁵⁰

Bonhoeffer’s call for a Christian worldliness, moreover, is not his turning away from the kind of community discipline he so eloquently defended in *Discipleship* and *Life Together*. In his confession in *Letters and Papers from Prison* that at one time he mistakenly assumed he could acquire faith by living a holy life, he is not rejecting the form of life lived at Finkenwalde. When he says he now sees some of the dangers of *Discipleship*, though he still stands by that book, he is continuing to reject the false dualism inherited from Troeltsch. Rather, he is making the Christological point that the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection must be held in unity to rightly understand the church’s relationship to the world. An emphasis on incarnation too often leads to compromise; an ethic based on cross and resurrection too often leads to radicalism and enthusiasm.⁵¹ The church names that community that lives in radical hope in a world without hope. To so live means the church cannot help but be different from the world. Such a difference is not an end in itself but “automatically follow[s] from an authentic proclamation of the gospel.”⁵²

This I believe to be Bonhoeffer’s theological politics. He sought to recover the visibility of the church because “it is essential to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ that it occupies space within the world.”⁵³ Put positively, in Jesus Christ God has occupied space in the world and continues to do so through the work of the Holy Spirit’s calling the church to faithfulness. These were the convictions that Bonhoeffer brought to his war with the Nazis and that made him the most insightful and powerful force shaping the church’s witness against Hitler. Yet in a sense Hitler was exactly the kind of enemy that makes Bonhoeffer’s (and Barth’s) theological politics so compelling. The question remains, however, whether Bonhoeffer (or Barth) provides an adequate account of how the church must negotiate a world “after Christendom.” To consider that question, I must explore what might be called Bonhoeffer’s “political ethics,” which are expressed primarily by his critique and attempt to find an alternative to the traditional Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms.

Bonhoeffer's Search for a Political Ethic

At a conference sponsored by the Church Federation Office in 1932, Bonhoeffer (even though he was the youngest speaker at the conference) vigorously attacked the idea of the “orders of creation” introduced by traditional Lutherans. That he would reject the two-kingdom tradition was inevitable, given the direction he had begun in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*. Creation simply cannot be self-validating because Christians have no knowledge of creation separate from redemption. “The creation is a picture of the power and faithfulness of God, demonstrated to us in God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. We worship the creator, revealed to us as redeemer.”⁵⁴ Whatever Christians have to say about worldly order, it will have to be said on the presumption that Christ is the reality of all that is.

Bonhoeffer soon returned to the issue of the “orders of creation” in a address to the Youth Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia in July 1932. Again he attacks those who believe that we must accept certain orders as given in creation. Such a view entails the presumption that because the nations have been created differently each one is obliged to preserve and develop its own characteristics. He notes this understanding of the nation is particularly dangerous because “just about everything can be defended by it.” Not only is the fallenness of such order ignored, but those that use the orders of creation to justify their commitment to Germany fail to see that “the so-called orders of creation are no longer *per se* revelations of the divine commandment, they are concealed and invisible. Thus the concept of orders of creation must be rejected as a basis for the knowledge of the commandment of God.”⁵⁵

However, if the orders of creation are rejected, then Bonhoeffer must provide some account of how Christians understand the commandment of God for their lives. In *Creation and Fall* he notes that the Creator does not turn from the fallen world but rather deals with humankind in a distinctive way: “He made them cloaks.” Accordingly, the created world becomes the preserved world by which God restrains our distorted passions. Rather than speaking of the orders of creation, Bonhoeffer begins to describe God’s care of our lives as the orders of preservation.⁵⁶ The orders of preservation are not self-validating, but “obtain their value wholly from outside themselves, from Christ, from the new creation.”⁵⁷ Any order of the world can, therefore, be dissolved if it prevents our hearing the commandment of Christ.

What difference for concrete ethical reflection flows from changing the name from “creation” to “preservation”? Bonhoeffer is obviously struggling to challenge how the Lutheran “two order” account both fails to be Christological and serves as a legitimation of the status quo. In *Christ the Center*, lectures in Christology he delivered at Berlin in 1933, Bonhoeffer spelled out some implications of his Christological display of the orders of preservation. For example, he observed that since Christ is present in the church after the cross and resurrection, the church must be understood as the center of history. In fact, the state has only existed in its proper form only so long as there has been a church, because the state has its proper origin with the cross. Yet the history of which the church is the center is a history made by the state. Accordingly, the visibility of the church does not require that the church must be acknowledged by the state by being made a state church, but rather the church is the “hidden meaning and promise of the state.”⁵⁸

But if the church is the state’s “hidden meaning,” how can the state know that the church is so, if the church is not visible to the state? How is this “hiddenness” of the church for the state congruent with Bonhoeffer’s insistence on the church’s visibility? Bonhoeffer wants the boundaries of the church to challenge or at least limit the boundaries of the state, but he finds it hard to break Lutheran habits that determine what the proper role of the state is in principle. Thus he will say that the kingdom of God takes form in the state insofar as the state holds itself responsible for stopping the world from flying to pieces through the exercise of its authority; or, that the power of loneliness in the church is destroyed in the confession-occurrence, but “in the state it is restrained through the preservation of community order.”⁵⁹ Understandably, Bonhoeffer does not realize that he is not obliged to provide an account in principle of what the state is or should be.

In his *Ethics* Bonhoeffer seems to have abandoned the language of “orders of preservation” and instead uses the language of “mandates.”⁶⁰ For Bonhoeffer, the Scriptures name four mandates — labor, marriage, government, and the church.⁶¹ The mandates receive their intelligibility only as they are created in and directed towards Christ. Accordingly, the authorization to speak on behalf of the Church, the family, labor, and government is conferred from above and then “only so long as they do not encroach upon each other’s domains and only so long as they give effect to God’s commandment in

conjunction and collaboration with one another and each in its own way.”⁶² Bonhoeffer does not develop how we would know when one domain has encroached on the other or what conjunction or collaboration might look like.⁶³

It is clear what Bonhoeffer is against, but it is not yet clear what he is for. He is against the distinction between “person” and “office” he attributes to the Reformation. He notes this distinction is crucial for justifying the Reformation position on war and on the public use of legal means to repel evil. “But this distinction between private person and bearer of an office as normative for my behavior is foreign to Jesus,” Bonhoeffer argues. “He does not say a word about it. He addresses his disciples as people who have left everything behind to follow him. ‘Private’ and ‘official’ spheres are all completely subject to Jesus’ command. The word of Jesus claimed them undividedly.”⁶⁴ Yet Bonhoeffer’s account of the mandates can invite a distinction between the private and the public which results in Christian obedience becoming invisible.

Bonhoeffer’s attempt to rethink the Lutheran two-kingdom theology in the light of his Christological recovery of the significance of the visible church failed, I think, to escape from the limits of habits that have long shaped Lutheran thinking on these matters. However, there is another side to Bonhoeffer’s political ethics that is seldom noticed or commented on. Bethge notes that though Bonhoeffer was shaped by the liberal theological and political tradition, by 1933 he was growing antiliberal not only in his theology but in his politics. Increasingly he thought liberalism — because of either a superciliousness or a weak laissez-faire attitude — was leaving decisions to the tyrant.⁶⁵

Nowhere are Bonhoeffer’s judgments about political liberalism more clearly stated than in a response he wrote in 1941 to William Paton’s *The Church and the New World Order*, a book that explored the church’s responsibility for social reconstruction after the war. Bonhoeffer begins by observing that the upheavals of the war have made European Christians acutely conscious that the future is in God’s hands and no human planning can make men the masters of their fate. Consequently, churches on the continent have an apocalyptic stance that can lead to other-worldliness but may also have the more salutary effect of making Christians recognize that the life of the church has its own God-given laws which differ from those governing the life of the world. Accordingly, the church cannot and should not develop detailed plans

for reconstruction after the war, but rather it must remind the nations of the abiding commandments and realities that must be taken seriously if the new order is to be a true order.⁶⁶

In particular, Bonhoeffer stresses that in a number of European countries an attempt to return to full-fledged democracy and parliamentarianism would create even more disorder than obtained prior to the era of authoritarianism. Democracy requires a soil prepared by a long spiritual tradition and most of the nations of Europe, except for some of the smaller ones, do not have the resources for sustaining democracy. This does not mean that the only alternative is state absolutism, but rather that what should be sought is for each state to be limited by the law. This will require a different politics from the politics of liberalism.

In his *Ethics* Bonhoeffer starkly states (he has in mind the French Revolution) that “the demand for absolute liberty brings men to the depths of slavery.”⁶⁷ In his response to Paton, he observes that the Anglo-Saxon word that names the struggle against the omnipotence of the state is “freedom,” and the demand for freedom is expressed in the language of “rights and liberties.”⁶⁸ But “freedom is a too negative word to be used in a situation where *all* order has been destroyed. And liberties are not enough when men seek first of all for some minimum security. These words remind us much of the old liberalism which because of its failures is itself largely responsible for the development of State absolutism.”⁶⁹

Bonhoeffer takes up this history again in his *Ethics*, suggesting that these developments cannot help but lead to godlessness and the subsequent deification of man, which is the proclamation of nihilism. This “hopeless godlessness” is seldom identified by hostility to the church but rather comes too often in Christian clothing. Such “godlessness” is particularly present, he finds, in the American churches which seek to faithfully build the world with Christian principles and ends with the total capitulation of the church to the world. Such societies and churches have no confidence in truth, with the result that the place of truth is usurped by sophistic propaganda.⁷⁰

The only hope, if Europe is to avoid a plunge into the void after the war, is in the miracle of a new awakening of faith and the institution of God’s governance of the world that sets limits to evil. The latter alternative, what Bonhoeffer calls “the restrainer,” is the power of the state to establish and

maintain order.⁷¹ In his reply to Paton he suggests that such an order limited by law and responsibility, which recognizes commandments that transcend the state, has more “spiritual substance and solidity than the emphasis on the rights of man.”⁷² Such an order is entirely different from the order of the church, but they are in close alliance. The church, therefore, cannot fail its responsibility to sustain the restraining work of the state.

Yet the church must never forget that her primary task is to preach the risen Jesus Christ, because in so doing she “strikes a mortal blow at the spirit of destruction. The ‘restrainer,’ the force of order, sees in the church an ally, and, whatever other elements of order may remain, will seek a place at her side. Justice, truth, science, art, culture, humanity, liberty, patriotism, all at last, after long straying from the path, are once more finding their way back to their fountain-head. The more central the message of the church, the greater now will be her effectiveness.”⁷³

Above I suggested that Bonhoeffer’s attempt to reclaim the visibility of the church at least put him in the vicinity of trying to imagine a non-Constantinian church. Yet in his *Ethics* he displays habits of mind that seem committed to what we can only call a “Christian civilization,” though Larry Rasmussen suggests that Bonhoeffer in the last stages of *Letters and Papers from Prison* began to move away from any Christendom notions.⁷⁴ Rasmussen directs our attention to the “Outline for a Book” Bonhoeffer wrote toward the end of his life. Rather than finishing the *Ethics*, which he expressed regret for not having done, if Bonhoeffer had lived, I believe, as does Rasmussen, he would have first written the book envisaged in his “Outline.” The book hinted at there would have allowed Bonhoeffer to extend his reflections about the limits of liberal politics and in what manner the church might provide an appropriate alternative.

In his “Outline” Bonhoeffer begins with “a stocktaking of Christianity.” In particular he suggests what it means for mankind to have “come of age” is the dream that humans can be independent of nature. As a result human creations have turned against their creators, making those that sought freedom enslaved to their self-created chains. The church provides no alternative, trapped by its invisibility, unwilling to risk itself on behalf of the world. Such a church is no more than a stop gap for the embarrassment of our suffering and death.⁷⁵ In the second chapter of his book, in terms reminiscent of *Sanctorum*

Communio, Bonhoeffer suggests he will begin with the question “Who is God?” in order to recover the God who is found only through our “participation in the being of Jesus.” He proposes to end his book with an account of the church that will “have to take the field against the vices of *hubris*, power-worship, envy, and humbug, as the roots of all evil.” The church will have to speak of “moderation, purity, trust, loyalty, constancy, patience, discipline, humility, contentment, and modesty.”⁷⁶

Finally Bonhoeffer says he intends to explore the importance and power of example, “which has its origin in the humanity of Jesus and is so important in the teachings of Paul,” and whose importance has been underestimated.⁷⁷ I cannot say that if Bonhoeffer would have had the opportunity to write the book suggested in his “Outline,” he would have forever left Constantinianism behind. But I remain convinced his attempt to think through what the recovery of the visible church entails — the implication of which, I am convinced, he was beginning to see in his last proposed book — is an invaluable resource for the challenges that those living after Bonhoeffer cannot ignore. He is now part of God’s exemplification given for our redemption.

Notes

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Nature of the Church,” in *A Testament To Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geoffrey Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990), 91.

² For the distinction between political theology and theological politics, see Arne Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jurgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

³ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, revised edition (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000). Hereafter cited as Bethge.

⁴ Marilynne Robinson, *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 110-111.

⁵ I am referring to Bonhoeffer’s remarks about Barth’s “positivism of revelation” and his infamous suggestion that Christians must now live in the world as if *etsi deus non daretur* (even if there were no God). See *Letters and Papers From Prison*, enlarged ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1971), 328 and 360.

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001). Originally published in English as *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1949). John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), 208.

⁸ It is extremely instructive to reread Harvey Cox's use of Bonhoeffer in his *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

⁹ Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 28, 33. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

¹⁰ Larry Rasmussen's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972) remains one of the best attempts to understand Bonhoeffer's involvement in the plot to kill Hitler. I remain unconvinced, however, that Bonhoeffer thought this aspect of his life could be justified even if he did think, as Rasmussen suggests, in terms of just war considerations. For quite different accounts see Greg Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 3-33, and James McClendon's *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1986), 188-211.

¹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* (New York: Harper Collins, 1966), 32.

¹² Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 219. Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, G. Leibholz, uses this quote in his "Memoir" in *The Cost of Discipleship*, 26. In *Life Together* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) Bonhoeffer observes "only in the Holy Scriptures do we get to know our own story. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God and Father of Jesus Christ and our God" (62).

¹³ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 303.

¹⁴ Quoted in Bethge, 722. At least one of the reasons Bonhoeffer was attracted to Barth is he shared Barth's distaste for pietism in any form. For example, Bonhoeffer complains that any definition of faith as "personal faith," "personal decision for Jesus," or "free decision of the individual," cannot help but distort the biblical understanding of faith. *True Patriotism*, ed. Edwin Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 149-50.

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 135.

¹⁶ *Sanctorum Communio*, 134, 209. Barth many years later regarded *Sanctorum Communio* as a theological miracle, finding it hard to believe such an extraordinary book could be written by someone only twenty-one, but even more startling that it could have been written at Berlin. Barth observes that if any vindication of the school of Seeberg is possible, it is so because this book exists. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/4* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 641.

¹⁷ Bethge, 96.

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 84). Charles Marsh has best demonstrated the influence of Barth on Bonhoeffer in his *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Oxford, 1994). Bonhoeffer may have revised his criticism of Barth after he had the opportunity to read the early volumes of the *Dogmatics*. In an essay, "The Visible Church in the New Testament," written in 1936, Bonhoeffer notes two dangers must be avoided regarding the place of the church in the world: (1) a docetic eschatology in which the church is assumed to be an incorporeal concept, and (2) a secular ecclesiology with a magical view of the sacraments. Bonhoeffer, displaying a sense of humor often present in his work, says "The former danger arises from the theology of Barth, understood wrongly; the latter from the theology of Dibelius, understood correctly." *A Testament To Freedom*, 160-61.

¹⁹ Bethge, 150.

²⁰ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, ed. Edwin Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 87.

²¹ Bethge, 205.

²² *Ibid.*, 205.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 168-69. Bonhoeffer has no time for humanistic justifications of pacifism, because they confuse safety with peace. Yet it is not clear that Bonhoeffer assumed that his Christological pacifism required the disavowal of violence in every circumstance. In his famous Fano conference address in 1934 he does say, "brothers in Christ obey his word; they do not doubt or question, but keep his commandment of peace. They cannot take up arms against Christ himself — yet this is what they do if they take up arms against one another!" *No Rusty Swords*, 290.

²⁵ Gerhard Leibholz, "Memoir," in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Fortress, 1961), ll. Leibholz, Bonhoeffer's twin sister's husband, was also Jewish. The Bonhoeffer family desperately made arrangements for the Leibholz family to escape to England.

²⁶ Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom*, 169.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

²⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and the Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

²⁹ Quoted by Bethge, 467.

³⁰ John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 136-37.

³¹ It is not accidental that those who have been schooled by Yoder's work have noticed Bonhoeffer's insistence on the visibility of the church. See, for example, Mark Nation, "Discipleship in a World Full of Nazis" in the *Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 249-77; Barry Harvey, "A Post-Critical Approach to a 'Religionless Christianity,'" in *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1994), 39-58.

³² Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 324. In *True Patriotism* Bonhoeffer notes that the defining mark of the Constantinian age was not that Christians began to baptize their children but "that baptism became a qualification for civic life. The false development lies not in infant baptism but in the secular qualification of baptism. The two should clearly be distinguished" (160).

³³ *Ibid.*, 324.

³⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 113.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 261-62.

³⁶ For example, Bonhoeffer in his *Ethics* claims that the justification of the western world lies in the divine justification of the church. The latter is possible only if the church is led to a full confession of her guilt through the cross (52).

³⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 141.

³⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 68.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom*, 92.

⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 160. A constructive way to represent Bonhoeffer's politics is to look closely at his understanding of lying. The demand of truthfulness runs from the beginning to the end of his work culminating in his discussion in the *Ethics*, 326-34. His remark that anyone

who tells the truth cynically is lying is an invitation to extended reflection on the kind of politics necessary to produce people who can tell the truth without cynicism. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 163.

⁴² Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 277.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 287.

⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 71-85. Earlier in *Christ the Center* Bonhoeffer observes, "Ritschl and Herrmann put the resurrection on one side, Schleiermacher symbolizes it; in so doing they destroy the church," 45.

⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 327.

⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 310.

⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 326-27. "Methodism" simply seems to have been Bonhoeffer's general characterization of pietistic traditions. Unfortunately, his use of methodism as a term of derision rightly describes the denomination bearing that name.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁵¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 88-89.

⁵² This passage comes from Bonhoeffer's essay "The Question of Baptism," written in 1942 in response to a controversy in the Confessing Church (*No Rusty Swords*, 160). Bonhoeffer observes that it is very understandable that in a secularized church there is a desire for a pure, authentic, truthful set of believers to exist. Such a desire is understandable but full of dangers because it is far too easy for a community ideal to take the place of the real community of God and because such a community might be understood as a contribution made by man.

⁵³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 68.

⁵⁴ Bonhoeffer, *The Prayerbook of the Bible*, 163.

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom*, 106.

⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 139.

⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 166-67.

⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 65.

⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, *A Testament of Freedom*, 96-97.

⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 73-78.

⁶¹ Bonhoeffer rightly worries how to justify the identification of the mandates. He rejects the Lutheran attempt to derive the orders from the world and attempts to justify them from the Bible. He observes "it is perhaps not by chance that precisely these mandates seem to have their type in the celestial world. Marriage corresponds with Christ and the congregation; the family with God the Father and the Son, and with the brotherhood of men with Christ; labor corresponds with the creative service of God and Christ to the world, and of men to God; government corresponds with the communion of Christ in eternity; the state corresponds with *telos* of God." *Ethics*, 295. Bonhoeffer's effort is clearly speculative, and not much should be made of his naming different mandates in different contexts.

⁶² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 246. Benjamin Reist provides an enlightening discussion concerning the tension between Bonhoeffer's stress on the space the church must occupy and his use of the two-sphere language bequeathed to him by the Lutheran tradition. See Reist, *The Promise of*

Bonhoeffer (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1969), 85-90.

⁶³ While generally praising Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* and in particular his account of the mandates because they "do not emerge from reality" but descend into it, Karl Barth suggests there still may remain just a hint of North German patriarchalism in Bonhoeffer's understanding of some having authority over others. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 22. Barth's comment is interesting in that his own account of the political implications of the Gospel has been criticized for exhibiting the same "arbitrariness" he finds in Bonhoeffer.

⁶⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 134-35.

⁶⁵ Bethge, 289.

⁶⁶ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 109-10.

⁶⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 38. This aspect of Bonhoeffer's work has been attacked in Germany by Klaus-Michael Kodalle in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Zur Kritik seiner Theologie* (Gutersloh: Guterslohes Verlagshaus, 1991). Wolfgang Huber defends Bonhoeffer against Kodalle in his "Bonhoeffer and Modernity," in *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility: Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Valley Forge, PA, Trinity Press, 1994), 5-19. I fear I am equally unsympathetic with Kodalle's critique and Huber's defence because they each remain determined by the categories of liberal political theory. Huber challenges Kodalle's dualism of individual and community, but fails to see that the heart of Bonhoeffer's challenge is ecclesial.

⁶⁸ In his "Thoughts on the Day of Baptism of Dietrich Wilhelm Rudiger Bethge" Bonhoeffer observes, "We thought we could make our way in life with reason and justice, and when both failed, we felt that we were at the end of our tether. We have constantly exaggerated the importance of reason and justice in the course of history." *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 298.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁷⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 41-42.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷² Bonhoeffer, *True Patriotism*, 113.

⁷³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 45.

⁷⁴ Larry Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*, 85-86. I am sure Rasmussen is right but I obviously have a different account of what Bonhoeffer means when he says Christians must acknowledge the "world come of age."

⁷⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 380-83. Bonhoeffer's description of the human project to safeguard life against accidents (380) has only recently become a theme in the work of postmodern theorists. In his "Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism," he observes "for the greater part of our lives pain was a stranger to us. To be as free as possible from pain was unconsciously one of our guiding principles" (298). Bonhoeffer saw that the attempt to escape suffering was the breeding ground for self-willed tyranny.

⁷⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 383.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Bonhoeffer on Truth and Politics

Stanley Hauerwas

Bonhoeffer's Passion for Truth

It is not accidental that my account of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a political theologian makes him an ally of John Howard Yoder. Bonhoeffer, like Yoder, sought to recover the visibility of the church amid the ruins of Christendom from the beginning to the end of his life. To so interpret Bonhoeffer risks making him subject to the same criticism often directed at Yoder — i.e., he gives an account of the church that makes the church politically irrelevant. Those tempted to so criticize Bonhoeffer, of course, have to give some account for the political character of his life. For example, they might suggest that his life was more political than his theology or (as I suggested in the first lecture) even that his theology is particularly well suited for totalitarian contexts but fails to provide an adequate account of how Christians should live in democratic societies.

In this lecture I hope to counter these kinds of criticisms by developing Bonhoeffer's understanding of the relation between truth and politics. I will try to show that Bonhoeffer rightly understood that the gift the church gives to any politics is the truthful proclamation of the Gospel. As far as I know, Bonhoeffer's understanding of truth and politics has seldom been commented on or analyzed. One of the reasons may well be the general assumption that truth and politics, particularly in democratic regimes in which compromise is the primary end of the political process, do not mix.¹ I hope to show that Bonhoeffer saw that such a view of politics abandons the political realm to violence.

I should be candid that (as we say in the South) I also have a dog in this fight. Because I am so influenced by Yoder I am often accused of abandoning the politics necessary to achieve relative justice.² My oft-made claim that the first task of the church is not to make the world more just but to make the world the world is interpreted as a call for Christians to withdraw from the world. By focusing on Bonhoeffer's understanding of how the church serves

the world by being God's truthful witness, I hope to direct attention to the same theme in my own work. For it has always been my conviction, a conviction I believe I learned from Barth, that the character of a society and state is to be judged by the willingness to have the Gospel preached truthfully and freely.³ By drawing on Bonhoeffer's understanding of the significance of truthfulness, I hope to show the political significance of the Christian refusal to lie.

Bonhoeffer was a relentless critic of any way of life that substituted agreeableness for truthfulness. For example, in a speech he gave in 1932 at the Youth Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia, he attacked attempts to secure unity by focusing on "practical" issues rather than fundamental issues of theology. For Bonhoeffer, to ignore questions of theology, truth plays into the hands of the forces that the ecumenical movement was meant to counter. He observes that because there is no theology of the ecumenical movement, "ecumenical thought has become powerless and meaningless, especially among German youth, because of the political upsurge of nationalism."⁴ Bonhoeffer observes:

No good at all can come from acting before the world and one's self as though we knew the truth, when in reality we do not. This truth is too important for that, and it would be a betrayal of this truth if the church were to hide itself behind resolutions and pious so-called Christian principles, when it is called to look the truth in the face and once and for all confess its guilt and ignorance. Indeed, such resolutions can have nothing complete, nothing clear about them unless the whole Christian truth, as the church knows it or confesses that it does not know it, stands behind them. Qualified silence might perhaps be more appropriate for the church today than talk which is very unqualified. That means protest against any form of the church which does not honour the question of truth above all things.⁵

Bonhoeffer saw little point to theological engagement if truth does not matter. He was, for example, quite critical of his fellow students at Union Theological Seminary. In his report of his study at Union in 1930-31, he noted that the upbringing and education of American students was essentially different from the education German students receive. According to Bonhoeffer, to

understand the American student, you need to experience life in a hostel which produces a spirit of comradeship and a readiness to help one another. The unreservedness of life together, “the thousandfold ‘hullo’,” manifests the American desire before all else to maintain community. In the tension between the attempt to say the truth and the will for the community, the latter always prevails in America. Fairness, not truth, becomes the primary commitment necessary to sustain community for Americans. As a result “a certain levelling in intellectual demands and accomplishments” shapes the life of American educational institutions. Intellectual competition and ambition are lacking, making innocuous the work done in seminar, discussion, and lecture.⁶

Bonhoeffer’s views of his fellow students reflected his general account of American religious and political life. His observation that America represents a form of “Protestantism without Reformation” is often quoted, but why he thought such a characterization appropriate is seldom explored. Bonhoeffer thought the “Protestant fugitives” who came to America did not come to enact another struggle. Rather Protestants claimed the right “to forgo the final suffering in order to be able to serve God in quietness and peace. . . . In the sanctuary there is no longer a place for strife. Confessional stringency and intolerance must cease for the person who has himself shunned intolerance. With his right to flee the Christian fugitive has forfeited the right to fight. So, at any rate, the American Christian understands the matter.”⁷

Because the American student of theology sees the question of truth primarily in the light of this understanding of community, preaching cannot aspire to the truthful proclamation of the Gospel. Rather “preaching becomes an edifying narration of examples, a ready recital of [the preacher’s] own religious experiences, which are not of course assigned any positively binding character.”⁸ As a result, the relation of denominations to each other in America is not one that represents a struggle for the truth in preaching or doctrine. One might think, Bonhoeffer reflects, that such a situation would be favorable for the possibility of the unity of the churches of Jesus Christ. If the struggle for truth no longer divides the church, then surely the unity of the church must already exist. Yet just the opposite is the case. “Precisely here, where the question of truth is not the criterion of church communion and church division, disintegration is greater than anywhere else. That is to say, precisely where the struggle for the right creed is not the factor which governs everything, the

unity of the church is more distant than where the creed alone unites and divides the church.”⁹

Christians came to America having fought hard to renounce confessional struggles. Subsequent generations born free of the battles for which their forebears fought no longer think it necessary to fight about anything. The struggle over the creed which occasioned the flight of their fathers and mothers becomes — for their sons and daughters — something that is itself unchristian. “Thus for American Christianity the concept of *tolerance* becomes the basic principle of everything Christian. Any intolerance is in itself unchristian.”¹⁰ Because Christians in America have no place for the conflict truthfulness requires, they contribute to the secularization of society;¹¹ a society, moreover, which finds itself unable to subject politics to truth and the conflict truthfulness requires.¹² Tolerance becomes indifference and indifference leads to cynicism.

Bonhoeffer’s criticism of American theology, education, and politics reflects his lifelong passion to speak the truth. For example, in a letter to Bishop Ammundsen on August 8, 1934, Bonhoeffer discusses an upcoming conference at Fano and the address he was to give. He confesses he is more worried about those who identify with opposition to Hitler than with the German Christians. The former will be worried that they should not appear unpatriotic, but they must recognize that those that come together at Fano do so not as Germans, Danes, or Swiss but as Christians. Bonhoeffer continues:

Precisely because of our attitude to the state, the conversation here must be completely honest, for the sake of Jesus Christ and the ecumenical cause. We must make it clear — fearful as it is — that the time is very near when we shall have to decide between National Socialism and Christianity. It may be fearfully hard and difficult for us all, but we must get right to the root of things, with open Christian speaking and no diplomacy. And in prayer together we will find the way. I feel that a resolution ought to be framed — all evasion is useless. And if the World Alliance in Germany is then dissolved — well and good, at least we will have borne witness that we were at fault. Better that than to go on vegetating in this untruthful way. Only complete truth and truthfulness will help us now. I know that many of my German friends think otherwise.

But I ask you urgently to appreciate my views.¹³

“Only complete truth and truthfulness will help us now” was not just a reflection of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the challenge presented by the rise of Hitler. For Bonhoeffer, Hitler or no Hitler, the peace and justice any social order might try to achieve was impossible without truth. “There can only be a community of peace when it does not rest on *lies* and *injustice*.”¹⁴ The mistake of Anglo-Saxon thought is the subordination of truth and justice to the ideal of peace. Indeed, such a view assumes that the very existence of peace is proof that truth and justice have prevailed. Yet such a view is illusory, in that the peace that is the reality of the Gospel is identified with the peace based on violence. No peace is peace but that which comes through the forgiveness of sins. Only the peace of God preserves truth and justice. So “neither a static concept of peace (Anglo-Saxon thought) nor even a static concept of truth . . . comprehends the Gospel concept of peace in its troubled relationship to the concepts of truth and righteousness.”¹⁵

For Bonhoeffer nothing less than the truth of the Gospel was at stake in the confrontation with Hitler. Bonhoeffer’s famous radio address of 1933, which criticized the *Führer* concept, was not based on liberal democratic ideas but rather reflected Bonhoeffer’s concern with authority.¹⁶ According to Bonhoeffer, in the past, leadership was expressed through the office of the teacher, the statesman, and the father, but now the “Leader” has become an end in himself. When leadership was based on office, it required commitment to standards that were public and therefore capable of some rational justification. But the new leadership is based on choice, answering to nothing other than its own self-justification.¹⁷

Sociologically, Bonhoeffer attributes this change to the breakdown of German society after the First World War. After the war the German people felt lost, dominated by techniques intended to dominate nature now turned against their makers, distrusting all political, philosophical, and religious ideologies, and overwhelmed by the insignificance of the individual confronted by the dull power of the mass. The significance of the individual and the possibility of real community seemed to be forever destroyed. “The individually formed, autonomous personality and the idea divorced from reality seemed to have gone bankrupt. And from this need there now arose the passionate call for a new authority, for association, for community.”¹⁸ Hitler, the leader who

exploited this hunger for significance, mocks God and in so doing becomes himself an idol no longer subject to truthful correction.

Bonhoeffer's criticism of American religious and political life as well as his analysis of the rise of Hitler can make uncomfortable reading for some who admire his opposition to Hitler but do not consider his understanding of why Hitler must be opposed. Bonhoeffer's assumption that truth matters makes him an unlikely ally of the widespread assumption that — given that no one knows the truth — the best we can do ecclesially and politically is to be tolerant. Moreover, some may object that it is not clear what Bonhoeffer took truth to be. I hope to show the best way to respond to those who fear the “conservative” implications of Bonhoeffer's passion for truth and his understanding of truth is to be found in an essay that appears in his *Ethics*, “What Is Meant By ‘Telling the Truth’?” Not only does this essay indicate that from the beginning to the end of his life truth mattered to Bonhoeffer, but that, even more important, he understood that far more significant than offering a “theory of truth” is giving us an account of what it means to be truthful.

Bonhoeffer on “Telling the Truth”

Joseph Fletcher claims that Bonhoeffer's essay “is as radical a version of the situational method as any Christian relativist could call for.”¹⁹ Fletcher's description of Bonhoeffer's position is far off the mark. He surely must have known better or at least must have been a better reader than his description of Bonhoeffer's position seems to suggest. Fletcher may have been misled by Bonhoeffer's claim that “‘telling the truth’ may mean something different according to the particular situation in which one stands. Account must be taken of one's relationship at each particular time. The question must be asked whether and in what way a man is entitled to demand truthful speech of others.”²⁰ It is also true that Bonhoeffer argues that in formal terms the description of the lie as a discrepancy between thought and speech is inadequate. There is a way of speaking which can be correct but still is a lie, i.e., when a notorious liar for once tells “the truth” in order to mislead, or when a correct statement contains a deliberate ambiguity or omits something essential necessary to know the truth.²¹

Bonhoeffer's account of the lie is determined by his understanding of reality. We are obligated to speak truthfully about reality, but we must remember

that reality names not only what is “out there” but our relation to what is “out there.” According to Bonhoeffer every word we speak should be true. To be sure, the veracity of what we say matters; but the relation between ourselves and others which is expressed in what we say is also a matter of truth or untruth. “The truthful word is not in itself constant; it is as much alive as life itself. If it is detached from life and from its reference to the concrete other man, if ‘the truth is told’ without taking into account to whom it is addressed, then this truth has only the appearance of truth, but it lacks its essential character.”²² Bonhoeffer observes that some may object to this view of truthfulness on the grounds that truthful speech is not owed to this or that individual person, but to God. He responds that this is correct as long as one remembers that God is not a “general principle, but the living God who has set me in a living life and who demands service of me within this living life.”²³

Bonhoeffer acknowledges that the concept of the living truth is dangerous to the extent it may give the impression that the truth can be tailored to fit this or that situation, making it difficult to tell the difference between truth and falsehood. The complexity of his account, however, does not lead him to equivocate about lying. For example, he says that one might think that the man who stands behind his word makes his word a lie or a truth, but that is not enough because “the lie is something objective and must be defined accordingly.”²⁴

Bonhoeffer gives the example of a child who is asked in front of the class by a teacher if his father often comes home drunk. In fact, the student’s father does often come home drunk, but in answer to the teacher the child denies that the teacher’s description is true. According to Bonhoeffer, the child rightly lies in answer to a question that should have never been asked in a classroom. Bonhoeffer explains that “the family has its own secret and must preserve it,” something which the teacher has failed to respect. Ideally the child would have the ability to answer the teacher in a manner that would have protected the family as well as the rule of the school. But that is to expect more from a child than should be expected. Bonhoeffer does not deny that “the child’s answer can indeed be called a lie; yet this lie contains more truth, that is to say, in is more in accordance with reality than would have been the case if the child had betrayed his father’s weakness in front of the class. According to the measure of his knowledge the child acted correctly. The

blame for the lie falls back entirely upon the teacher.”²⁵

It is against this background that we can appreciate Bonhoeffer’s claim that “telling the truth is something which must be learnt.”²⁶ He acknowledges that this will sound shocking to anyone who thinks telling the truth depends on moral character and that if we have a good character then not lying is child’s play. But if the ethical cannot be divorced from reality, then continual practice in learning to discern and appreciate reality is a necessary ingredient in ethical action. That we must learn to tell the truth, that we must develop the skills of description to tell the truth, is the background presumption necessary to understand Bonhoeffer’s remark that only the cynic claims “to speak the truth” at all times and places.

Bonhoeffer’s insistence that politics can never be divorced from truth is prismatically illumined by his understanding of cynicism. In a letter to Bethge in December 1943, Bonhoeffer reports he is working on his essay on “What is ‘speaking the truth’?” in which he is trying to draw a sharp contrast between trust, loyalty, and secrecy and the “cynical” conception of truth. According to Bonhoeffer “anyone who tells the truth cynically is lying.”²⁷ Yet cynicism is the vice that fuels the habits to sustain a politics that disdains the truth.

For example, in *Letters and Papers From Prison* Bonhoeffer writes to Bethge (December 1943), describing a fellow prisoner who has come undone in prison. Bonhoeffer relates that this man now consults him about every little thing as well as reporting to him every detail of his life, such as when he has cried. Bonhoeffer’s fellow prisoner simply has no life that he does not expose. This occasions in Bonhoeffer a remarkable reflection in which he tells Bethge he has been thinking again about what he wrote recently about fear:

I think that here, under the guise of honesty, something is being passed off as ‘natural’ that is at bottom a symptom of sin; it is really quite analogous to talking openly about sexual matters. After all, “truthfulness” does not mean uncovering everything that exists. God himself made clothes for men; and that means that *in statu corruptionis* many things in human life ought to remain covered, and that evil, even though it cannot be eradicated, ought at least to be concealed. Exposure is cynical, and although the cynic prides himself on his exceptional honesty, or claims to want truth at all costs, he misses the crucial fact that since the fall there must

be reticence and secrecy.²⁸

Bonhoeffer is quite aware that secrecy can also be the breeding ground of the lie. The reticence and the secrecy he is intent on protecting is what sustains relationships such as marriage and the family that should not be subjected to the gaze sponsored by ideological formations. What concerns him is how language itself is debased, made incapable of truth, by its misuse in the interest of “community.” Each word, for example the word of command, which rightly is used in public service, must be rightly used if we are to be truthful. Commands — if used in the family — can sever the bonds of mutual confidence that sustains the trust crucial to family life.²⁹ But from Bonhoeffer’s perspective modern developments have rendered words incapable of truthful expression:

It is a consequence of the wide diffusion of the public word through the newspapers and the wireless that the essential character and the limits of the various different words are no longer clearly felt and that, for example, the special quality of the personal word is almost entirely destroyed. Genuine words are replaced by idle chatter. Words no longer possess any weight. There is too much talk. And when the limits of the various words are obliterated, when words become rootless and homeless, then the word loses truth, and then indeed there must almost inevitably be lying. When the various orders of life no longer respect one another, words become untrue.³⁰

It is against this background, moreover, we can appreciate how and what Bonhoeffer thought was at stake for the church in the confrontation with Hitler. As early as *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer maintained that humans cannot place themselves into the truth without the help of revelation because the untruth of human self-understanding is only made apparent within the truth that revelation creates. Humans can only “recognize themselves as having been created anew from untruth for truth. But they recognize themselves as that only from within truth, within revelation — that is, in Christ, whether judged or pardoned.”³¹ Accordingly “the lie is primarily the denial of God as He has evidenced Himself to the world. ‘Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?’ (1 John 2:22).”³²

Lies are nothing less than contradictions of the word of God and the reality which is created by God. The purpose of our words, in unity with the word of God, is to “express the real, as it exists in God; and the assigned purpose of our silence is to signify the limit which is imposed upon our words by the real as it exists in God.”³³ For Bonhoeffer, the source of the lie is always our penchant for abstraction. Therefore the true meaning of correspondence with reality is neither civility or opposition to the factual, but rather the attempt to understand reality without the real man. To attempt to live without Jesus Christ, the One before whom all factual reality derives its ultimate foundation and its ultimate annulment, is to live in “an abstraction to which the responsible man must never fall victim; it is to fail to make contact with reality in life; it is to vacillate endlessly between the extremes of servility and revolt in relation to the factual.”³⁴

I do not think Bonhoeffer believes that every word we use must gain its immediate intelligibility from Christ. As Rowan Williams suggests, the truth to which Christological dogmas gesture is not so much a concern with rationality or a comprehensive elucidation of all that is, but more with the “need to preserve the possibility of the kind of encounter with the truth-telling Christ that stands at the source of the Church’s identity.”³⁵ The threat to truth for Christians comes not from the difficulty of developing an unproblematic correspondence theory of truth, but rather from the lies that speak us disguised as truth. Those are the lies Bonhoeffer rightly feared made possible the rise of Hitler and the ongoing lies necessary to sustain him in power. The failure of the church to oppose Hitler was the outcome of the failure of Christians to speak the truth to one another and to the world.

Living in Truth

Some may find troubling the account I have given of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of truth and politics. The implications of his understanding of truthfulness for politics could even suggest he favored a theocracy. Though I do not share the general presumption that theocracy is a “bad idea,”³⁶ Bonhoeffer remained far too Lutheran to entertain a theocratic alternative. For example, in his essay “The Church and the New Order in Europe,” written in 1941 in response to William Paton’s *The Church and the New Order*, he observes that there is a new recognition that the political order

also is under the Lordship of Christ. The political order, therefore, cannot be considered a domain which lives on its own terms apart from God's plan. "The commandments of God indicate the limits which dare not be transgressed, if Christ is Lord. And the Church is to remind the world of these limits."³⁷ Accordingly, the Church cannot and should not try to develop a detailed plan for postwar reconstruction, but it should remind the nations of the reality the commandments entail if the new order is to be a "true order."

In particular, Bonhoeffer suggested that the "chaos" behind the war could not be overlooked if the new order was to be true and just. National Socialism was made possible because there was just enough justice in some of Germany's claims against the "peace" established in the railway wagon at Compiègne to make credible Hitler's presentation of himself as a prophet of justice.³⁸ For Bonhoeffer there is no way to the future that does not truthfully acknowledge the sins of the past.

Bonhoeffer grasped the challenge modern politics presents for those committed to truthfulness. His views on the politics of the lie we confront are quite similar to Hannah Arendt's understanding of the lies associated with modern politics. Arendt observes that the politics of the lie we experience in our day is quite different than the traditional political lie. In traditional politics, by which I assume she means the kind of politics Machiavelli represented, the lie was assumed a necessity in diplomacy and statecraft to protect secrets or intentions that had never been made public or could not be made public.³⁹ In contrast the modern political lie deals not at all with secrets but what is generally known. For example, Arendt calls attention to a:

highly respected statesmen who, like de Gaulle and Adenauer, have been able to build their basic policies on such evident non-facts as that France belongs among the victors of the last war and hence is one of the great powers, and "that the barbarism of National Socialism had affected only a relative small percentage of the country." All these lies, whether their authors know it or not, harbour an element of violence; organized lying always tends to destroy whatever it has decided to negate, although only totalitarian governments have consciously adopted lying as a first step to murder.⁴⁰

Bonhoeffer's passion for the truth meant he would have stood against the lies that speak through us in modernity — lies all the more powerful because we believe we speak them by our own volition. We are, after all, "a free people." Moreover, we live in a manner that seems to make our lies true because we are so determined to make them true.⁴¹ Wittgenstein remarks that "nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself" (*Culture and Value*, 34e). The clarity of Bonhoeffer's truthful witness to the truth was made possible by the clear evil he opposed. Yet such clarity is apparent only retrospectively. Most of Bonhoeffer's fellow Christians did not see the truth with his unflinching clarity.

In his book, *Living in Truth*, Vaclav Havel calls attention to the innocent act of a manager of a fruit and vegetable shop who puts in his window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan: "Workers of the world, unite." Why, Havel asks, does the shop owner put the sign in his window? Is he genuinely enthusiastic about the possibility of the workers of the world uniting? Does he want to communicate his enthusiasm for this ideal to his fellow citizens? Does he have any idea what it might mean for workers to be so united?

Havel suspects the majority of shopkeepers who put such a sign in their window never think about what they are doing, nor does the sign express their true opinions. The poster was delivered from headquarters along with the onions. The shop owner put the sign in his window because he had always done so and if he did not he could get in trouble. Moreover, the greengrocer thinks nothing is at stake because he understands that no one really believes what the slogan says. What is important is the subliminal message the sign communicates. Havel suggests the sign's real message is: "I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace."⁴²

To help us understand what is happening with the display of this sign, Havel suggests a thought experiment. Suppose the greengrocer had been asked to display the sign, "I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient." Even though the new sign expresses the truth, Havel observes that the greengrocer would be ashamed to display such a sign. He is, after all, a human being with some sense of his own dignity. The display of the sign "Workers of

the world, unite” allows the greengrocer “to conceal from himself the low foundations of his obedience, at the same time concealing the low foundations of power. It hides them behind the facade of something high. And that something is *ideology*.”⁴³

I suspect most of us think there is a great distance between the sign in the greengrocer’s window and the rise of National Socialism in Germany. Yet I think Bonhoeffer rightly saw that the Christian acceptance that truth does not count in such small matters prepared the ground for the terrible lie that was Hitler. In order to expose the small as well as the big lies, a community must exist that has learned to speak truthfully to one another. That community, moreover, must know that to speak truthfully to one another requires the time granted through the work of forgiveness. Such patient timefulness is a gift from the God the community believes has given us all the time we need to care for the words we speak to one another.⁴⁴ Any politics absent such a people is quite literally doomed to live lies that are the breeding ground of violence.⁴⁵

An analysis of relationship between the acknowledgment of death, our ability to live truthful lives, and violence would be extremely informative. Bonhoeffer observes “the miracle of Christ’s resurrection makes nonsense of that idolization of death which is prevalent among us today. Where death is the last thing, fear of death is combined with defiance. Where death is the last thing, earthly life is all or nothing. Boastful reliance on earthly eternities goes side by side with a frivolous playing with life. . . . The drastic acceptance or rejection of earthly life reveals that only death has any value here. To clutch at everything or to cast away everything is the reaction of one who believes fanatically in death.”⁴⁶ Where death is everything, violence cannot be kept at bay. Bonhoeffer believed that the church is the sign God has placed in the windows of the world to make possible a truthful politics.

This means Bonhoeffer’s observations about the character of theological education in America are not what might be considered his personal prejudices. Rather they are a challenge to teacher and student alike that few things are more important than our holding ourselves, as well as being held by the church, to speak the truth. As odd as it may sound, given the accommodated character of the church in liberal societies, if the church does not itself preach the Gospel truthfully, then politically we condemn ourselves, and those to whom

we are pledged to witness, to what Bonhoeffer called “the void.”⁴⁷ A sobering observation, but one that at least directs those who count ourselves Christian to the task God has given us, that is, to be a people capable of speaking truthfully to ourselves, to our brothers and sisters in Christ, and to the world.⁴⁸

Notes

¹ According to Hannah Arendt, to look on politics from the perspective of truth — and by truth, she meant “factual truth” — is to stand outside the political realm. She notes “truthfulness has never been counted among the political virtues, because it has little to contribute to that change of the world and of circumstances which is among the most legitimate political activities.” *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. with an Introduction by Peter Baehr (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 570. Arendt is not recommending lying in politics but is trying to explain why the political realm so often seems immune to truthfulness. She notes a politics that acknowledges the need for the existence of impartial institutions, such as universities, improves the possibility of truth to prevail in public (571). Yet she observes such institutions remain exposed to all the dangers arising from social and political power.

² See, for example, Jeff Stout’s appendix in the new edition of his *Ethics After Babel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 341-58.

³ Barth challenged Hitler’s regime on the grounds that Hitler was trying to determine what the church could preach. He did so from the conviction “that it is the preaching of justification of the Kingdom of God, which founds, here and now, the true system of law, the true State.” Karl Barth, *Community, State, and Church*, with an introduction by Will Herberg (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1960), 126.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, trans. Edwin Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 159.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 102-03. Though these judgements about American Christianity come early in Bonhoeffer’s career, if the work in the *Ethics* is any indication he never changed his mind. For example, he contrasts the French and American revolutions, observing the latter was not based on the emancipation of man, but the limitation of all earthly powers by the sovereignty of God. Yet the process of secularization in America is as advanced as that in Europe. Bonhoeffer suggests that “the claim of the congregation to build the world on Christian principles ends only with the total capitulation of the Church to the world, as can be seen clearly enough by a glance at the New York church registers. If this does not involve a radical hostility to the Church that is only because no real distinction has ever been drawn here (America) between the offices of Church and state. Godlessness remains more covert. And indeed in this way it deprives the Church even of the blessing of suffering and of the possible rebirth which suffering may engender.” *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), 40-41.

⁸ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 88.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹¹ Bonhoeffer had little use for the kind of education available at Union Theological Seminary. He thought the “theological atmosphere” at Union was accelerating the process of secularization of American society. According to Bonhoeffer the criticism from Union directed at fundamentalists and “Chicago humanists” is necessary, but no basis is given for rebuilding after demolition. He was particularly critical of the students at Union who had turned their backs on all genuine theology in order to study economic and political organizations. Theology in America had been transformed into ethics. Even if Barth is studied, the basic suppositions of those who read him are “so inadequate that it is almost impossible for them to understand what he is talking about.” *No Rusty Swords*, 90.

¹² In a diary entry dated June 24, 1939, Bonhoeffer observes “there hardly ever seem to be ‘encounters’ in this great country, in which the one can always avoid the other. But where there is no encounter, where liberty is the only unifying factor, one naturally knows nothing of the community which is created through encounter. The whole life together is completely different as a result. Community in our (German) sense, whether cultural or ecclesiastical, cannot develop here.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: Harper/San Francisco, 1990), 498.

¹³ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 286-87.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 168-69. John Paul II often sounds very much like Bonhoeffer to the extent the Pope maintains no freedom is worth having that is not disciplined by the truth. Jean Bethke Elshtain draws on Bonhoeffer and John Paul II in *Who Are We?: Critical Reflections and Hopeful Possibilities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). Elshtain rightly thinks Bonhoeffer and John Paul II to be allies, particularly given our current cultural challenges.

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 169.

¹⁶ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 259-60. The address is found in *No Rusty Swords*, 190-204.

¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 194-96.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁹ Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 149.

²⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 326.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 331. A fascinating exercise would be to compare Bonhoeffer’s account of lying with Augustine’s. On the surface Bonhoeffer seems to be denying Augustine’s account of the lie as the use of speech to say what I know is not the case in order to deceive. However, Augustine’s careful analysis of lying, which may well involve silence, is much closer to Bonhoeffer’s account than would first appear. Though Bonhoeffer does not claim, as does Augustine, that one may never lie, the general direction of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of lying is quite similar to Augustine’s. For a subtle and compelling account of Augustine’s position see Paul Griffith, “The Gift and the Lie: Augustine on Lying,” *Communi* 26 (Spring 1999): 3-29.

²² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 328.

²³ *Ibid.*, 326-27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 332.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 330.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 327. In *Culture and Value*, G.H. von Wright, ed., trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 35e, Ludwig Wittgenstein observes: “No one *can* speak the truth; if he has still not mastered himself. He *cannot* speak it; — but not because he is not clever enough yet. . . . The truth can be spoken only by someone who is already at home in it; not by someone who still lives in falsehood and reaches out from falsehood towards truth on just one occasion.” Wittgenstein, perhaps more than anyone, knew that our speaking truthfully is a skill that not only requires attention to what we say but how we say it. Moreover, we can only learn to speak truthfully when our pride has been defeated.

²⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 163. This remark, like much else Bonhoeffer has to say, often sounds quite similar to some of Wittgenstein’s remarks about lying and how hard it is to avoid lying. For example in *Culture and Value* (39e), Wittgenstein observes: “How hard I find it to see what is *right in front of my eyes!* . . . You can’t be reluctant to give up your lie, and still tell the truth.” Later Wittgenstein comments, “Someone who knows too much finds it hard not to lie.” A remark I suspect Bonhoeffer might appreciate.

²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*, 158.

²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 328. This kind of reflection is what informs Bonhoeffer’s observation in *Letters and Papers From Prison* (148) that husbands and wives should have the same mind about matters even in the literary sphere. He confesses that he and his fiancée Maria are not yet on the same wave length about writers. She reads poets such as Rilke he regards as “decidedly unhealthy.” Bonhoeffer’s attitudes can be interpreted as an exemplification of an unrepentant male point of view. It would have been interesting to see how Bonhoeffer’s views might have developed if he and Maria would have had the time to marry and live together. That said, I think he is right to contend that it is extremely important that marriage provide the time for husbands and wives to discover common judgements about matters that matter.

³⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 329-30. Wendell Berry provides a contemporary complaint similar to Bonhoeffer’s observation about the degradation of our language. He observes that a movement may lose its ability to speak truthfully when its enemies preempt its language. His example is organic farming, which became an end in itself making possible huge “organic” monocultures. This has made possible the attempt of the US Department of Agriculture to label food genetically engineered and irradiated to be called organic. Berry comments, “Once we allow our language to mean anything that anybody wants it to mean, it becomes impossible to mean what we say. When ‘homemade’ ceases to mean neither nor less than ‘made at home,’ then it means anything, which is to say that it means nothing.” *In the Presence of Fear* (Great Barrington, ME: Orion Society Publication, 2001), 34-35.

³¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, trans. H. Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 81-82.

³² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 332.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 198. In the section of the *Ethics* in which he discusses the “Concept of Reality,”

Bonhoeffer says, “Henceforth one can speak neither of God nor of the world without speaking of Jesus. All concepts of reality which do not take account of Him are abstractions” (61).

³⁵ Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000), 82.

³⁶ Allen Verhey has recently written an extremely intelligent analysis and defense of theocracy. See his *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 333-507.

³⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *True Patriotism*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 109. See also Lecture 1.

³⁸ Bonhoeffer, *True Patriotism*, 111-12.

³⁹ For example, see Ruth Grant’s subtle analysis of Machiavelli and Rousseau on the necessity of hypocrisy in her *Hypocrisy and Integrity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). “At the outset,” Grant says, “we noted the peculiar susceptibility of liberal democracies to charges of hypocrisy. This is a function of both aspects of what I have called the ‘paradox of democracy’; liberal democratic regimes make particularly strong claims to be able to provide open and honest political processes at the same time that those processes are structured so as to increase dependencies conducive to hypocritical political behavior” (176). Bonhoeffer might well agree with Grant’s contention that some forms of hypocrisy may not only be necessary but justified in democratic regimes, but I do not think he would regard that as a good thing.

⁴⁰ Arendt, *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, 565.

⁴¹ Arendt tells the medieval anecdote about the sentry that was given to practical jokes who one night sounded the alarm just to give his townsfolk a scare. Everyone rushed to the walls. As a result he was the last one to rush to the walls. Arendt comments that the story illustrates how hard it is to lie to others without lying to oneself. She comments “The tale suggests to what extent our apprehension of reality is dependent upon our sharing the world with our fellow-men, and what strength of character is required to stick to anything, truth or lie, that is unshared. In other words, the more successful a liar is, the more likely he will fall prey to his own fabrications.” *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, 566.

⁴² Vaclav Havel, *Living in Truth*, ed. Jan Vladislav (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 42.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁴ For a powerful account on the importance of word care for Christians see Stephen Fowl, *Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 161-71. One of the offices John Howard Yoder thought crucial for the church was the one served by “agents of linguistic self-consciousness.” He noted that this is a dangerous office because the tongue is hard to govern. The demagogue, the poet, the journalist, the novelist, the grammarian, are all in the business of steering society with the rudder of language. Too often concepts become reified by such people because it is through such concepts they make themselves indispensable. Yoder urges the teacher to watch for the “sophomoric temptation” to make verbal distinctions without substantial necessity. *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 32-33.

⁴⁵ For a fascinating, powerful account of the relationship between lies and violence, see Robert Dodaro, OSA, “Eloquent Lies, Just Wars and the Politics of Persuasion: Reading Augustine’s *City of God* in a ‘Postmodern’ World,” *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 77-138. Dodaro argues that Augustine saw the lies that shaped Roman politics and political leaders drew their intelligibility

from the attempt to beat death by achieving political glory that would insure immortality. Dodaro thinks the same process is at work in attempts to justify the Gulf War.

⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 16-17.

⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer saw clearly that “the void” becomes possible as the alternative to Christianity. In the section of the *Ethics*, “Inheritance and Decay,” he suggests that “it was only from the soil of the German Reformation that there could spring a Nietzsche” (28). In a manner that anticipates postmodern doubts about reason, Bonhoeffer notes that “contempt for the age of rationalism is a suspicious sign of failure to feel the need for truthfulness. If intellectual honesty is not the last word that is to be said about things, and if intellectual clarity is often achieved at the expense of insight into reality, this can still never again exempt us from the inner obligation to make clean and honest use of reason” (34). Finally he notes, “Luther’s great discovery of the freedom of the Christian man and the Catholic heresy of the essential good in man combined to produce the deification of man. But, rightly understood, the deification of man is the proclamation of nihilism” (39). For Bonhoeffer’s explicit use of the language of “the void,” see page 44 of the *Ethics*.

⁴⁸ Wittgenstein observes, “You cannot write anything about yourself that is more truthful than you yourself are. That is the difference between writing about yourself and writing about external objects. You write about yourself from your own height. You don’t stand on stilts or on a ladder but on your bare feet.” *Culture and Value*, 33e. This remark is extremely important if what Christians believe is true — namely, we can only know the truth about ourselves by receiving it as a gift from God. So we can never trust our “truth,” but rather must continually look to that truth that is God if we are to truthfully see ourselves.

Why Bonhoeffer, Why Now? A Response to Stanley Hauerwas's "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology"¹

Pamela E. Klassen

Department for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto

As a scholar of religion in North America (apparently not one of Bonhoeffer's favorite topics), I come at this paper not with the perspective of a theologian with intimate knowledge of the work of either Bonhoeffer or Hauerwas, but from the vantage point of a religious studies scholar who has explored questions of life history, narrative, gender, and religious identity through the methods of ethnography and history.

My comments come out of four related issues. The first is, What is it to be a political theologian? If, as Hauerwas suggests, Bonhoeffer was a political theologian because he wanted to "reclaim the visibility of the church as the necessary condition for the proclamation of the gospel in a world that no longer privileged Christianity"² — that is, he wanted Christian theology to speak out and act in the world — was he also a theologian who understood the politics of theologies? According to Hauerwas, Bonhoeffer insisted that to become the "visible" Church, the Church must renounce its invisible "Constantinian" privileges and rely only on Christ and the forgiveness of sins, thus making it, in Hauerwas's words, "a zone of truth in a world of mendacity."³ This sharp dualism obscures multiplicity on both sides of the equation of church vs. world. However, I'm less concerned in this instance with the plethora of Christianities than with the other side of the dualism, in which a variety of theologies, and especially Judaism in the case of Bonhoeffer's time, are rendered invisible by the Church's visibility. If part of our exercise is to think about what Bonhoeffer's work offers to the twenty-first century, then it would seem that if visibility entails forgoing privilege (and I would contend that many, especially Euro-American, Christians still do enjoy this privilege in a global sense), it must also entail developing ways of being able to see and hear other theologies, be they Jewish, Muslim, or those of another religion.

My second comment stems from Hauerwas's description of Bonhoeffer's ambivalence towards or revulsion for the "religious." Ironically, in his suspicion of "religion" Bonhoeffer is not so far away from the Americans whose theology he found superficial.⁴ That said, if Bonhoeffer's visible church or visible community does not take the form of "religion," what shape does it take? In his highly eschatological essay, "The Visible Community," he argues that the visible church must include the sacraments, the proclamation of the Word, and the embodied, daily lives of Christians: "When a man is baptized into the Body of Christ not only is his personal status as regards salvation changed, but also the relationships of daily life."⁵ Despite his disdain for an overly individualized pietism, Bonhoeffer seems to counter his revulsion for the religious with a direct individual relationship with, in his words: "God and Christ; authenticity, life, freedom, and compassion mean a great deal to me. It is just their religious manifestations which are so unattractive."⁶ If we think of religion in an albeit limited sense as rituals, institutions, theologies — various modes of not entirely consensual community consensus that necessarily stifle aspects of individual authenticity — how does faith take form in a community without religion?⁷

My third concern is the role of family in Bonhoeffer's life. I wonder if Hauerwas's dismissal of the Christianity of Bonhoeffer's family as "simply . . . part of the furniture upper-class Germans assumed came with their privileges" is not too quick.⁸ Certainly, that many members of Bonhoeffer's family were involved in the German resistance together with him and the intensity with which Bonhoeffer wrote of his love for his family in his letters from prison suggest that his family may have played a large role both in his political development and as a set of relationships that shaped his identity as a Christian. As Bonhoeffer wrote from prison in May 1943: "Anyone for whom the parental home has become so much a part of himself as it has for me feels specially grateful for any message from home."⁹ As Bonhoeffer himself makes clear in writing about the visible community, daily relationships — and these must include family ones — are a necessary sphere in which the deeds of a Christian are done. Perhaps, then, Bonhoeffer's notion of the intimately political nature of Christianity was not only the product of a great mind capable of "theological miracles"¹⁰ (according to Barth) but also the work of an embodied son and brother whose experience of family and other human relationships informed

his political theology. Interestingly, and perhaps tellingly, his strong biblically-based views on the complementary roles of wives and husbands in which “the wife is to be subject to her husband, and the husband is to love his wife”¹¹ were not actually based on his own embodied experiences of daily life with a wife.

So, for my final point: If we can see Bonhoeffer as a political theologian whose life and theology developed a “theological politics from which we still have much to learn,”¹² how is that learning happening? What kind of Bonhoeffer is being created today? Hauerwas, in an autobiographical introduction, discusses how it took until now for him to write about Bonhoeffer, because he found the uses to which Bonhoeffer was put so problematic — especially Harvey Cox’s version in *The Secular City*.¹³ What has changed since then, both for Hauerwas and for the wider reception of Bonhoeffer? How have the “fragments”¹⁴ of Bonhoeffer’s life (a notion I find very helpful) been put together in new ways? There are operas, plays, and poetry written with Bonhoeffer as their subject. There are attempts to have him honored at Yad Vashem as a Righteous Gentile, that, as far as I know, have still not met with success because he is not thought to have met the criterion of actually risking his life to save the lives of Jews. There are Bonhoeffer societies and Bonhoeffer statues, and the Bonhoeffer home page quotes Dorothee Soelle as saying that Bonhoeffer is “The one German theologian who will lead us into the third millennium.”¹⁵ Perhaps the fragments of Bonhoeffer’s life play off each other in a way that helps to perpetuate his enigmatic appeal: the pacifist who would have killed Hitler; the Christian who hated religion; the political animal engaged in the world and dedicated to an eschatological revelation that would end the world; the scribe who disdained the foolish for their habit of talking in (to be anachronistic) soundbites, while being himself eminently quotable.

The politics in Bonhoeffer’s theology requires a great deal of critique, especially in terms of gender and relations between religious traditions. However, I must also say that I found this opportunity to reread him to provide some solace in a world that seems once again to be escalating to a different kind of apocalypse of its own making, as evidenced by an American president on the front page of the newspaper declaring that the “nuclear option” is still “on the table.” With that president in mind, I would draw attention to one last

quotation from Bonhoeffer, this one on folly:

The fact that the fool is often stubborn must not mislead us into thinking that he is independent. One feels in fact, when talking to him, that one is dealing, not with the man himself, but with slogans, catchwords, and the like, which have taken hold of him. He is under a spell, he is blinded, his very nature is being misused and exploited. Having thus become a passive instrument, the fool will be capable of any evil and at the same time incapable of seeing that it is evil. Here lies the danger of a diabolical exploitation that can do irreparable damage to human beings. . . .¹⁶

The questions that remain are, What sort of liberation do we as human beings require to overcome the folly of today? and What does Bonhoeffer offer to this struggle?

Notes

¹ I thank James Reimer and the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre for inviting me to respond to Stanley Hauerwas's paper, and I also thank Hauerwas for his thoughts on my comments.

² Stanley Hauerwas, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology," 12.

³ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Rev. ed. (London: SCM Press, 1959), 231.

⁶ Bonhoeffer, quoted in Hauerwas, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology."

⁷ For a very helpful discussion of "religion" as both a scholarly construct and an historical force, see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1993).

⁸ Hauerwas, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology," 20.

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Enlarged edition. Ed. Eberhard Bethge. (New York: Collier, 1971), 38.

¹⁰ Hauerwas, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology," 21, note 16.

¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 43.

¹² Hauerwas, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology," 17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 18, note 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵ For more on the range of tributes to Bonhoeffer, see www.dbonhoeffer.org.

¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 9.

Response to Stanley Hauerwas

Fred Shaffer

Th. D. candidate in Systematic Theology, Knox College

Thank you, Dr. Hauerwas, for your interesting presentation on Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I especially want to commend your attention to Bonhoeffer's 1932 lecture, "A Theological Basis for the World Alliance?" In his identification there of the ethical criterion of directedness toward Christ's coming, Bonhoeffer sets down a pattern which he will pick up again, in different words, in his *Ethics*. Indeed, that lecture is a sort of a very early "first draft" of *Ethics*, and more attention should be paid to it than it has received. I also agree completely with your assessment of the theological continuity in Bonhoeffer, and with your grounding of his Abwehr resistance activity in his ecclesiology.

I see a somewhat different ecclesiological focus from Bonhoeffer's, though, in the strength of your interest in the political activity per se arising from the theological existence of the divine community under the Word of God. Bonhoeffer's concern was, first of all, to work out the nature of the church as Christ existing as community in terms of christological formation and secondly, in terms of its dialectical relationship with the state and other elements of the secular world within the prior, over-reaching, and all-encompassing reality of their reconciliation in Jesus Christ. In this connection I think that you underestimate the continuing structural importance of the Lutheran two kingdoms doctrine, and the way it functions in tandem with christological formation, in Bonhoeffer's thought.

The two kingdoms doctrine has traditionally separated Christ's kingdom and the kingdom of this world, Christian and secular, the church and politics, so strictly that they had nothing to do with each other. Bonhoeffer's neo-Lutheran contemporaries in Germany placed an exaggerated emphasis on this. The state maintains the outward order as it sees fit, the church proclaims the gospel unto salvation, and each strictly minds its own business. Bonhoeffer considered this to be a misinterpretation of Luther — he even called it "pseudo-Lutheran" — because it makes Christ into something partial within a more comprehensive reality.¹ Lutheran ethics would thus fly in the face of Lutheran

christology — Luther's *kein ander Gott*. It is quite an eye-opener to read Paul Althaus, in his final book on Luther's ethics, separating "God," as the ruler of the outward, worldly, created order, from Christ, who as ruler of the inward and spiritual order has nothing whatsoever to do with the outward order — and to realize that this Lutheran stalwart has thereby used the two kingdoms doctrine to essentially the same christological end as that of the extra-Calvinisticum!² So Bonhoeffer recast the traditional doctrine in terms of a dynamic relation of Christian and secular as a polemic unity in Jesus Christ. Their polemic is directed toward the historical actualization of the given reality of the reconciled unity of God and the world in Jesus. Bonhoeffer claimed, I think correctly, to have recovered Luther's original intention in this directedness toward Christ.³ This understanding of the two kingdoms doctrine firmly circumscribed all of his political interest and activity.

In his 1933 essay, "The Church and the Jewish Question," Bonhoeffer says that when the state, by itself becoming lawless in depriving the Jews of their rights and by interfering with the church's ministry, has completely absconded from its responsibility to maintain law and order for the sake of the proclamation of the gospel, then, and only then, the church may be obligated to act on behalf of the entire reality in Jesus Christ by jamming a spoke into the state's wheel.⁴ Similarly, in *Ethics*, he says that just as Luther had protested, with the help of the secular princes, against the Roman Church's extension of its ecclesiastical power, all in the name of a better Christianity, so also when Christianity is employed against the secular it must be solely in the name of a better secularity in the interest of the entire reality in Christ.⁵

You mentioned Bonhoeffer's interest, in *Ethics*, in the "restrainer," the power of the relatively just state for order. But this follows a much longer discussion of the decay of the Christian inheritance of the West, the West's repudiation of the form of Christ.⁶ The healing of the nations can come about only with the coming together of the church's recovery of the form of Christ and the "restrainer" within the overreaching reality of Christ. Bonhoeffer immediately follows this up with an elucidation of the church's recovery of the form of Christ in the world in terms of its representative acceptance of the Western world's guilt as its own, and the confession of its own guilt toward Christ for abdicating its role within reality by its endless concessions to the world and relentless secularization of the gospel in the interest of "relevance"

to the world's prior agenda.⁷ This coming together of a faithful church and the "restrainer" is the only hope Bonhoeffer holds out for the West in 1940; the alternative is final disintegration of the civilization.⁸ The political force of the "restrainer" is really of no interest in and of itself. This puts the important theological letter of July 16, 1944 in an interesting light:

Here is the decisive difference between Christianity and all religions. Humanity's religiosity makes it look in its distress to the power of God in the world: God is the *deus ex machina*. The Bible directs humanity to God's powerlessness and suffering; only the suffering God can help. To that extent we may say that the development towards the world's coming of age outlined above, which has done away with a false conception of God, opens up a way of seeing the God of the Bible, who wins power and space in the world by His weakness. This will probably be the starting point for our 'secular interpretation'.⁹

In other words, within the cosmic reality of the reconciled unity of God and the world in Jesus Christ, the Enlightenment (even though its own insight into this reality is impaired, as Bonhoeffer had earlier put it in *Ethics*¹⁰) actually serves to purify the church and is thus paradoxically directed toward Christ's coming. He always thought like this. Because politics and the church were always to be clearly distinguished within this modified, or, as he would say, restored, two kingdoms doctrine, I think your opening statement, that "from the very beginning Bonhoeffer was attempting to develop a theological politics from which we still have much to learn," probably overstates his political interest and concern as such. He saw himself as belonging primarily to the church and called to the task of purifying it to assist the secular in its appointed task. This is certainly clear enough in the final "Outline for a Book," where he envisions the life and work of the church of the future, having just properly grounded it christologically in terms of Jesus's being-for-others as the revelation of God in his concreteness.¹¹

On another, but not unrelated, matter, while you speak primarily about Bonhoeffer's attempt to develop a theological politics, the paper is titled "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology." I followed up your reference to

Arne Rasmusson's book *The Church as Polis* to clarify the distinction you would make between "theological politics" and "political theology." I gathered that political theology is theology whose categories are intentionally determined by a particular political existence and set of political presuppositions and experiences, whereas theological politics is political activity intentionally formed and limited by the theological existence of the church-community under the Word of God. If I have understood the distinction correctly, it is certainly a critical one. Yet you seem to use the terms interchangeably. I for one would be most grateful if you would clarify exactly what you mean by them. I'm not sure that you are in fact arguing that Bonhoeffer is a political theologian, the title of your paper notwithstanding.

I do think any attempt to cast Bonhoeffer as a political theologian is misguided — as misguided in its own way as the eclectic uses of him made by Cox, Robinson, or Fletcher which you rightly reject — for he was an opponent of political theology of any kind. You quote from his 1932 lecture to the Youth Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia, "There can only be a community of peace when it does not rest on *lies* and *injustice*."¹² Now "lies and injustice" is a reference to the Treaty of Versailles, which unjustly and vindictively ascribed sole guilt for the First World War to Germany and penalized it accordingly.¹³ The lecture's title was "A Theological Basis for the World Alliance?" and Bonhoeffer's point was that its largely political basis was woefully inadequate and that a proper theological basis was needed.

Bonhoeffer begins that lecture by complaining that the lack of a serious *theology* of the international ecumenical movement means that any German theologian engaged in ecumenical work will be accused of being "unconcerned with the Fatherland and unconcerned with *the truth*."¹⁴ One suspects that this may be autobiographical — that he himself had felt the sting of such accusations. His words here indicate a certain restricted area of agreement with the German nationalist political theologians Emanuel Hirsch and Paul Althaus, who were certainly among his critics. They treated German nationality as an order of creation and Germany's urgent need for international justice as an ethical absolute — and therefore supported Adolf Hitler's candidacy for Reich Chancellor even as Bonhoeffer was delivering his lecture. But Bonhoeffer accuses Hirsch and Althaus of having "a static concept of the truth."¹⁵ They were telling the truth about Allied "lies and injustice." But by their rejection of

the Christian unity given in the ecumenical movement as a sham in view of the apparent indifference of the churches in the Allied countries to German concerns, and by their acceptance of the prospect of a war of national liberation for the sake of justice, they had lost sight of the biblical command of peace and the need for truth to be related to peace in terms of the gospel concept of the forgiveness of sins, the sign of Christ's coming.

Then Bonhoeffer turns his theological guns on the Anglo-Saxon-dominated ecumenical movement, which he accuses of having "a static concept of peace."¹⁶ It rightly perceived the biblical command of peace to which Hirsch and Althaus were seemingly blind, but saw the ideal of external peace as something good in itself, an order of creation, valid quite apart from any relation to international justice and the forgiveness of sins. Bonhoeffer saw the "peace" agenda of the ecumenical movement as a one-sided political theology cloaking "lies and injustice" with theological respectability.

But above all Bonhoeffer believed passionately in the reality of the body of Christ, which overreaches every human difference and distinction with Christ's will for the unity of his body (cf. John 17:20ff). He called for the replacement of both of these political theologies of created orders with a reconciliation theology of the orders of God's preservation of humankind for Christ's coming. The ethical question then is, "Which orders in the world are directed toward that end?"¹⁷ Only in this context, never in themselves, may they be called "good." Hence German Christians must struggle for justice, but without resorting to war and misrepresenting it as "justice," for it is so destructive it cannot be said to be preserving anything for Christ's coming. They must remember that real justice can only come with forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace — that is, with Christ's coming.¹⁸ The Anglo-Saxons for their part must listen to the German cries for truth and justice, and must stop misrepresenting lies and injustice as "peace," in the interest of that real peace which can only arise with justice from forgiveness and reconciliation, that is, in the bodily reality of Jesus Christ.¹⁹ And all churches and individual Christians must concentrate on the new recognition of unity with respect to the truth of Jesus Christ — the theological basis! — so that the church may speak with one voice.²⁰

Would that Bonhoeffer's voice had prevailed in 1932! But his is a strange one indeed to political theology, then or now, in his context or some

current one. Why? Because Bonhoeffer adamantly refuses to make an ethical absolute of *any* political context, and demands that all such realities, however pressing or urgent, always be fully relativized to the concrete ecclesial reality of the unity of Jesus Christ. And here is the secret of Bonhoeffer's ethical thinking: because they are all relative to Jesus Christ, they not only *can* be reconciled, but in him, in reality, they *are*, and the only thing in question is how this given reality is to be actualized in history. That is, the answer to the *how* of political and personal ethics ebbs and flows about the Christo-ecclesiological *who*. When have we ever heard a political theologian speak like this?

Notes

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 196.

² Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, tr. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972). Althaus maintains that for Luther creation and its orders are prior to Christ and continue to operate apart from him. He does say that according to Luther Christ's lordship is operative "in persons only, that is, in their faith," and not in orders, for "the Lordship of Christ is to be understood in the context of the theology of the cross. It is still hidden under the 'form of this world'." But this "does not mean that they are not subject to the will and commandment of *God*" (79-80, italics mine). Apparently, according to Althaus, Luther was prepared to discern the will of God in the things that have been made as well as in the suffering of the cross, hence my reference to the extra-Calvinisticum. However, Althaus is curiously unable to cite Luther convincingly on this point, whereas passages supporting Bonhoeffer's interpretation can be found by the score and are actually cited by Althaus in other contexts. I am at a loss to explain Althaus's interpretation.

³ *Ethics*, 199.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question," *No Rusty Swords*, ed. E.H. Robertson (London: Collins, 1965), 225-26.

⁵ *Ethics*, 199.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 108-9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 110-16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 116-17.

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Enlarged ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 361. Italics mine.

¹⁰ *Ethics*, 97.

¹¹ *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 381-83.

¹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "A Theological Basis for the World Alliance?" *No Rusty Swords*, ed. E.H. Robertson (London: Collins, 1965), 169.

¹³ That this was Bonhoeffer's view on this matter and that his view remained essentially unchanged

even throughout his resistance activity is quite clear. Cf. the sermon “The Love of God” of 1930, in *No Rusty Swords*, 76 ff., esp. 78-82, and his joint statement with W. Visser ’t Hooft of 1941, “The Church and the New Order in Europe,” in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *True Patriotism*, ed. E.H. Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 108 ff., esp. 110-12, 115-16.

¹⁴ *No Rusty Swords*, 159.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 166-67.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 169-70.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 168-69, 171.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 171-73.

Faculty Forum with Stanley Hauerwas Conrad Grebel University College

15 March 2002

James Reimer: The theme will not so much be Bonhoeffer as Hauerwas, on this occasion. I'd like to begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about your life, how you began in Texas, how you grew up, how you got to know John Howard Yoder, and how you became a pacifist.

Stanley Hauerwas: Well, I think I'm a theologian because I couldn't get myself saved! I was raised in an evangelical Methodist church in the South where you joined the church on Sunday mornings but everyone knew that didn't have anything to do with being a Christian — you had to get saved on Sunday night. And you'd go and you'd sing hymns for almost an hour and then you'd listen to the sermon, which had to be forty-five minutes — I mean, no one could get saved in a thirty-minute sermon — and I wanted to get saved but it just did not happen. I didn't think you should fake it, and finally, I was about fourteen or so and there had been some life dedications to the ministry in the church and I thought, "Well, hell, if God isn't going to save me, I'll dedicate my life to the ministry and that will mean he'll have to pay some attention!" So that's what I did. We were singing "I Surrender All" for the twenty-third time and I thought, "This is going to last all night!" so I went up and dedicated my life to the ministry.

We'd gotten an associate pastor in the church who actually read books and he'd gone to seminary — his name was Raymond Butts — and I'd started asking Raymond what I should read. I read David Makier's *From Faith to Faith* and discovered the Bible wasn't true. We weren't fundamentalists, we weren't that smart. I mean, you've got to be real smart to be a fundamentalist, and we weren't up that high. We just thought you ought to take the Bible seriously, and I discovered it wasn't true.

And then I read a book by Nels F.S. Ferré called *The Sun and the Umbrella*. He was an early Barthian from Sweden and he suggested that

religion probably did as much to hide God as it did to reveal God, and I thought, “That’s true!” and I gave it up. So I went to Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. We thought of it as Texas’s oldest Sunday school, a little Methodist school with 435 students when I was there. I majored in philosophy. I was the only philosophy major at Southwestern. There was this terrific guy there named John Score who had just come from Duke, working on his Ph.D. He was basically a theologian but he taught me — and there would be a few others in the class. We read Copleston’s *History of Philosophy* and read the primaries as we went through. I did that for six semesters. What a terrific education! I slowly began to understand that I didn’t know enough to say God didn’t exist, and so I decided to go to Yale Divinity School to discover, or to continue to think about, whether this stuff was true.

I left Southwestern thinking that if I was going to be a Christian I’d be a liberal Christian because I figured it must be the best way to go, more or less. But I’d also become convinced that — I’d read a lot of Nietzsche — the crucial issue about Christian truthfulness is that Christians don’t look very much like Christians. Particularly the Holocaust was a peculiar horror that stood in the way for me to be a Christian.

When I got to Yale I was stunned to discover that it was the liberals that had given the Jews up and it was Karl Barth that had stood against them. I started reading Barth and the rest is history! I’m a Barthian. I’ve always one way or the other been within the Barthian framework . . . Philosophy for the Germans always meant Kant and I don’t think Barth really knew Aristotle existed in that [same] way, so partly I’m a kind of Aristotelianizing Barth in terms of the way I work.

When I left Yale the only job I could get was at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. I’d never been around the Lutherans and I was the first non-Lutheran to ever teach theology there; that was an ecumenical excess that they would not soon repeat. I went there and said, “Listen, you know, you’ve got to understand as someone that is a committed theologian, I must destroy the law/gospel distinction!” I discovered they didn’t care much about the law/gospel distinction, but they cared a lot about manners, and I didn’t have those and I got into a lot of trouble. I was going to be fired, but I got this job at Notre Dame as a “visiting assistant instructor,” if you want to know how doubtful my standing was. I took it, and it was a wonderful, wonderful time for me.

I had read John Howard Yoder's *Karl Barth and the Problem of War* — if some of you remember, it was a little 11 by 12 inch peace pamphlet originally. It was in the Yale Divinity School bookstore and it cost a dollar. I still have my copy. I read it, and I thought, "That's the best critique of Barth I've ever read, but you'd have to be crazy to buy that ecclesiology!" Then, when I went to Notre Dame, I drove out to Goshen because I thought he was at the College. I discovered he was in Elkhart, but I did buy some of his other pamphlets, "Capital Punishment," the one on Reinhold Niebuhr, and I think there was another one on Barth that were at the back of the College Church. Then I went and met him in Elkhart.

John certainly never won any convert through charm. I came bopping into his office over at Associated Mennonite Bible Seminary, and I'm sure he thought I was another Yale wiseacre, and I said, "What are you working on now?" He gave me a whole list of stuff, including the manuscript of *The Politics of Jesus*. I took those pages home, read them, and the rest is history. I dedicated *Against the Nations* to Paul Ramsay and John Howard Yoder. I really do believe that it was the serious engagement with Ramsay's attempt to reconstitute just war reflection that made it possible for me to begin to appreciate just what an extraordinary set of reflections Yoder had developed.

I didn't want to be a pacifist. I remember I was riding over to Notre Dame with Robert Wilken, who was then a Lutheran but is now a Roman Catholic, a historical theologian who had gone to Chicago . . . (By that time, John was on the faculty at Notre Dame; John MacKenzie, the year before, had gotten John teaching a course at Notre Dame. MacKenzie was a great Jesuit New Testament scholar who was also a pacifist. I had been leaning on David Burrell and I said, "Listen, this guy is one of the major minds of our time, and we need to get him on the faculty here," and that's how we did, only John insisted that he be appointed in peace studies. That was part of what he was to do.) I was driving over to Notre Dame with Robert, who said, "What do you think of this guy Yoder?" I said, "Well, I'm really very impressed. I've been deeply influenced by him." He said, "Well, surely you can't believe any of this stuff about the early church. That's just golden age stuff." I said, "No, I think that's a really crude reading of what he's about, and as a matter of fact, I find him very persuasive. I'm a pacifist. He's convinced me to be a pacifist."

That was the first time I'd ever said that, and I really didn't like it. Of

course, no one knows what you mean when you say you are committed to non-violence. No one can anticipate what the implications are for your life when you so declare that yourself. It's an ongoing negotiation that one is never finished, because it's not like we know what violence is. One of the problems with pacifism is it too often sounds too sure of itself, like it really knows what non-violence is. This is where I'm Augustinian. You cannot know what it means to be non-violent by being against violence, because sin is always parasitical on the truth. So unless we actually have the embodiment in our lives of Christ's peace, we will not be able to locate the violences that lie within our lives and that we do not know how to name.

It's very important that we always be ready to be challenged about where our violences may lie, often by people who are violent. One of the great accomplishments, I think, is the awareness by women of how certain presumptions [have] provided men with protection from having to ever get to know a woman. I think any man that thinks that he's ever gotten to know a woman is crazy as hell, because Freud was right to ask, "What do women want?" I'm not sure that women know, but they sure as hell keep us guessing. I think that's part of the kind of negotiations we have to do with non-violence.

I never know how to characterize the kind of work I've done. Like Yoder, most of the writing I've done has always been under assignment. That was very important, that is, John always understood he was writing under assignment; it meant that he wasn't an intellectual because none of his work was self-generated. It's very interesting to watch how he worked; John would absolutely go crazy when he didn't know what you wanted him to do. That's why so many of his essays start, "My assignment is . . ." and he would delineate it and then try to respond to it. That's why his work is not dialectical, it's always part of an ongoing conversation. It's always unfinished. It's very important that it be unfinished.

I hope my work has some of that sense to it. I don't have much use for the notion of systematic theology. You learn from it, but you don't want to do it, because systematic theology for me is just the other side of empire — you're trying to put everything in its place. I think that people forget — this is MacIntyre's argument in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, about the form of Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* being important because it is intrinsically unfinished — there can always be another question to which you need another

response. So when the summa gets turned into system in neo-scholasticism, it's dead, and you get over-reifications of nature, grace, and that kind of thing.

It was really Calvin's *Institutes*, which after all was a catechism, that started the process we call systematic theology. People began to mimic the *Institutes* by making this or that locus of the faith "fundamental" to try to make [theology] systematic in that way. Hopefully, as German theology fades into the dusk, we will be through with [that] idea — where every German theologian has to overcome the last generation by having their own "doctrine" and "theology" identified by its difference from the previous generation's. I mean, that's state theology. German theology was able to be redone year after year because [theologians] were paid by the state and weren't responsive to the necessity of the actual living church. Of course, right now, as far as I can tell, the actual living church in Germany is pretty well gone. At least, my German friends tell me that's the case.

That's the reason why I like places like Conrad Grebel College — because you're dependent on actual congregations. I was once giving lectures at Bethel College when it was still in Oak Brook . . . and I said, "This is terrific!" Bethel being the only seminary of the Brethren in Christ, I said, "You guys can really see within ten years the results of your curriculum . . . I mean, what's really happening out there in the churches? Doesn't that frighten you? It makes you realize this is not a game."

Dale Brown said, "Yeah, it's pretty frightening." I say this because I'm not convinced that we know what we're doing in seminaries today in terms of the curriculum that was set primarily by Schleiermacher. Why is it that we teach Old Testament — of course we don't often teach Old Testament at Duke, we teach "Hebrew Bible," which makes sure that the seminarians that come through our courses in Hebrew Bible never preach on the Old Testament again. Why don't we just teach Christian scriptures? And why do we separate the study of Scripture from the Fathers? Why wouldn't a good way to learn Scripture be by reading Origen's commentary on Genesis? Why do we keep replicating these disciplinary divisions? Because that's how our Ph.D.s got structured. Whether that's good for the church or not is another matter, it seems to me, and those are the kinds of questions that we're trying to press at Duke.

For example, think about the very notion of "Christian ethics." Why

“Christian ethics”? We have Christian ethics because of the development of protestant liberalism that didn’t want to take Jesus that seriously but still wanted to talk about peace and justice. So we end up with various versions of Reinhold Niebuhr being taught as “Christian ethics.” It’s time to give those projects up as far as I’m concerned. Indeed, I think that we’re at a point where it’s very important that we teach a certain mode of forgetting. Every education depends upon forgetting, and we need to forget Reinhold Niebuhr. What is the most destructive book that has been written, the one that makes it very hard for Anabaptists to understand their own tradition? *Christ and Culture*. It ought to be burned! And of course I assume you’re for censorship, since I can’t imagine any serious intellectual tradition that doesn’t believe in censorship. Jews won’t let you read certain prophetic books when you’re too young, because it might invite mystical tendencies. I think those are exactly the kinds of decisions we need to make. You shouldn’t be able to read this book because you’re not ready to read it yet.

Theology is not a discipline that is for the training of people for the ministry. Theology is a discipline of the church, for all people in the church, for the formation of holy community. That seminaries have now been determined primarily as training people for the ministry seems to me to be a kind of overdetermination of what we should be about for the building of the church. For example, who do you write for? I try to write books that I think of as Sunday school literature for the laity of the Methodist church, God help them. Books like *Resident Aliens*. Will Willimon said he was going to make me famous, and he did when he and I wrote that little book together. He and I have also written a book on the Lord’s Prayer, and a book on the Ten Commandments. . . . Ministers in the Methodist church hate *Resident Aliens*, but the laity find it interesting. They say, for instance, “No one ever told us Christians were odd!” That’s terrific!

That also involves how you think about the genre of theology today. What genre should it take? Academic articles, of which I’ve written my fair share, are written mainly for other academics. It’s appropriate that we test our reflections among people who know what we know, because we can get away with murder if we don’t try to do that. But how to recover — for the church — the work we do as theologians whether in New Testament, Old Testament, or church history is one of the big challenges before us.

Questioner: I was thinking about what you said last night, imagining how that would be received — about the centrality of Christ and the distinctiveness of the church, the epistemological priority of the church, the onus being on the present age to justify itself to the church rather than the church justify itself to the present age — those kinds of remarks, politics being first about the church and secondly about the world. In the ideology of religious pluralism or religious relativism that we live in, we're encouraged to think theocentrically, not christocentrically, we're encouraged to think about the good of all humanity, common humanity. So the kind of statements that you're making would be unthinkable presumptuous and elitist and imperialistic — all that stuff. How do you respond to that kind of reaction?

Hauerwas: Yeah. You can't be arrogant enough today, is my opinion. Christian humility cannot help but appear — Christian humility which is the recognition of our sinfulness in the light of the cross — arrogant in the world in which we find ourselves, and what that means is that Christians today are in a constant battle of disciplining our speech in a manner that lets us locate the lies that speak us. Take, for example, the notion you just used of "common humanity." I don't believe in common humanity. I don't know what people are talking about when they talk about common humanity. The only notion that Christians have that we share a life in common is the life we share with God. That is, eschatologically, common humanity is the humanism of modernity that presupposes that we're all the same from a biological or evolutionary perspective. Common humanity from the Christian perspective is only known in the light of the eschatological hope of the kingdom of God.

How Christians can resist being seduced into the subtle humanisms of modernity is a constant battle. You take a word like "pluralism." America is always described as pluralistic. Pluralism is always the ideology of people who have won. It is the speech of those at Harvard or Chicago — "Well, we live in a pluralist world. We Christians can't go out there and talk about Jesus because we'll offend people." And I always say, "Oh. I thought you said it was pluralism. Why do Christians have to keep their mouths shut about Jesus if the Jews get to talk about the Torah, the Muslims get to talk about Allah?" Well, I'll tell you why. It's because pluralism is the ideology of those who think they're still winning and therefore keep their mouths shut about their particularities as a

way of controlling everyone else. If you go to Harvard, remember you're still being educated to run an empire. That's true of the Harvard Divinity School too. And so of course they want to be pluralist! What we live in is a world of, in MacIntyre's understanding, "fragments."

If you want to talk about pluralism, that's rabbis arguing Torah. That's real pluralism. Everything else is just shouting at one another. Of course, as Christians recover who we are, it will sound offensive to people. So what?

Yesterday in Toronto, [Donald] Wiebe — I've had several run-ins with him — asked about Christianity's relationship with other faiths, and I said, "Well, you know Judaism is really different, the relationship between Christianity and Judaism is really different. The relationship between Christianity and Islam is really different. I don't know what to make of Hinduism. It's different." And so Wiebe suddenly thought, "Oh, this is terrible. He's dumping on Hindus." No. I mean, what do I know about Hindus? It is a Constantinian project to presuppose that Christianity has to have a theory in which it will determine how to place all other faiths.

I gave the example of when I was down in Conway, Arkansas, a number of years ago, lecturing at Hendrix College, which is a little Methodist school down there, a very good school. After I finished my lecture, Jay MacDonald, who is a student of John Cobb, thought that what I had said was the worst thing he'd ever heard, and said to me, "Well, your problem, Hauerwas, is that you don't give us any theory in order to be able to talk with Buddhists." And I said, "Well, gee, Jay, I'm sorry. How many of them do you have here in Conway? And by the way, if you have some of them around here, what good would a theory do you? I'd just assume you'd go talk to them! [You'd ask,] 'What do you guys believe?'"

At Harvard, they say you can't go into the public arena without a theory of rights, a universal language that will give us translation possibilities away from particularities in a way that we can have some kind of co-operative arrangements. Have you ever tried to talk to a Muslim about rights? They don't know rights. They know Jesus, and they really know Mary. You can talk to a Muslim about Jesus and Mary, but they're not too high on rights. They understand that it's just the imperialistic ideology that the west wants to impose on them. We Christians have just got to get over this idea that somehow we're in control. We're not in control! What the Mennonites have been telling

us all of these years is true. We're not in control. We finally lost. We're free. This is terrific! Of course, there is appropriate etiquette of speech when you are trying to begin conversations with people with whom you're not familiar. Of course, and you don't want to just be stupid.

Questioner: Last night, you identified yourself very much as a Barthian, and you've also talked about the fact that you learned a great deal from John Yoder. A week ago, there was a symposium on the legacy of John Yoder at Notre Dame, and one of the papers presented there talked in appreciative terms about how Yoder's thought is very much apologetic, in that it takes its cue from the conversation. On the other hand, Barth — at least if I can remember from my reading of Barth, and especially his argument with people like Brunner and so on — believes that apologetics is the worst thing going. Sometimes, when I hear you talking now, you sound very much like you want to say, "Nein, nein, nein" all the time to anybody who wants to let the conversation partner determine the conversation. If you're still speaking on this basic point, can you tell us a little bit about where you come down on this? How missionary are you?

Hauerwas: I don't know. Yoder's "apologetics of conversation" was constitutive of his understanding of peace witness. It wasn't that he thought that he needed to, as the apologists thought, accept the questions of his interlocutor in order to have a conversation. It was rather he never knew where God and Christ would show up. So you need to listen. I think Barth's arguments against apologetics were basically arguments against Protestant liberalism that wanted to let the world determine the questions of which Jesus gets to be the answer. The Bonhoeffer quote that I gave last night that I like so much — that the resurrection is not an answer to the problem of death — that's anti-apologetics of the sort that Barth would encourage.

I think that Barth's enemies did not give him space, given the task before him, to say in what way the work he was doing might help the kind of response John was engaged in. But I don't think it would exclude it. Anyone who reads Barth's *Church Dogmatics* knows that when Barth gives you a paragraph on Nietzsche, which of course is forty pages long, there are few people more sympathetic and better interpreters of Nietzsche than Barth. That's

a kind of apologetics. Barth was often — and I engage in this, oftentimes — in what might be called “negative” apologetics. Namely, “If you go this route, let me show you where you’re going to end up.” Barth would do that. In terms of the kind of listening in which John was always involved, no one could be more vicious about Mennonite farm Constantinianism than John, but I think that he had a generosity of listening . . . that is really admirable.

I do apologetics. You take a book like *Suffering Presence*, where I say, in the Preface — but no one ever pays attention — that this is my form of natural law reasoning. What I do in that book is explore why we think we ought to be around people when they’re sick. Why do you think you ought to set aside a whole group of people, nurses and doctors, to do nothing but to be present to the ill when they can’t really do very much for them? Where do you get that? Now, I think it comes from the Christian commitment to provide hospitality to the dying. Just because you’re dying, we’re not going to let you die alone. We’re committed to being present to the dying. I think that gets corrupted in modernity to think the only way that we can be around the ill is to try to cure them, and then that absolutely destroys everyone. That’s a kind of apologetic argument, to say, “You know, I think you should take seriously Christian convictions constitutive of the practice to be around the dying, where we will be present to one another as we die.” I think that people who are not Christian will recognize themselves in those depictions because God created us to be that kind of people, not to abandon one another in death. That’s natural all the way down. *The Grain of the Universe* is an argument that is a kind of apologetic. . . . Those who work with the cross work with the grain of the universe. There is nothing more natural than that. That’s why people when they see it embodied in lives say, “That’s God!”

Questioner: I heard you mention several times what freedom is not. I would like your interpretation of what freedom is.

Hauerwas: Perfect obedience. Freedom is being made part of a way of life that makes it possible for me to finally claim my life as my own. The project of modernity is to produce people who believe they should have no story except the story they chose when they had no story. They call that freedom: producing people who believe they should have no story except the story they

chose when they had no story. And you can see how deeply that story has embedded itself in our lives if I asked you, “Do you think you ought to hold people responsible for decisions they made when they did not know what they were doing?” Most people do not think you ought to hold people responsible for decisions they made when they did not know what they were doing.

Of course, what that does is make marriage unintelligible. Because how would you ever know what you were doing when you got married? Even more, it makes unintelligible having children — you never get the ones you want. It’s those aspects of our lives that I’m trying to help us recognize. We Christians do not believe that we should have no story except the story we chose when we had no story. We’re creatures. We don’t get to make up our lives. We get to be people who discover the story that makes our lives intelligible. God’s creatures. And that is a hard and painful discipline, such rediscovery. That’s why we only become what we are to the extent that we recognize our lives are not our own, but are given. And that’s freedom.

Questioner: I wondered if when we criticize modernity, especially in anglophone North America, when we criticize the world, are we not really also criticizing ourselves?

Hauerwas: There is a book by Ephraim Radner — he is an Episcopal clergyman who did his work at Yale and is a convert from Judaism — which argues that almost all the arguments secularists use against Christians were first used by Catholics and Protestants against one another. It is a stunning book. It’s very hard to read; his style is convoluted. Even though I am an unapologetic Enlightenment and liberal basher, I actually believe that God gave us the Enlightenment as a judgment on the failure of Constantinian Christianity, and that this is a great new opportunity for us to recover the gift that is the church, to make us happy. I think Christians should be happy. I can’t imagine anything more wonderful than discovering that our lives matter to God.

I don’t bemoan our current malaise. I regard it as a great opportunity, and part of the great opportunity is this rediscovery. I said at the Yoder conference, God knows why God made some of us ecclesially homeless. When I call myself “a high-church Mennonite,” I really mean that I’m a Methodist, because I think that Methodism at its best is a free-church Catholic

tradition. I hope that what that means is at least God has made some of us ecclesially homeless today. I said at Notre Dame that I distrust the ecumenical movement because it ends up being denominational executives having negotiations about how to join headquarters without anyone losing their job. I don't find that terribly interesting. Of course, churches are able to discover they are quite similar because past differences, in the face of the challenges of the present, no longer matter. Think about "Free Will Baptist": you've got to make something out of "free will" as a mode of distinctiveness? So now churches emphasize their distinctiveness just enough to get their appropriate market shares in the buyer's market.

Hopefully, one of the things that God is using in this time is a rediscovery of the unity of the church, which I think comes by us getting to know one another, and for us to be locating one another. I don't have any right to claim Mennonites for my life, but I've been gratified to have Mennonites claim my life, and I hope what that also means is that you have to deal with the David Burells and the Mike Baxters, Roman Catholic priests, who were at the Yoder conference, who have been deeply shaped by your life. You have to be deeply shaped by their lives, and what that means as we go forward. There's no going back. People always ask me, "Why aren't you a Roman Catholic?" I do think that's a serious question. My own view is you need to stay with the people that harmed you. It's not easy if you're a Methodist.

In the last chapter of my Gifford Lectures, I hold up two witnesses — John Paul II and John Howard Yoder. I try to Yoderize the Pope, which is trying to show that John Paul II's Papacy has an extraordinary Christocentric character and that the Pope should be a pacifist. I then indicate that most people do not think the Pope and John Howard Yoder can get in the same body, but I can name a body that embodies them both, and that's Dorothy Day. Those are the kinds of hopeful judgments that I hope we can live into. I think God wants us to live into that kind of unity as Christians who will not kill one another.

Text, Music, and Meaning in Congregational Song

Kenneth R. Hull

The word “hymn” has traditionally been employed to denote the text of a congregational song. The music to which the words of the hymn are sung, on the other hand, has most commonly been called its “tune,” even though we usually mean by that not just an unaccompanied melody, but a melody harmonized with an additional three singable voices. We often read about the relationship between texts and tunes in terms of such questions as, “Does the tune fit the meaning of the hymn?”

It is instructive to reflect on what is implied by this question, and by the way the terms “hymn” and “tune” are used. This way of speaking about congregational song clearly privileges its textual (i.e., verbal) component, because the term “hymn” is applied to it, while the “tune” is subsidiary, “fitted” to the text. In fact the very word “tune” is minimizing, implying as it inaccurately does, an unaccompanied melody. The phrase “the meaning of the hymn” also seems simplistic. Poetic texts are commonly understood to have multiple layers of meaning. Critics and others who explicate one of these meanings are said to be offering a “reading” of the poem. To ask whether the tune fits the meaning of the hymn, then, not only privileges the text and minimizes the importance of the music, but also assigns to the hymn text an objective, informational character, rather than a more genuinely poetic, multilayered one.

Why has our language about congregational song been so biased in favor of the text? Probably because we have understood the meaning of the hymn to be situated exclusively in its text. The music to which hymn texts are sung has been understood as having an expressive character, certainly, for it is important that the music “fit” the tune not only metrically but also in terms of expression. The music of the hymn has also been seen as enhancing or deepening the meaning of the text, but not as contributing any element of

Kenneth R. Hull is Associate Professor of Music and Director of the Institute for Worship and the Arts at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, ON.

meaning distinctly its own. It is only recently that we have begun to ask whether the music of hymns might not contribute aspects of meaning not found in the text alone.

This question has been put most recently by David Cole in his essay, “Singing the faith.”¹ In it, he asks whether the meaning of a hymn is indeed carried primarily by the text, or whether it might not be that music not only brings additional meanings, but might even be the more dominant partner. “[I]s it,” he asks, “the words which give added meaning to the music, or the music which gives added meaning to the text, or does some other process come into play?” Later, he concludes that “in hymns we must take seriously the text, the music, *and* the new art form which comes from combining these two art forms.”

My purpose is to offer a model for understanding how the text and music of hymns interact with one another to produce meaning, the music by creating a *reading* (not just a “setting”) of the text, and the text by specifying a “hearing” of the music. Text and music each do this by providing a context within which the other is perceived and understood. The framework for the model I propose is adapted from the work of music theorist and critic Edward T. Cone, particularly his seminal book, *The Composer's Voice*.²

* * * * *

The Composer's Voice has been a foundational work for many scholars writing in the area of musical meaning and expression.³ Cone calls his book “a theory of musical utterance” — an answer to the question, “If music is a language, then who is speaking?” His answer to this question considers especially the genre of the art song, in which the words of a poet are set to music for solo voice and piano by a composer. Cone regards his work not as offering a theory of musical meaning, but rather as “prefatory to any theory of musical meaning or musical expression,” though it is probably true to say that such a theory of musical meaning is clearly implied throughout the text. In any case, Cone outlines the theory of musical meaning implicit in the main body of the book in a lengthy epilogue entitled “Utterance and Gesture.”

Music, unlike language, is non-referential; it has neither a single translatable meaning, in the denotative sense, nor multiple meanings in the

more connotative poetic sense. What music does share with language, however, is its gestural aspect — the dimension of language that relies on inflection and context to convey meaning. The word “Oh!,” for example, will be spoken in many different ways and convey as many different meanings depending on whether it is a response to — for example — the news of a death, an implausible excuse for not completing homework, the news that one’s daughter is pregnant, or finally figuring out why a circuit breaker keeps tripping. The context of the utterance will determine which gestural shape (and which meaning) is appropriate. It is this gestural aspect of utterance that is “simulated, and symbolized, by music.”

But the gestures of musical utterance remain only potentially expressive unless they have a context within which to resonate. The contexts of a musical gesture are two: the complete network of gestures which makes up the musical composition as a whole; and the context of human activity and experience which each listener brings to his or her encounter with the music, and which may also be at least partially provided as part of the musical work itself, as in the text of a song, or the program of a symphonic poem.

It is sung text which most directly provides a context for interpreting the expressive potential of the music. “When the gestures of the music are closely analogous to those implied by the words,” then the effect created is that “the music expresses the emotion, mood, activity, or attitude revealed by the text.” But the expressive potential of a piece of music is not limited to the interpretation suggested by a single text. Consider the strophic song (of which the hymn is of course an example):

The fact that a given musical setting can be applied to a number of different stanzas need not mean that the music is expressively neutral, since for any of the Schubert examples [or for any hymn tune] it would be easy to find stanzas that would fit metrically but would not work because of expressive disparity. What strophic song suggests is that a piece of music allows a wide but not unrestricted range of possible expression: this is what I call its expressive potential. A given text specifies one possibility, or at most a relatively narrow range of possibility, its verbal formulation providing the immediate context that renders the musical gestures emotionally, etc., expressive.⁴

The meaning of a song, then, “is not revealed by the words alone but by the quasi-metaphorical relation between the words and music.” Its expressive content “emerges from the mutual relations of words and musical gestures, and from the light they throw on each other. A song is thus a kind of metaphor, an equation whose significance consists, not in what it states about either of the two members, but in the coupling itself. . . .”

If it is true that various poetic stanzas set to the same music bring out different aspects of that music’s expressive potential (i.e., create different “hearings” of the music), it is also true that different music employed as the setting for the same poetic text will likewise produce various “readings” of the text. Of course, as Cone points out, there must be a sufficient degree of similarity between the expressive potential of the music and the potential readings of the poetic text for this process to take place. This might fail to occur either because the expressive character of text and music are too different from one another, or because the music is too neutral or weak in expressive character to evoke much of a reading at all.

Let us turn now to Cone’s theory of musical utterance itself. Briefly put, his view is that whereas “[i]n the poem, it is the poet who speaks . . . , [i]n the song, it is the composer who speaks, in part through the words of the poet.”⁵ When composing an art song, the composer does not “set” the poem itself, but rather “appropriates his own reading of a preexisting poem in order to use it as one component of a new work of art . . . [W]hat we then hear in the words is less the poet speaking than the composer through the poet.”⁶

Cone arrives at this formulation by what he calls a “dramatistic” analysis. When we read a poem, we understand it as being uttered by a poetic persona whose character may or may not closely resemble the poet himself. Composing a song involves the creation of at least two other personas: the vocal persona, portrayed by the singer and consisting of the poetic text set to the vocal line; and the complete musical persona (or “composer’s persona”), made up of vocal persona and accompaniment together. This distinction between vocal persona and complete musical persona is an important one, because the singer is provided with only some of the musical material. The accompaniment provides information about aspects of the vocal persona that may be outside that vocal persona’s awareness.

It follows from this analysis that “in most encounters between poetry

and music, poetry can become the more powerful of the two only by the intentional acquiescence or the unintentional incompetence of the composer.”⁷ One of the consequences of this reality is that a wonderful musical setting can redeem a mediocre poetic text. Brahms, for example, was notoriously drawn to weak poets, yet managed to create masterful songs using their poems as a starting point. The reverse, however, is not true: a great poem will seldom save a mediocre musical setting, but will be dragged down with it.

Cone’s analysis was undertaken especially with the art song of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in mind, beginning with Schubert, who was the first composer of genius to regard the poem as raw material for the creation of a new work of art. Before this time, the German art song, or *Lied*, had been dominated by another conception, one which prevented it from growing into a fully mature art form. This opposing view was championed by no less powerful and influential a figure than Goethe, himself the author of many lyric and narrative poems set to music by *Lied* composers. Goethe’s view was that the *Lied* should be text- rather than music-dominated, its poems set to simple, strophic music with optional accompaniment that disturbed the natural rhythms and inflections of the poetry as little as possible. His interest, in other words, was in having the poet’s persona continue to speak, in part through the music of the composer, rather than in providing poetic material from which the composer might create something fundamentally new. Among Goethe’s favourite *Lied* composers were C.F. Zelter and J.F. Reichardt — names whose pallid musical settings are little remembered today. Goethe had a low opinion of Beethoven’s settings of his texts, and returned a parcel of Schubert’s songs to the composer without comment.

So long as Goethe’s view of the *Lied* prevailed, composers of genius were not prepared to devote significant energies to it. The songs of Mozart, Haydn, and even Beethoven are among their lesser achievements (with the exception of Beethoven’s song-cycle “An die ferne Geliebte,” which attempted to combine elements of *Lied* style in individual songs with a more musically sophisticated overall structural design).⁸ It was Schubert more than anyone who redefined the *Lied* by his genius for lyric composition and his radically new approach to song composition.

Of course, there are significant differences between the mature art song and the congregational hymn. The art song is sung by a soloist to an audience;

the hymn is sung by a group, normally by all present — there is no passive audience. Hymns are addressed to someone or something, normally either to God, or to oneself or to other members of the congregation; art songs rarely have an actual addressee. In their traditional four-part texture, hymns do not require an instrumental accompaniment; if they do have one, it is normally simply a doubling of the four vocal lines, although an alternate harmonization or a descant may be added, especially for the final verse. In the art song, a fully developed accompaniment containing distinctive musical material is essential to create a larger musical context for the vocal line. Hymns must be rigidly strophic in both textual and musical structure; the structure of the art song is potentially more flexible, ranging from strophic to through-composed.

Two questions naturally arise in light of these differences between the hymn and the art song: How far can the insights of Cone's analysis be applied to hymnody? and, Is hymnody more like the earlier text-dominated conception of the *Lied* or the later music-dominated one?

Cone does actually make a few comments about hymns. He calls them an instance of "functional song," to which he believes his dramatisitic analysis does not apply. The reason he gives is that in hymns (and other functional song), the vocal persona is not a dramatic character, but "an aspect of the actual singer[s] at the time of singing. In functional song, the singer expresses himself directly as a member of a specific community."⁹ The implications of this observation for hymn singing, however, are perhaps more far-reaching than Cone takes note of. It means that the hymn, rather than being an aesthetic object, experienced at a certain critical distance by an audience, is identified with directly by the congregation, so that while they sing, the persona implied by the text and music is taken on by the singers. The singer imaginatively becomes the vocal persona. The singer's act of dramatic impersonation in the case of the art song is, in a hymn performance, undertaken by all. Whatever power the text and music have is amplified by being experienced "from the inside."¹⁰

But how much is the hymn like the mature art song? Is it closer in character to the best of Schubert's *Lieder*, in which the text is absorbed by the music in the service of creating a new art form? Or is it more like the worst of the early *Lieder*, in which the music is too neutral or too weak in expressive character to evoke much of a reading of the text at all?

The answer, perhaps unsurprisingly, is that the hymn occupies a space along a continuum somewhere between these two extremes. That space is itself something of a continuum, spanning relatively stronger and weaker hymn tunes. The difference between the early and the mature *Lied* lies primarily in the strength of its music. But even after the emergence of the art song as a mature musical genre, weak, unsuccessful songs continued to be written. The musical weakness of the early *Lied* was due not only to the “intentional acquiescence” of the composers to the text-dominated ideal, but also to their limited compositional gifts. Beginning with Schubert, great composers regarded the art song as a viable form, and contributed masterpieces of the genre to the repertoire. But although weak musical settings were unlikely now to be produced due to intentional acquiescence to the text-dominated conception, many were composed due to the limited talents of composers.

So too with hymn tunes: their musical strengths vary. Some are rather neutral expressively, but most are sufficiently strong to contribute significantly to a text-music complex that creates new meaning from the interaction of elements.

It must be admitted that in some respects, the hymn is like the early *Lied*: the music is rigidly strophic, the text setting is almost exclusively syllabic, and the accompaniment usually does not have a distinctive identity. But within the very real constraints of the hymn tune form, the repertoire of hymn tunes is stronger musically than that of the early *Lied*. The harmonic vocabulary is richer, the four-part texture is fuller, and the character of the repertoire is both more serious and more varied. The hymnic repertoire is also richer because it embraces so much wider a variety of styles, having been composed over a much longer period of time.

Another important difference between the repertoire of hymns and the art song, whether early or later, is that it consists of a body of texts and tunes, classifiable according to a relatively restricted number of metres, which can be combined in hundreds of ways. In effect, this “modular” aspect of hymns leaves part of the process of composition to the hymn-book editor, worship planner, or performer. The particular interaction of text and tune which makes up a given hymn is ultimately beyond the control of the poet and the composer. This characteristic of hymns might seem at first to be a weakness. If texts and tunes can be combined so freely, how musically strong could the tunes possibly be?

But a practical test demonstrates otherwise. Chose any hymn stanza in Common Meter (CM) and sing it to all the CM tunes found in a current denominational hymnal (probably 40 or 50 tunes). Most of them will be inappropriate. Frequently the tune will be obviously wrong for the text, sometimes hilariously so. But there will be at least a few and perhaps even as many as a dozen that produce a reasonable hymn. In other words, there is sufficient musical strength or character in most hymn tunes to prevent random combinations of texts and tunes.

Our common repertoire of hymn texts and tunes, then, as constituted by the aggregate of our various denominational hymn books, provides a laboratory for the testing of our model of how hymn texts and tunes act on each other to create a distinctive entity, the hymn. Many of the hymn texts in our common repertoire are sung to differing tunes in different denominational traditions. And many of them have become associated with a single tune that has been more or less universally adopted by the English-speaking church. But even where there is general agreement about the association of a particular text and tune, these associations are contingent, not necessary. Many of them may well represent the best possible union of text and available tune. But even in these cases, the singing of the text to that particular tune creates only one possible reading of the text. Other readings lie dormant in the text, waiting to be activated by a tune with different musical characteristics.

I want now to test the model I have been proposing on a well-known text, “Amazing Grace,” one that has come to be universally associated with a particular tune, *NEW BRITAIN*. The particular text is chosen pretty much at random, but also because the association of text and tune has become so deeply ingrained. Even in the case of such a familiar and well-loved hymn, different tunes create new readings of the text, provided we are able to set aside temporarily the familiar association of text and tune. One of the effects of always singing a hymn text to the same tune, especially if the text is one that has not, for the singer, had an independent existence as a poem, is that it becomes very difficult to experience the text apart from its musical associations. Because the familiar hymn tune creates a particular reading of the poem — in effect acting as a filter through which we hear the text — we have to make a conscious effort to “hear” the text apart from any music before we can “hear” it set to a variety of tunes.

* * * * *

Here is the text of “Amazing Grace” as it appears in most North American hymn books:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

This is not John Newton's original text, however, nor is it even all by Newton. The last stanza of this version originally appeared anonymously in a collection published in Richmond, Virginia, in 1790, and was not attached to “Amazing Grace” until 1910, in an American collection called *Coronation Hymns*.¹¹ In

the version printed above it replaces Newton's original two final stanzas:

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease:
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who called me here below,
Will be forever mine.

Time and familiarity have made the replacement stanza seem a natural conclusion to the poem. But a closer look reveals how different it is in tone, style, and perspective from the preceding stanzas. Newton's text is written in the first person singular: "I", "my" and "mine" appear frequently throughout. The transition to the anonymous stanza is awkward.¹² The new stanza's content is similar to the two stanzas it replaces, but the movement from "as long as life endures" to "When we've been there ten thousand years" requires the reader to infer where "there" is (and to adapt to being included suddenly in the shift from "I" to "we"). All of Newton's verses are carefully constructed in two halves, with a strong ABAB rhyme scheme. The added stanza, however, is a single statement that runs through the four lines, and only its second and fourth lines rhyme. There is also an internal rhyme in the third line ("days"/"praise") which has no parallel in Newton's text. Nor is the language of the anonymous stanza the equal of Newton's: it lacks both his strong syntax and colorful vocabulary.

The first stanza of the poem announces grace as its subject, contrasting the author's former state with his present one. The remainder of the poem is ordered chronologically. It speaks of the action of grace in the past, both before and after coming to belief (stanza 2), returns to the present (stanza 3), then turns to the future. Stanza 4 considers the remainder of the author's life on earth; the original stanza 5, the transition to life after death; and the sixth stanza, the final judgment. All of this is related from the perspective of the author's experience, either actual or imagined. The replacement stanza also

speaks of the experience of life after death, more in the manner of stanza 6 than of stanza 5.

In his discussion of Newton's hymn texts, J.R. Watson notes the poet's placement of crucial words at the ends of stanzas and half-stanzas, a device that is much in evidence here.¹³ Newton delights in the employment of multiple images, especially when he can juxtapose extreme or dissimilar ones: "'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved," "shield and portion," "dangers, toils and snares," "dissolve like snow"/"forbear to shine." Above all, Watson identifies what he calls Newton's "unabashed concentration

NEW BRITAIN

The musical score for 'New Britain' is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a bass line (bass clef). The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: '1. A - maz - ing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.'

NEW BRITAIN
8 6 8 6

Example 1

on the self” (285), by which he means his fascination with “a certain kind of religious experience” (286). This is a text that is not only written from the perspective of the first person singular, but which views even the most unimaginably cosmic events — the end of creation — through the filter of personal experience. By the time we reach the final stanza of Newton’s original text, this orientation has become almost bizarre in its self-centeredness. Perhaps it was a sense that the juxtapositions of Newton’s last stanza were too extreme that contributed to its being replaced by the anonymous “wandering stanza” now commonly sung.

Like many hymn texts, “Amazing Grace” has become almost universally associated with a particular tune. NEW BRITAIN, shown in Example 1, probably originated as a folk tune, and was first published in 1829. It first appeared as the setting for “Amazing Grace” in William Walker’s *Southern Harmony*, in 1835 (with all six of Newton’s original stanzas). The tune is pentatonic, and the effect of this on contemporary singers and listeners, as with many such tunes, is a slightly rugged and primitive one. Because of this, it is well-suited to texts whose language is strong and direct.

Harmonizations of this tune vary somewhat from hymnal to hymnal, but are generally limited to four or five chords, and have a slow harmonic rhythm, with two or three measures of uninterrupted tonic in a few places. The tune is in triple meter, with an almost unvarying rhythm of $\text{♩} \mid \text{♩}$, occasionally modified to $\text{♩♩} \mid \text{♩}$ or $\text{♩} \text{♩♩} \mid \text{♩}$.

This rhythm has a couple of effects on the text. One is to create the simplest possible declamatory rhythm, with half notes falling consistently on stressed syllables: “a-MA-zing GRACE, how SWEET the SOUND. . . .” The other is to allow the singer to savor each of the stressed syllables as it goes by: “grace,” “sweet,” “saved,” “found,” “see. . . .”

David Douglas has written that to sing this text to NEW BRITAIN is to experience “the comfort of salvation,”¹⁴ and many of the characteristics of this tune invite just this experience. The uninterrupted rocking rhythm of the tune suggests security, predictability, a kind of luxurious warmth.

Moving from the level of individual measures to the phrase, we see that three of the four phrases begin identically (1, 2 and 4), and that the fourth phrase is an abbreviated version of the first: the comfort of predictable repetition

is here as well. Three of the four phrases (1, 3 and 4) are arch-shaped, each beginning with an energetic upwards movement, and then settling more gently down onto a cadence. The second phrase departs from this pattern by ending on a high C rather than low one, imbuing this phrase with a sense of exultation the others lack. Finally, this high ending of the second phrase helps to create an overall arch shape for the entire tune, with its highest notes occurring in the middle two of the four phrases, and the outer two phrases peaking a third lower.

The cumulative effect of these rhythms and melodic shapes is oceanic, with the regular lapping of measure-long rhythms subsumed into the larger crests of the phrases, and these in turn parts of a yet larger swell. For the singer, the tune is unchallenging: smooth, uncomplicated, regular and symmetrical in construction, phrases requiring the most breath at their beginnings when most breath is available, and tapering off nicely as the breath itself wanes. It is a sensual pleasure to sing this tune.

What kind of reading does the interaction of this particular tune with this particular text create? The subject of the text is the personal experience of salvation, and the qualities of the tune certainly allow those personal and experiential dimensions to come through. In the first stanza, the words “sweet,” “found,” and “see” come particularly alive, while “wretch” and even “amazing” seem softened. The singer seems to sing from a place of security, warmth, absolute assurance. Life before encountering grace is mentioned, but not recalled in either feeling or imagination. The spaciousness of the tune, the ease with which its first, third, and fourth phrases descend stepwise to their cadences makes the phrases “as long as life endures” and “grace will lead me home” seem very real. The text and tune seem less well suited to each other in the final (replacement) stanza. Here the words seem to call for some sort of intensification, perhaps because of the change of perspective to collective activity — this is the first time the text speaks of the singer actually doing something. Perhaps it is this shift of tone which has probably led to the frequently encountered practice of singing the final stanza up a semitone.

So, there is good reason for this text and tune to have become so closely linked with one another. *NEW BRITAIN* captures something essential about “Amazing Grace” — probably its most essential feature — that “certain kind of religious experience,” the comfort and assurance of personal salvation

which Newton juxtaposes with past, present, and future circumstances in almost every stanza of his text. But even here, where text and tune seem so perfectly “matched,” the interaction of the text with other tunes produces other possible readings of the poem.

My purpose here is not a practical one — the tunes we are about to look at are not likely to be used as alternatives to NEW BRITAIN in congregational singing. For one thing, the associations both with the text and with some of the tunes I will suggest are too strong for most people to adjust easily to a change of tune. The reader will need to do his or her best to set aside pre-existing associations with these tunes. Nor am I necessarily suggesting that these alternative tunes are equally successful settings for “Amazing Grace.” NEW BRITAIN will probably never be surpassed in that regard. But as we have seen, no single tune can capture all of the possible connotations of a text, and other readings are bound to emerge as we consider alternative tunes.

So let us turn now to another very familiar and popular tune, ANTIOCH, sung universally to the text, “Joy to the World!” Lowell Mason composed ANTIOCH in Handelian style, claiming only to be the “arranger” of certain short phrases from *Messiah*, though this claim is too modest. Although it was first published at about the same time (1836) as NEW BRITAIN, it is an example of very different musical style and aims. ANTIOCH is an exuberant tune with a strong rhythmic character, elementary harmony (I-IV-V), and a rather uninteresting melodic outline. Its structure is irregular: it is classified as “CM with repeat” rather than simply “CM” (like both “Amazing Grace” and NEW BRITAIN) because of multiple repetitions of the fourth and final line of each stanza:

Joy to the world! The Lord is come:
 Let earth receive her King;
 Let every heart prepare him room,
 And heaven and nature sing,
 And heaven and nature sing,
 And heaven,
 And heaven and nature sing.

Or, if we include the dialogue between women’s and men’s voices in the second half of the tune:

ANTIOCH

5. When we've been there ten thou - sand years, bright shin - ing
as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's
praise than when we'd first be - gun, than when we'd
first be - gun, than when, than when we'd first be - gun

CM with repeat
ANTIOCH

Example 2

Joy to the world! The Lord is come:
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
 (And heaven and nature sing)
And heaven and nature sing,
 (And heaven and nature sing)
And heaven,
And heaven and nature sing.

These repetitions strongly emphasize the final line of each stanza. As shown in Example 2, the repetition works well for most of the stanzas of “Amazing Grace,” either because the final line expresses the central idea of the stanza, or because, given the psalm-like parallelisms Newton typically employs, the last line captures the sense of the entire stanza.

But more than just adding emphasis, the repetitions built into the tune are an expression of joyful exuberance. The repetitions aren’t textually necessary: they are there for the pleasure of singing them, and because the joy of the singer is too full to be contained by a regular CM structure. It is as if the tune simply cannot contain itself.

The dialogue between women’s and men’s voices is part of this mood of celebration, and creates the sense of a community interaction. So it is the final (added) stanza that benefits most from being sung to this music, because the poetic voice is now “we,” not “I,” and also because the tune illustrates the text so aptly: “We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise,” and so we sing the words “than when we’d first begun” over and over. Singing God’s praise is the culminating activity of both the song and our life, the end for which we were created. (Incidentally, the musical repetition at measures 8-11 nicely parallels the internal rhyme “days”/“praise” of line 3 of the last stanza).

The rhythmic style of the first part of the tune is declamatory and emphatic, a style that returns briefly in the closing measures of the tune. The melody in these places is made up mainly of descending scales, in imitation of a peal of bells, a sound associated with festive celebration. The harmonic vocabulary is the simplest possible — I, IV, and V — and the harmonic rhythm is slow: one change per measure in the opening seven measures, and then slower, with as many as six successive measures of tonic harmony during

the antiphonal section. The overall character of the music, then, is jubilant: extrovert, joyous, unreflective. Its expressive character has very little in common with *NEW BRITAIN*. How does a tune like this interact with the text?

Hymn tunes are typically 16 to 32 measures long, too short to accommodate internal contrast. They have a homogenous texture and therefore a single expressive character from beginning to end. This musical character acts like a lens or filter through which the text is experienced, amplifying certain words and phrases, muting the effect of others. Where *NEW BRITAIN* tends to amplify words that express sensory experience, like “sweet,” or to invite us to experience sensory associations of words, like “precious” and “home,” *ANTIOCH* adds no special flavor to these words. Instead, *ANTIOCH*’s enthusiastic rejoicing is more attuned to phrases that describe actions: “saved a wretch like me,” and “grace my fears relieved,” for example.

A hymn tune’s musical character also creates or implies an experiential state from which the words are being sung, and within which they are entered into imaginatively by the singer. The singer participates imaginatively in the subjective space created by the tune and experiences the text from within that space. Of course, there must be sufficient congruity between the meanings expressed by the text and the subjective space implied by the tune in order for meaningful interaction between the two to take place. We have already noted that the character of *ANTIOCH* may be described with words like “jubilant,” “extroverted,” “unreflective,” “enthusiastic,” and “declamatory.” How does a subjective state described by these sorts of adjectives interact with the text of “Amazing Grace”?

We might imagine that the person singing these words to this particular tune is closer in time to the life-changing experience of grace than the singer of *NEW BRITAIN*. Where the singer of *NEW BRITAIN* seems to have had time to absorb and integrate the significance of grace in his life, the singer of *ANTIOCH* still seems overwhelmed with excitement and even some incredulity at the newness of the experience. In this he is perhaps closer to the man born blind of John 9:25 to whom Newton alludes: “He answered, ‘I do not know whether he [Jesus] is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’” The way the juxtaposition of opposites of the first stanza is expressed in the music creates the impression that the singer is trying to convince himself, and can do little more than to repeat what he knows must be true, but seems

too wonderful to be grasped: “I once was lost/but now am found,” set to the same phrase of music accompanying the parallel syntax, thereby heightening the opposition of meaning of the two text phrases; and the delirious repetition of:

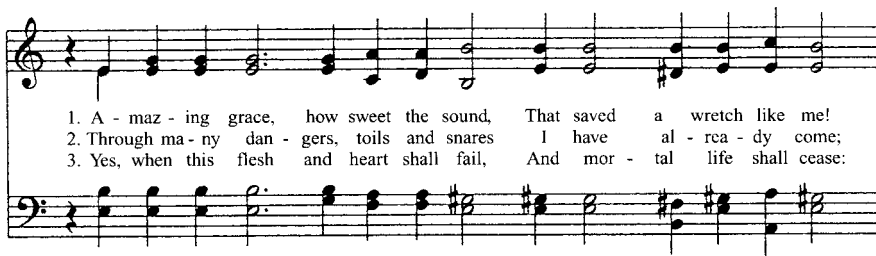
Was blind but now I see,
 (Was blind but now I see)
 Was blind but now I see,
 (Was blind but now I see)
 Was blind,
 Was blind but now I see,

with emphasis given to the last three words by the return of the more declamatory rhythm of the first measures of the tune. ANTIOCH also seems to imply a more social context than NEW BRITAIN, in part for the reasons already mentioned above, but also because of its extroverted, declamatory style. NEW BRITAIN is more ruminative, and could well be heard as being sung to oneself. But ANTIOCH is bursting with good news, as if the story must be told, and not only told, but heard as well.

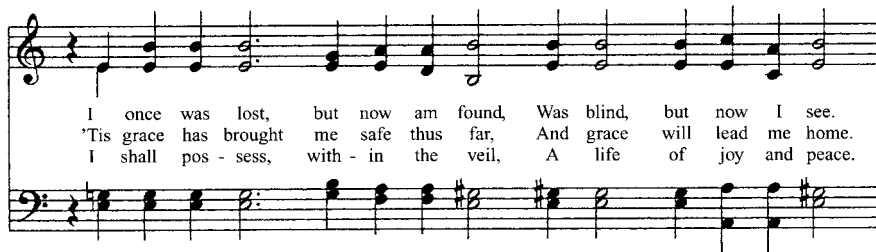
In Example 3 we find a sixteenth-century tune by the great English composer Thomas Tallis, one of nine he wrote to accompany Matthew Parker’s *The Whole Psalter Translated into English Metre* of c.1567. It is not a CM tune but CMD (Common Meter Double), and therefore requires an even number of four-line stanzas to fill out the music. Accordingly, we will consider it with Newton’s original six stanzas, rather than with the added stanza, which in any case does not suit the tune as well.

The tune is a modal one, on E, with an unstable third scale degree that oscillates between Gn and G#. While it has a steady pulse, its meter is irregular; the only bar lines occur at the end of lines of music (that is, after every two lines of text). The harmonic rhythm is slow, usually with several quarter-note beats per chord. Chords on E are held the longest, sometimes e-g-b, and sometimes e-g#-b, because of the changeable third degree of the modal scale. The two halves of the tune are somewhat different in character. The first two lines create a rather static effect: most of the melody notes are repeated several times, and the movement is primarily stepwise around B, which serves almost as a reciting tone. The range is only a sixth, and the harmony is mostly a triad on E. The second line is an almost exact repetition of the first. In its second half, the tune becomes more animated: the range expands to a ninth, repeated

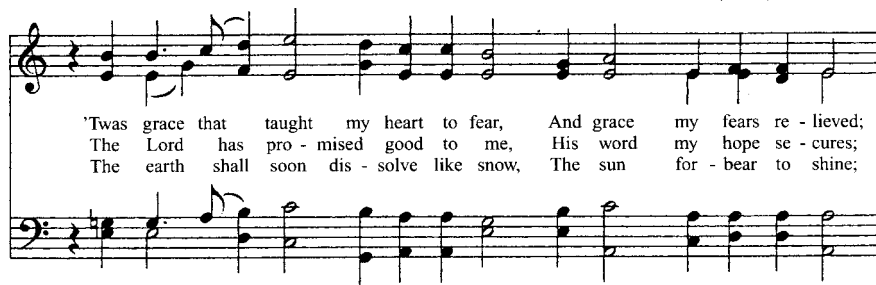
THE THIRD TUNE



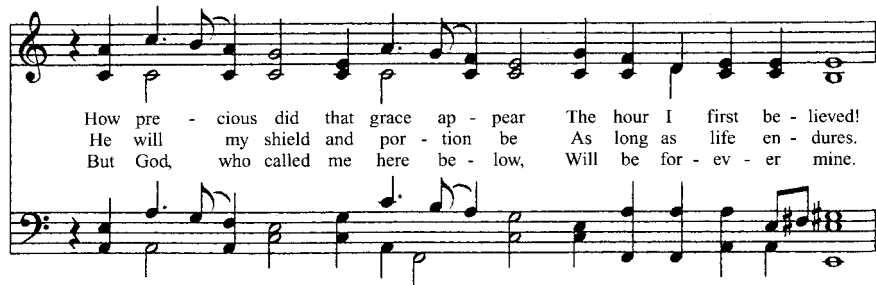
1. A - maz - ing grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me!
 2. Through ma - ny dan - gers, toils and snares I have al - rca - dy come;
 3. Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail, And mor - tal life shall cease:



I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.
 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.
 I shall pos - sess, with - in the veil, A life of joy and peace.



'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears re - lieved;
 The Lord has pro - mised good to me, His word my hope se - cures;
 The earth shall soon dis - solve like snow, The sun for - bear to shine;



How pre - cious did that grace ap - pear The hour I first be - lieved!
 He will my shield and por - tion be As long as life en - dures.
 But God, who called me here be - low, Will be for - ev - er mine.

notes are fewer, harmony is more varied. There are a few dotted rhythms, and a short sequence at the beginning of the last line. The last two lines are dissimilar from one another. The third line rises to an early climax on E, the high point of the entire tune, and moves gradually down through an octave to a cadence on the lower E. The last line begins with a descending sequence and again cadences on the lower E.

This music has a static, somewhat floating quality that is created by a number of features: the absence of regular meter, repeated notes and chords, and the modal flavor with its G \flat /G \sharp instability. Affectively, these features produce an expression of awe or mystery. The absence of a strong meter, particularly, so unlike the other two settings, creates a sense of other-worldliness that contrasts with the strongly embodied character of *NEW BRITAIN* and *ANTIOCH*. Accordingly, the music de-emphasizes what is so strongly present in the other settings, the experience of grace. Instead, singing “Amazing Grace” to *THE THIRD TUNE* invites contemplation of grace itself: awesome, a mystery, “amazing” in the traditional sense. Sung to this music, the first person singular language of the poetry is humbled and the sense is almost of unworthiness. Instead of singing about grace as experienced within a human frame of reference, we find ourselves considering the paradox of the unfathomable mystery of God’s grace as an unknowable spiritual reality. The further the text moves forward in its description of the grace’s gifts to me, the deeper the experience of awe becomes. Who am I to receive such lavish generosity?

The first stanza is sung to the more subdued first half of the tune. Beneath the tune, the shift between G \flat and G \sharp delicately underscores the oppositions between lost and found, blindness and sight. The tune expands into its second half for the second stanza. The climactic phrase accompanies the words, “’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,” while the music to the answering text phrase “and grace my fears relieved” is much less intense, illustrating something of the experience of these two processes. Then the more lyrical sequence at the beginning of the last line of music adds a poignancy to the lines, “How precious did that grace appear.”

Of course, the same succession of musical gestures undergirds verses 3 and 4, and 5 and 6. We will note only the aptness of the music that accompanies Newton’s sixth and final stanza. In this instance, the intensity and relaxation of the third line of music heightens the apocalyptic lines, “The earth shall soon

dissolve like snow, the sun forbear to shine,” while the sweeter character of the sequence that follows is associated with, “But God, who called me here below, will be forever mine.” The otherworldliness of the music suggests that I will be as much possessed by God as God will by me. (Contrast this with the more mundane sense of possession implied by *NEW BRITAIN*.)

Finally, we turn to Example 4, a Scottish psalter tune, *LONDON NEW*, first published in 1635, in the century after *THE THIRD TUNE*. Like *NEW BRITAIN*, it is a straightforward CM tune, most closely associated with another text from *Olney Hymns*, “God Moves in a Mysterious Way,” by Newton’s collaborator William Cowper. *LONDON NEW* illustrates the effect of a tune of more neutral expressive character than those we have been considering, one that has a

LONDON NEW

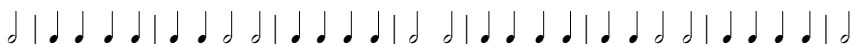
1. A - maz - ing grace, how sweet the sound, that
saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but
now am found, was blind, but now I see.

Example 4

CM
LONDON NEW

weaker impact on its poetic text.

This relative weakness is not so much a characteristic of the tune itself as it is of the Scottish psalm-tune genre, at least in the form in which it is represented in contemporary hymnals. For one thing, tunes of this type tend to resemble one another. Substituting the tune DUNFERMLINE or CAITHNESS for DUNDEE will have a minimal impact on whatever text it accompanies. But this in itself does not mean these tunes are musically weak — a pair of identical twins may each be beautiful; the fact that there are two of them does not diminish their individual beauty. Rather, it is the fact that their similarity to one another arises from their identical and uninteresting rhythm, whether in the versions with “gathering” notes at the beginning of each phrase:



or without:



This rhythmic strait-jacketing (which was not a feature of most of these tunes in their earliest recorded versions), assists unaccompanied ensemble singing, but is both dull and predictable. While the best of these tunes exhibit great variety and beauty in their melodic construction, their rhythmic monotony seems to inhibit significantly their ability to infuse their texts with much energy. If anything, their steady and even rhythmic motion tends to focus attention on the words themselves.

As an example of the Scottish psalm tune, LONDON NEW is remarkable for its movement primarily by leap, and leaps of all sizes: ascending and descending 2nds, 3rds, 4ths, and 6ths, and ascending 5ths. Three of its four phrases span an octave, while its third phrase moves in smaller intervals in the upper half of the tune’s range. The melodic intervals tend to alternate direction — up, down, up, down. The shape of the tune this movement creates is unusual, rugged and jagged, and requires energy to sing. (It is easy to imagine that it was this aspect of the tune that suggested its association with “God moves in a mysterious way.”) Here, for the first time, we have a tune with a fast harmonic rhythm, a change of harmony with almost every melody note. The effect of such a harmonic rhythm is to give weight to each note, and to suggest a slower tempo than a tune with a slower harmonic rhythm. The tune

does not so much move fluidly through the lines of text as weigh each syllable carefully.

So the rhythmic flatness of the Scottish psalm tune style is counteracted to some extent by the angular movement of the melody. But this tune is much less an expression of feeling associated with some aspect of the text, and more an invitation to take in the words as poetic text — an effect more like the earlier art song, in fact.

What LONDON NEW does bring to the text of “Amazing Grace” is a sense of travel, of journey. “I once was lost but now am found,” and “Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come; ’tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will bring me home” — these are phrases that seem to be directly illustrated by the contours of this angular tune. In this version of the hymn, the singer is still in the midst of an active journey, and grace is leading him from somewhere on ahead. We have exchanged the warmth and comfort of NEW BRITAIN, whose impact on the text creates more of a focus on the end of the journey, for the vigor and strength of a journey still in progress.¹⁵

Conclusion

The influence of music — even relatively weak music — on how the text it accompanies is perceived and understood is inescapable. When we experience a text only in association with a particular musical setting, we may be utterly unaware of how the music shapes and delimits our perception of it. But the filtering effect of the musical setting is nonetheless present, probably most powerfully in precisely those cases where the text has come to be associated with a single musical setting. Having more than one musical option for singing a text means that the poetry has not become so thoroughly fused by familiarity with a particular tune.

A hymn, then, is neither text nor tune alone, but the product of the reciprocal interaction of text and tune on one another. We need to think of the hymn text more like an opera libretto or a screenplay — the foundational component for the creation of a larger work of art, but one which does not and cannot remain inert, impervious to dynamic interaction with the other media that contribute to the total finished work.

Thinking of hymns in this way has a number of both practical and theoretical consequences. I can do little more than enumerate them here. One

of the significant practical consequences of thinking of hymns in this way lies in the area of worship planning. In recent decades, the biblical index has become an essential part of the denominational hymn book, permitting the selection of hymns to be sung on a given Sunday to be coordinated more closely with the lections of the day. This is certainly a good and important development. But as we have seen, a congregation does not experience these words directly, but as interpreted through the medium of the musical setting. Worship planners need to attend to the reading of the hymn text which will be received by the congregation, not just the text in isolation.

We have explored how the contextualizing effect that text and music have on one another in congregational hymns creates new meaning. But of course this is not the whole story. The reading created by the interaction of a text and tune is not experienced in a vacuum, but within liturgical, cultural, social, and other larger contexts, each of which modifies how we perceive and understand the musical-textual reading. For example, the placement of a hymn (or any other musical or textual item) within the liturgical structure will affect how it is heard. Whether “Amazing Grace” is sung at the beginning of a service, as a response to a reading, or during communion will have an influence on the total meaning of the hymn as experienced by the congregation. The nature of the service itself can also create a powerful context which colors how we understand the meaning of a congregational song. To sing “Amazing Grace” at a baptism, a funeral, or a regular Sunday service — each of these experiences will differ considerably from one another.

It is not only hymn texts but any liturgical text whose meaning will be affected by its musical setting. Indeed, where a text is more general in content and more familiar to the singer from routine repetition (e.g., “Lord have mercy,” “Holy, holy”), the role of music in creating meaning will be so much greater, the experience of the text much more about the expressive character of the music. Our perception even of purely instrumental music is guided by the liturgical context in which we hear it, for, as Cone observes, an accompanying text is only one way of specifying a “context of human experience and activity.” The very fact that a piece of music — whether texted or not — is heard in the context of worship and not in the concert hall already limits and directs the range of human experience and activity which will be brought to bear on the experience of the music.

The meanings created by the texts and music of our worship do not only express the spirituality of a congregation; they form it as well.¹⁶ We readily recognize the formative power of the texts we use in worship, carefully weighing the pastoral appropriateness of the words we chose, testing affirmations of faith for theological correctness. The formative power of music is less often considered, and yet is potentially much stronger than that of the text. Music is a non-rational, non-verbal medium. It is perceived with a sensual and imaginative immediacy that penetrates more readily to the deeper layers of mind and spirit, more easily slipping past the critical, judging function that words are naturally subject to. And it is music that guides and shapes our perception of those textual meanings whose appropriateness we take so much care over. How much more consideration might we give to this potent agent of meaning, not only in our hymns, but in every aspect of our worship?

Notes

¹ David Cole, "Singing the faith," *The Hymn* 51:3 (July 2000), 24-27.

² Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

³ In 1989, on the fifteenth anniversary of its publication, a session of six papers responding to the book was held at the annual meeting of the College Music Society. These were published, together with Cone's response, in *College Music Symposium* 29 (1989).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 166-67.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸ See Joseph Kerman, "An die ferne Geliebte," *Beethoven Studies 1*, ed. Alan Tyson (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 123-57.

⁹ Cone, *The Composer's Voice*, 49.

¹⁰ Philip H. Pfatteicher has also noted this dimension of the experience of hymn-singing. See his "Hymns in the Life of the Church," *Cross Accent* 2 (July 1993): 7-15, esp. 8 and 15.

¹¹ *Psalter Hymnal Handbook*, ed. Emily R. Brink and Bert Polman (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1998), 628. The added verse is an example of "a 'wandering' stanza in CM that appears at the end of a variety of hymns in nineteenth-century hymnals." (*The Hymnal 1982 Companion*, ed. Raymond F. Glover, vol. 3B [New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1994], 671).

¹² In some recent hymnals, the order of verses 3 and 4 is reversed to ease the transition.

¹³ J.R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 282-88.

¹⁴ David Douglas, "Amazing Grace: A Journey in Time and Faith," *The Hymn* 49:3 (July 1998), 12.

¹⁵ In the context of considering the steady rhythmic character of this tune, it is interesting to look briefly at St. PETER, not a Scottish psalm tune, but an early nineteenth-century English tune. It also moves in even quarter notes (like the second rhythm given above) and has a fast harmonic rhythm, though it is much smoother and stepwise in melodic motion. The text to which it usually joined, "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds," is also by John Newton, and shares features with "Amazing Grace": the image of "sweet sound" in the first stanza, and the "unabashed concentration on the self." But it is much easier to imagine singing it to NEW BRITAIN than it is singing "Amazing Grace" to St. PETER.

¹⁶ See, for example, Edward Foley, "Musical forms, referential meaning, and belief," *Ritual Music: Studies in Liturgical Musicology* (Beltsville, MD, 1995), 145-72; Don E. Saliers, "Liturgical musical formation," *Liturgy and Music: Lifetime Learning*, ed. Robin A. Leaver and Joyce Ann Zimmerman (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 384-94; and Saliers, "Sound spirituality: on the formative expressive power of music for Christian spirituality," *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 8:1 (Spring/Summer 2000): 1, 3-5.

This article also appeared in the January 2002 issue of The Hymn, published by The Hymn Society, and is reprinted here with The Society's permission. For information on The Hymn Society in the U.S. and Canada, phone 1-800-THE-HYMN, write to hymnsoc@bu.edu, or visit www.hymnsociety.org.

Stanley Hauerwas. *The Hauerwas Reader: Stanley Hauerwas*. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, eds. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.

Stanley Hauerwas is a provocative, prolific Christian ethicist whose dozens of books and hundreds of scholarly articles range over a variety of topics. Most of his published work is in the form of the occasional essay, in which he tries to argue for and display a new language for the church and for Christian ethics. The ad hoc character of much of his work is indicative of his view that theology is an ongoing practice of the church, explicating what the church thinks and does, and is thus of a piece with the messiness of actual church life. By contrast, a desire for comprehensiveness is the legacy of a Christian ethics that mistakenly thinks itself responsible for American society. The nature of Hauerwas's project and the volume of his work make the "reader" format especially welcome.

The first of this book's three main parts, "Editorial Introductions," contains an engaging biographical essay by William Cavanaugh. This "Thoroughly Biased Account of a Completely Unobjective Person" offers a starting point for gaining a sense of the accent in which Hauerwas's essays speak.

The second section, "Reframing Theological Ethics," includes eighteen essays organized under the categories of the Christian story, the nature of Christian discipleship, and examples of Christian discipleship. The story in need of reframing is that of a Christian faith that seeks to provide a general account of ethics which any reasonable nonreligious person can accept and thus form a basis for American political life. Hauerwas's reframing, drawing from John Howard Yoder, begins with the church as the community formed by the story of God's saving action and marked by distinct practices. The life of this community is a new language which forms people to hear God's word rightly, be truthful, negotiate specific social issues, and display a real Christian difference.

The third section, "New Intersections in Theological Ethics," explores what this ecclesial reframing means for social ethics or "public theology" and medical ethics. Eight essays address topics such as war, American democracy, and sex. In one fascinating essay, "Should War Be Eliminated? A Thought Experiment," Hauerwas considers the ambivalence towards both just war and

pacifism displayed in a statement by U.S. Catholic bishops. Since a particular morality is already implied by naming some violence “war,” Hauerwas presents a strong case for war based on cooperation in pursuit of social goals over individual ones which is nearly incompatible with the bishops’ simultaneous assertion of peace and nonviolence as the ideal form of human relations. This serious interrogation of common but inconsistent moral assumptions juxtaposed with the radical social-political dimensions of the Christian faith — in this case that the elimination of war is a false issue because “war has been eliminated for those who participate in God’s history” (424) — is typical of essays collected here. The final five essays suggest that “given the particular demands put on those who care for the ill, something very much like a church is necessary to sustain that care” (548). This provides a way of talking Christianly about suffering, abortion, and euthanasia, and about how to be a patient in ways that a mechanized view of medicine as purely instrumental or as a new savior fails to do.

This exceptionally well-organized book makes good use of the “reader” format, such as a selected annotated bibliography and a “how to read the author” essay. The lamentable but necessary exclusion of frequent Hauerwas topics, such as the university, friendship, post-modernity, race, gender, John H. Yoder, and Alasdair MacIntyre, preserves the book’s thematic unity. The reader also sees how Hauerwas’s thought has changed over thirty years, moving from categories of narrative, character, and virtue to more particular reflection on church practice. Demonstrating the perpetually unfinished nature of this project, some essays have been clarified, shortened or consist in the author’s conversation with earlier work. As “an entryway into Hauerwas’s thought for theologians and graduate students in theology and ethics” (6) with special attention to undergraduates and seminarians without extensive theological training, this volume will serve its intended audience admirably. I recommend it also for serious study groups, although its length (729 pages) may call for occasional rather than comprehensive use.

Jeremy M. Bergen, Toronto School of Theology

Timothy J. Geddert. *Mark. Believers Church Bible Commentary*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001.

Timothy Geddert has contributed an outstanding commentary to the Believers Church Bible Commentary series. He begins with a brief introduction discussing the nature of the gospel of Mark, questions of authorship, date, provenance, basic theology, reception of the gospel in the church, and his own approach to the gospel's interpretation. While acknowledging the usefulness of a wide variety of critical methodologies, he sees Mark as a highly creative, carefully constructed narrative employing various literary devices (chiasm, intercalation, etc.), and suggests that "literary criticism and reader-response criticism contribute most directly in helping readers interpret the message of Mark" (23). He reminds readers of things Mark presumed his audience would understand, highlighting Old Testament and first-century Greco-Roman backgrounds and customs, and explaining the meaning of Greek words and grammar.

Geddert sees the gospel divided into two main sections: "Ministry In and Around Galilee" (1:1-8:26) and "Journey to Jerusalem, the Cross, and Beyond" (8:27-16:8). An overview at the beginning of each section is followed by a detailed treatment of individual units found there. For example, Geddert's treatment of Mark 13 begins with a preview recalling the development of the narrative so far and significant thematic emphases, and setting forth his understanding of the unit now under consideration. Geddert argues that this chapter is not about "signs and timetables" but "about discernment, not being fooled by people with timetables and signs" (300). It is about the familiar Markan themes of discernment, discipleship, Christology, passion, and the temple. If these themes are kept central, the chapter appears to be "an integral part of Mark's good news and of his challenge to follow Jesus" (300).

An outline of the section under examination is followed by explanatory notes. Noting that chapter 13 is filled with ambiguities (e.g., "the desolating sacrilege") that have "proved extremely difficult" for interpreters, Geddert suggests that "Mark has deliberately created or incorporated virtually all the ambiguities that many interpreters are aiming to eliminate," so that faithful interpretation "does not mean getting rid of the ambiguity but understanding why it is there and what roles it plays" (302). He gives attention to major exegetical and interpretive issues, acknowledges interpretive options, and sets

forth his own conclusions (301-20). Geddert's conclusions will not satisfy everyone, but they are well-reasoned and make sense in the developing Markan narrative.

"The Text in the Biblical Context" presents succinct, suggestive discussions of issues such as "The Prophetic Perspective" and "The Four Watches of the Passion Night," an often overlooked feature which dramatically contrasts Jesus' faithfulness and the disciples' unfaithfulness. Finally, "The Text in the Life of the Church" discusses significant issues for the church today (e.g., "Mark 13 and Popular Eschatology"). A full outline is followed by helpful essays ("Kingdom of God in Mark," etc.), an extensive and cosmopolitan bibliography, and an annotated list of selective resources.

Geddert notes connections often overlooked, is quick to point out popular interpretations that go beyond the text, and highlights contributions of the believers church tradition to the understanding of the text, while recognizing shortcomings in this tradition suggested by others. Geddert has immersed himself in the Markan text. His approach is refreshing and revealing, a skillful and effective blending of the scholarly (in a non-technical way) and the devotional. He approaches the text with humility, inviting the reader to join him in listening carefully to Mark's message. I recommend this commentary highly to pastors and teachers and to anyone wanting to engage in a serious, compelling study of Mark's gospel.

William Hulitt Gloer, George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Waco, Texas

Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World: A History of North American Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2002.

The author's aim is "to provide a broad outline of the major events, developments, and occurrences in the history of the Christian churches" and "to highlight some of the most important interpretive issues in the transfer of the hereditary religion of Europe to the 'New World.'" This volume, prepared initially for European readers, may be seen as an abridged version of Noll's

larger work, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Eerdmans, 1992). While much smaller than the earlier one, this work has a wider scope in that Mexico is added to the United States and Canada as part of North America.

Chapters 1-3, 5-8, and 10 constitute a brief, very readable narrative of the transformation of the old Christianity of Europe into a new distinctly different mutation in the New World. Chapters 4, 9, 11, and 12 are topical, dealing with the separation of church and state, and with theology, and they offer an interesting chapter on the spiritual life of Christians, including ethics, Christian literature, hymns, and especially the place and use of the Bible.

European Christians are almost universally puzzled by Christianity in North America, especially the Christianity of the United States. Noll brilliantly identifies what is specifically non-European about Christianity in the New World. The four aspects of the North American religious environment which made for a new “mutation of Christianity” (words borrowed by the reviewer from Arthur Mirgeler) were: space — the simple geographical vastness of North America; race and ethnicity — North America is a conglomerate of immigrants; pluralism — a variety of religious forms arising from the plural origins of the immigrants, and from the absence of confessional conservatism, caused largely by the forces of democratic individualism. In this connection Noll quotes George Grant’s words from *Lament for a Nation*: “The United States is the only society on earth that has no traditions before the age of progress.”

The main problem with Noll’s book is that despite its title, it is about Christianity in the U.S., and the story of Christianity in Mexico and Canada is tacked on but not integral to the main narrative. (In this respect Robert T. Handy’s *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada* [1976] is much more successful.) Noll mentions Canada occasionally, e.g., pages 20 and 32, in addition to chapter 10, which deals exclusively with Mexico and Canada. The Afterword refers only to the U.S., with not a word about Canada and Mexico. Of the list of six factors that have differentiated Christian history in North America from that of Europe, only three apply to Canada and perhaps none to Mexico.

What is obvious is not only a failure to present a North American picture, but the extent of this failure. Perhaps it would be more accurate to acknowledge

that Canada and Mexico are at least peripheral to the United States of America, a sentiment not unknown among Americans. This failure could be used as proof that a single history of Christianity in North America including Canada America, the U.S. America, and Mexico America is not possible, since neither Canada nor Mexico share the politico-cum-religious ethos of U.S. Christianity. Neither country has had, for example, the religio-political messianism that still characterizes much American Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant.

But why should such a comprehensive history be impossible? Could not a serious attempt be made to compare and contrast on an equitable basis, chronologically, the ways in which Christianity has taken different forms in the three countries so politically and socially different from each other? Professor Noll did, after all, do it by comparison with Europe. Why not among the three Americas, especially since there have been and continue to be numerous ties, especially between the churches of Canada and the United States? Noll's Appendix B offers a brief discussion with statistical tables comparing regional distribution of denominations in the U.S. and Canada. This does point to some major differences.

As to what the author has actually done in his description of the transmutation of European Christianity in the United States, Noll's book deserves all the high praise it has received. It is a brilliant achievement. His description in chapter 1 what the transplantation of Christianity from Europe to the New World meant to nine men, coming to North America with Catholic and Protestant versions of Christianity, is very illuminating. Some of them saw emigration as a way of preserving European forms of Christianity; other saw it as a way of renewing the old faith.

However, "The old religion in a New World: a history of Christianity in North America" has still to be written.

Walter Klaassen, Vernon, B.C.

John Howard Yoder. *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002.

In many ways, John Howard Yoder's *Preface to Theology* is completely out-of-date. Even though Brazos Press published it only recently, this introduction intended for first-year seminarians has been available for over thirty years in mimeographed form. As a result, the assumptions of 1960s New Testament scholarship that were dominant at that time can be found throughout. How useful can such a book be as an introduction for theology students today?

The very fact that it is out-of-date is one of the book's strengths and a reason for its continuing relevance. Only a book like this can challenge, critique, and inform theology that is up-to-date—theology as it is practiced today. This was typical of Yoder's approach. By combining the Anabaptist vision of his own heritage with the highest level of academic rigor, Yoder was known for doing theology in a way that questioned dominant assumptions long before the rejection of modern theology's assumptions became widespread.

Today's readers will benefit from how Yoder models theological education. The book is based on classroom lectures that he delivered to new seminary students. Each chapter contains preparatory questions, suggested reading lists, and so forth. Yoder's method in preparing these students is not to talk *about* theology, but to *do* theology alongside them. To accomplish this (and also to be faithful to traditional Anabaptism), Yoder approaches theology historically. He begins with the apostles' message and the gospel, showing how theology is the ongoing task of responding to new questions. Even Yoder's detailed attention to the "threefold office" of Christ (king, priest, prophet) is done with an eye to historical development rather than dogmatic declaration.

Yoder wants us to understand that, without the study of history, theology is simply unintelligible. Not only does history help us understand the theology of past times, theological reflection is the work of God's people embodied in specific times and places. As such, theology witnesses to the action of God through time. Jesus is Lord over history, and thus the historical development of doctrine is not incidental to the life of God. Moreover, the implication of that lordship is that "the management of history is not the business of the church" (237). Instead, Christians have been given eyes to see God at work in history without being given the sword to ensure that it "comes out right."

For today's readers, this approach presents a number of challenges. The first relates to the nature of theology itself. For Yoder, theology is the activity of the church responding to new questions in ways that are both relevant and faithful to its own heritage and authority. Therefore, theologians must learn *how* to serve the church before they can start doing so. A second challenge is the way that Yoder teaches this method by practice. The theologian-in-training must enter into the activity of theology by learning from theologians who have served the church throughout its history and by imitating their approach in situations the church is currently facing. This is particularly helpful because it provides a model for Protestants to grasp the development of their own doctrine, overcoming the ahistorical way they have reacted against tradition in Roman Catholicism.

Yoder's work challenges and informs today's theological discourse also through his disavowal of the distinctions within theology as an academic discipline. He prefers to call the work to which he invites us "dogmatics" rather than "systematic theology." Yoder questions a view of theology that rigidly distinguishes systematic theology from teaching, preaching, and ethics. For example, the theology practiced in the New Testament is almost entirely "narrative or recitative" and almost never "systematic" (377). Furthermore, "the very concept of a split between belief and action is itself a doctrinal error" (390). All of theology, properly understood, has ethical implications and resists the compromises inherent in systematizing.

In the recent publication of *Preface to Theology*, we find Yoder's words to be even more meaningful now than when he wrote them, a compliment not always paid to someone who so explicitly did not attempt to write for the ages. That a book so thoroughly out-of-date could be so relevant for today is just one of the wonderful ironies of God's Kingdom that Yoder has taught us to expect.

Craig R. Hovey, Fuller Theological Seminary; *John Perry*, University of Notre Dame

Marlene Kropf and Kenneth Nafziger, *Singing: A Mennonite Voice*. Scottdale, PA and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2001.

This is a book that music and worship planning committees in Mennonite churches need to read, sing, and discuss. It stands alongside the *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, published in 1992 for Mennonite and Brethren Churches in North America. As a result of their work in helping to produce this hymnal, the authors began a two-year research project in which they asked people in the church, “What happens when you sing?” This book reports these interviews. *Singing: A Mennonite Voice* effectively crafts anecdotal stories with insightful interpretation. That it is designed and illustrated by Gwen M. Stamm, who also designed *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, adds a significant artistic beauty and integrity to it.

Part One and Two report and organize interviews with people involved in the worship life of Mennonite congregations in North America. Part Two, “What Happens When We Sing?,” covers spiritual areas of our lives that are impacted by singing hymns: singing creates the body of Christ; unveils an inner landscape of the worshiper; reveals a path to God; becomes our best way to pray; and heals and transforms us in our time of need.

Part Three is the heart of the book. There the authors probe the importance of hymn singing in a postmodern landscape that desires to integrate the heart and the mind, transcendence and immanence. It is claimed that the interviews in this project show that hymn singing is the one sure way such integration happens for Mennonites. If faith is to grow in our congregations, people need to sing (104). This growth of faith takes place in three ways: Our vision of God is formed; we are formed into Christian community; our life is formed as people of the Spirit. Part Three develops these in detail. This is very helpful for those planning worship services.

The Epilogue sums up six learnings that the authors gained from their interviews and stories about hymn singing. The sixth one is likely the most obvious, but it is increasingly hard to do: we need to care for how much time we spend singing together. Mary Oyer is quoted as saying, “Keep singing. Sing. Sing. Sing. Sing before church. Sing during church. Sing after church. Just do it” (161).

It is my impression that a majority of the interviews and stories come

from Mennonites in the Swiss Mennonite tradition. I suspect that stories from Church of the Brethren and Mennonites from the German and Russian experience would convey similar themes and learnings, but it would be interesting to test this assumption a little wider.

J. Laurence Martin, Minister of Pastoral Leadership Training, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

RITUAL IN ANABAPTIST COMMUNITIES

An interdisciplinary conference

**Hillsdale College
Hillsdale, Michigan
June 26-28, 2003**

The conference will provide contact and conversation between individuals concerned in various ways about Anabaptist ritual/worship from the perspectives of biblical and theological studies, the social sciences, the humanities, or church leadership.

For more information

Peter Blum, Department of Sociology
Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, MI 49242

Phone 517 437-7341, ext. 2444

peter.blum@hillsdale.edu

<http://www.hillsdale.edu/academics/soc/ritual.html>

*Conference sponsors: the Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholars Network,
the Anabaptist Sociology and Anthropology Association,
and the Hillsdale College Sociology Department.*