

Theodidaktos *Taught by God*

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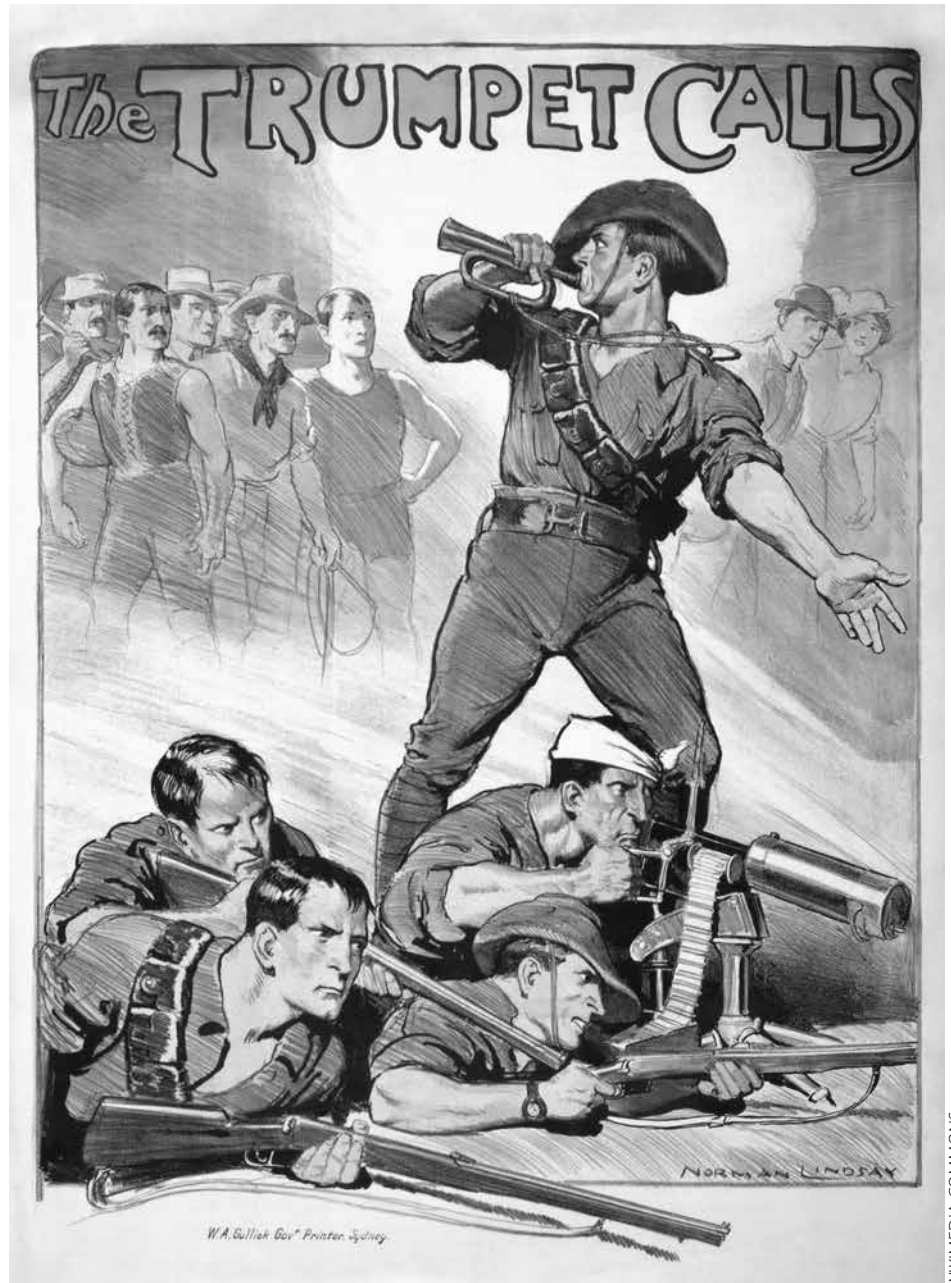
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Editorial

The Theology of Ordinary

TO LABEL SOMEONE AS ORDINARY sounds like an insult. “Ordinary” has become another word for average and subsequently boring. No one wants to be ordinary.

We are taught in school and in homes that we can be anything. “Reach for the stars.” No dream is too small; each of us is special and unique. Our society promotes excellence in all things. Society does not promote being ordinary. No one puts a bumper sticker on their car, “My child is an ordinary student at Steinbach Christian School.”

The rise of individualism in the past couple of centuries has entrenched itself in the current era to the extent that the philosophy of self has a stranglehold on most of us. If we fail to stand out and make a difference we have not lived up to our potential. Some of us grow up believing that we are going to do something special in our lifetimes and that our names will be engraved in history.

The Church is not exempt from the false religion of self. How many testimonies have you heard where the young baptism candidate quotes Jeremiah 29:11 as a personal promise? Somewhere in some context someone has inspired this exegetical fallacy, as Don Carson calls it, that God’s promise to Jewish exiles in Babylon is a guarantee of material success in “my” life.

Ordinary does not fit into our vocabulary. Radical. Epic. Revolutionary. Transformative. Impactful. Life-changing. Ultimate. Extreme. Awesome. Emergent. Alternative. Innovative. On the edge. The next big thing. Explosive breakthrough. These are terms that Michael Horton begins with in his book *Ordinary* (Zondervan, 2014, 11), illustrating what modifiers grab our attention. I would add the insufferable “super” to that list.

On the one hand, we tune out these modifiers because everyone uses them to stand out. On the other hand, we tend to ignore the unappealing run-of-the-mill whatever. We are tired of being harangued with “new and improved” and yet we want to be amazed. Nothing amazes us anymore. People are growing disillusioned and depressed with unrealized hopes and dreams that were unrealistic to begin with.

We put this insatiable drive for the “bigger and better” into our church experience as well. Pastors preach Sunday to Sunday, faithfully sharing the Word of God, wondering all the while why something fantastic like a revival does not break out from their sermons. Meanwhile, our people gather around famous authors and attend conferences where renowned experts teach the Word like no one else.

I have heard the phrase “God is really working” applied to a person or a place, as if God is not always at work (John 5:17). What these well-meaning people are trying to say is that God is *really* working hard in

such and such a place or person. You can put all the emphasis on *working* that you want; it is our desperate hope that something extraordinary is going to happen. All the while we miss the extraordinary in the ordinary everyday work that God is doing.

The way Horton puts it in his book, Paul passed on to Timothy a very ordinary charge. Timothy is an ordinary minister accountable to ordinary elders, who is simply supposed to “guard the good deposit

entrusted to him” and “fight the good fight of faith” (108).

Timothy was not overwhelmingly charismatic (Paul chides him for being timid). He did not possess great leadership skills or preach knock-down blow-me-over sermons. In fact, Horton writes (109), the more Timothy tries to distinguish himself, the more division he will bring to the church. He is called to simply remain faithful to his calling, “when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6:12).

My fellow pastors and teachers, we are not called to anything more than the ordinary means of grace that God has provided through the Church and the proclaiming thereof. You may not write a book, speak to thousands, or be able to claim profound statistics, but you can be faithful to the place and people that God has placed you. Lay aside senseless desires, the youthful ambition of being the next Billy Graham or John Piper, and know that God in Christ uses the ordinary person to proclaim extraordinary grace. **☉**

Darryl G. Klassen



Darryl G. Klassen, a man so ordinary that I have to put G. in my name.

Lay aside senseless desires,
the youthful ambition of
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Cover photo: “The trumpet calls,” an Australian Army recruitment poster from World War I. (Public Domain)

Responding to Bruxy Cavey’s Position Statement on the Gay Marriage Debate

Editor’s Note: Bruxy Cavey’s article *Responding to the Gay Marriage Debate* (December 2014) was not written with the EMC in mind nor for the EMC. It was not a statement requested by the EMC. It was a statement that Cavey produced a few years ago for The Meeting Place, the Brethren in Christ multi-site church, where he serves as senior pastor. The position statement was reprinted in this EMC journal because it upheld a traditional view of marriage (as does the EMC) and sought to minister sensitively to people of same-sex attraction (as should the EMC). The article was printed because of its basic stance, not because all of it was agreed with by the editor, nor need be by any reader. Two responses to Cavey’s position became available. Cavey was notified of them and was invited to respond to some concerns raised. Though his office was given considerable advance notification, Cavey did not supply a reply.



Appreciating and Questioning Cavey's Response

Dr. Al Hiebert

Dr. Al Hiebert is an ordained EMC minister. He holds a BA (U. of M.), MA (TEDS), and PhD (NYU).

THERE ARE MANY DIMENSIONS TO Bruxy Cavey's "Responding to the Gay Marriage Debate" in *Theodidaktos* (Dec. 2014) that I much appreciate:

1. "Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1: 19-20).
2. Biblical rigour of conservatives and radical discipleship to the grace and truth message of Jesus and the Bible as God's inspired special revelation of Himself to us. As Christ-followers we must always live and speak the truth in love, including the listening that implies.
3. Defend the human rights of every oppressed group, including LGBTQ (and I would add, those who uphold the sanctity of one man and one woman marriage of any faith).
4. An evangelical church needs to love and respect every type of sinner who is willing to walk in the door of our services or home Bible study group. None of us is perfectly sanctified and we dare not make perfect sanctification a prerequisite to entrance to our public and semi-private events. But I would add that appointment to full membership or leadership appropriately requires a higher standard of obedience to Christ's teaching demonstrated by the prospective appointee.
5. Yes, we are all "sexually dysfunctional," but I hesitate to describe that as "wonderful."
6. Yes, we need to distinguish between acceptance of people as image-bearers of God and agreement with their behaviour. We need to engage in mutually respectful dialogue with LGBTQ activists, atheists, liberals of all sorts, devotees of all sorts of religions and worldviews.
7. Yes, we cannot demand that those who do not claim to follow Christ and the Bible must follow the ethics of Christ and the Bible. However, I believe that as representatives of Christ and the Bible we should still urge others to follow the ethics of Christ and the Bible on rational grounds other than appeal to the authority of Christ and the Bible (e.g., physical, mental and social health concerns). In my humble opinion this is a very practical expression of love for our neighbours, especially if the tone of our urging is obviously compassionate (e.g., "We love you and really wish for your greater well-being.").
Such "speaking the truth in love" need not avoid pointing out the destructive effects of immoral behaviour. Carl Lewis, retired former writer for *The National Post*, faults evangelicals for being too silent on the physician-assisted suicide (PAS) discussion—quite validly so, in my humble opinion.
If Canada legalizes PAS, amidst evangelical silence on the subject, we are not showing love for those whose lives will be terminated through the PAS abuses here that Holland, Belgium and Switzerland have demonstrated for years. Is the same not also true of evangelical silence on conformity of our schools, courts, etc., to the demands of the LGBTQ activists?
8. Yes, we need to say and mean "I'm sorry" that we evangelicals have not always shown genuine love and respect for LGBTQ people as image-bearers of God. However, those LGBTQ activists who define everyone who does not agree that "Gay is okay" as "hateful homophobic bigots" are not likely to hear our "I'm sorry" till we agree with them.

9. I agree that the LGBTQ activists' demand that all Christians must agree with them as a "necessary basis for peace" between our communities "will never happen."
10. I agree that "homosexual sexual expression is wrong, a sin," just as "heterosexual sexual expression outside of marriage is sin" and that this belief does not make us "a bigot, redneck or homophobic in the least."
11. I agree that "gay Christians" need to set aside the "I was born this way" argument and embrace the Lordship of Christ; "Biology is not destiny. Life is about choice... we can all choose how we live."
12. I agree that "the practice, not the impulse, is sin," that "homosexual sexual expression is not... more sinful than a host of other things," etc. However, today we don't face demands to accept as normal a host of other sins, such as we do from LGBTQ activists, with the possible exception of extra-marital sex, greed and pornography, where the pressures are less overt and public.
13. I agree that "marriage is established by God and affirmed by Jesus as a heterosexual union" and that "marriage is what God, not the state, defines it to be."
14. I agree with many other fine points that Cavey makes, e.g., relations to government, to fellow Christians who differ, etc.

But I am troubled by:

1. The implication that liberals generally practice welcoming embrace of diverse people and conservatives don't. That's a stereotype that liberals generally like to promote, but there are far too many expressions of the reverse to warrant this stereotype.
2. His sentence "To be gay or straight or bi or trans is to be a wonderful image-bearer of God, yet to be so in imperfect, broken, and often hurting ways, just like everyone else" leaves me confused. Yes, all humans are image-bearers of God and so warrant our love and respect. But do we really wish to proclaim that all who practice incest, pedophilia, rape, bestiality (cf., Egyptians and Canaanites in Lev. 18) are to be embraced as "wonderful image-bearer(s) of God" without seeking change?
3. His promotion of a "Third Way" as an ideal. There are too many variations on a claimed "Third Way" ideal in the

gay marriage debate to make this a useful model, in my humble opinion. For example, there is a Catholic movie claiming that the Catholic church is *the* authentic "Third Way" ideal between evangelicals (such as Westboro Baptist Church who formerly carried "God hates fags" pickets at funerals of gays) and liberal Protestants who embrace the full LGBTQ orientation and behaviour as beautifully ordained of God.

This Catholic movie shows seven ex-gays who have left the LGBTQ community and behaviour and embraced the Catholic church as *the* authentic "Third Way" ideal. Might Bruxy Cavey be unaware of this?

It seems Bruxy Cavey does not follow Ken Wilson's definition of a "Third Way" (cf., Wilson's *A Letter to my Congregation*, Read the Spirit Books, 2014, where this expression was popularized). Wilson's definition of a "Third Way" is to put the ethics of LGBTQ behaviour in the category of "disputable matters" (cf. Rom 14–15 regarding eating meats), i.e., each believer is free to decide whether LGBTQ behaviour is sin or not. Is this what EMC leaders want their people to believe? Hopefully not.

4. There is a logical impossibility between saying "Yes" and "No" to the proposition "Gay is okay," as the LGBTQ activists demand that everyone embrace as true. On this matter a "Third Way" is logically impossible. Bruxy Cavey does not address this problem.
5. Too many people, churches and denominations have embraced a "Third Way" on gay marriage as a transition from traditional natural marriage to a full embrace of LGBTQ orientation and behaviour as beautifully ordained of God. It seems Bruxy Cavey is unaware of this common "Third Way" trend (e.g., in western Anglicanism, United Methodist, ELCA, various Presbyterian denominations, and their related schools and missions).
6. When Cavey argues that The Meeting House seeks to be a "queer-friendly church" and that they "do not preach that people need to change their sexual orientation in order to follow Jesus," I think of 1 Cor. 6:9–11 (NIV): "Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Does Cavey want The Meeting House and the EMC to

be equally adulterer-friendly, thieves-friendly, idolaters-friendly, greedy-friendly, drunkards-friendly, slanderers-friendly, and swindlers-friendly, and that they “do not preach that people need to change their [behaviours in these areas] in order to follow Jesus”? I rather doubt that.

Can we ever repeat 1 Cor. 6:9–11 without the “sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who have sex with

men, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers, or swindlers” protesting that we made them “feel inferior”? Cavey wants us to say to LGBTQ people: “I’m sorry that we have not demonstrated love, but judgment.” Does this not demand that we reject the divine inspiration and authority of passages like 1 Cor. 6:9–11? **Θ**

My Response to Bruxy Cavey’s Presentation



Pastor Glenn Loewen

Glenn Loewen is the senior pastor of Portage Evangelical Church. He holds an Associate of Arts in Religious Studies (Prairie Bible College) and a BEd (Brandon University).

LET ME USE MY NUMBER SYSTEM TO give some crisp thoughts of reflection on Cavey’s words:

1. The issue Cavey is addressing is deeply emotional and, in many cases, personal. Tenderness and love should never be lost even in the middle of a bold, clarion call for truth and clarity. At times, the immense pressure of personal testimony is the “wild card” which wins the debate. In moments like these, clarity is often perceived as obnoxiousness or cold heartedness, causing truth to be lost in the murky waters of very real pain and confusion. I’ve been shaken with the very real pain people go through in the struggle of gender and sexual identity. It’s also been shocking to behold the rapid abandonment of clear biblical thinking and the embracing of biblical hermeneutics which would’ve left our forebears and early Church Fathers completely speechless. Let me go ahead and express some thoughts on Cavey’s essay by way of critique and response. Some of the following words are really more of a general reflection of the church culture of the day.
2. Early Anabaptism was a “separate church”—separate from the world, culture, and the state church. Do we have the right to call ourselves Anabaptists while we slowly assimilate and integrate the values of culture around us?
3. “Radical discipleship” is a phrase that has little meaning to me anymore. It’s fairly popular; but what does it mean? I imagine there are many churches out there—emergent, conservative, liberal, social justice, charismatic—who don’t mind the phrase.
4. Words and phrases like “brokenness,” “sickness,” “the need for healing” when referring to homosexuality will increasingly become offensive. They’re words and phrases which easily confuse the need for the “New Covenant.” *Sin* and deep heart level *repentance* are more unpopular these days, but increasingly necessary. What is sin? The rebellion we inherited from Adam with manifestations like: pornography addiction, unbelief, the practice of homosexuality, adultery, pride, bestiality, cheating, prayerlessness, etc. The healing ministry of Jesus Christ where He redeems us, washes us, heals us, invigorates us is a beautiful reality—and it all happens through the power of the New Covenant.
5. I’m not big on the word “deserving.” However, if there is one thing humanity deserves to hear, it’s this: “Jesus Christ almighty has crushed the head of the devil, dealt with our vile sin on the cross by virtue of His precious blood, and given us a powerful way to overcome the self-life; through the cross.” It’s called the Gospel!

6. A contention I have with Cavey's essay and our current church culture is the low view of the power of the gospel, the blood, the cross, and the Word. It's become quite trendy, over the last 20 years or so, to wallow in our "humanness," "be real in our crass conversation," have "doubt nights" (as did an emergent church in the United States), get together and talk about our addictions, celebrate our spiritual mess, etc. Books on the shelves of our Christian bookstores have helped with this. The victorious Christian life seems to be a hypocritical term from yesteryear.

Spiritual slovenliness and sluggishness are easily excused and celebrated because this is apparently all we can expect from God and ourselves. This thing is self-perpetuating. Someone is going to have to take up the very unpopular mantle and begin to warn the western church about her coming collision with the holiness of God—warn us about the way we've "denied the power of God." Incidentally, Paul informed Timothy that this would, in fact, be a hallmark of the last day's church (2 Tim. 3).

7. Mr. Cavey's approach doesn't seem to have a systemic file for the demonic fuel that's driving this agenda of sexual confusion and identity. Our work of intercessory prayer, spiritual warfare, and being ones who "stay the hand of God's judgment" will be greatly impacted or impeded by our understanding and embracing of this reality.
8. Mr. Cavey will also come to a crossroads soon. Michael Brown warned about it, stating the following sentiment, "The 'same-sex wave' that's sweeping over both the church and culture will not rest until the church, in one voice will acknowledge the celebration of same-sex union by Moses, Jesus, Paul, Peter and the rest." This isn't "small potatoes." We can easily defer the subject and try to stick our heads in the sand by saying things like, "Hey, let's change the conversation" or "talk about something else" or "put a moratorium on it" (something a present author suggested only to come out with a clear stand against orthodoxy). Brown recently preached a gentle and yet bold sermon along these lines using the O.T. theme of Haman and Mordecai. Haman will not be happy until every Mordecai bows.
9. What if the early martyrs of the 1500s had said, "Hey, it's not that big of a deal whether the communion elements really are or are not the literal body of Christ. Let's lay low on this. Maybe we're wrong"? What if our forebears


had decided to compromise on baptism, separation, and biblical thinking for the sake of cultural peace? There would be no Anabaptism.

A contention I have with Cavey's essay and our current church culture is the low view of the power of the gospel, the blood, the cross, and the Word. The victorious Christian life seems to be a hypocritical term from yesteryear.

10. Maybe you're saying to me, "Glenn, what should we do? Hammer them all over the head? Scream hatred?" No, absolutely not. Part of the answer lies in being a biblical church where we preach the full gospel, live holy lives, separate ourselves from the love of the world, embrace persecution, preach the power of the blood, have tons of prayer meetings, groan for revival, tremble in the fear of God Almighty, and love like crazy.

The early apostolic church saw people either flocking to it or leaving in great fear. There was no middle ground. In a scenario like this the Holy Spirit comes and brings a shaking to a church where people fall under great conviction; some will gnash their teeth at us and run. Homosexuality and other flesh patterns and sins (ones we have been or are all guilty of) may not even have to be mentioned because the foregone conclusion will be clear.

I've been spending some time going through an old Methodist hymnal compiled in the late 1890s. The language seems so different. God's position of grandeur, splendour, and authority are extoled instead of questioned. Man's helplessness before God and subsequent dependence of God are declared in songs of worship before the burning Flame of the great Triune God. Our present-day man-centred singing and humanistic gospel thinking has radically altered the positions where God is now at our disposal to do with what we like. This easily and ultimately leads to a denial of God's moral code as Scriptures get reworked to accommodate these worldviews and lifestyles.

11. You might ask, does this kind of thinking and practice actually exist anywhere in the western world? David Wilkerson and Jim Cymbala are two preachers I would point to as examples of those who have been able to preach the true no-compromise gospel and holiness in the middle New York City (Time Square and Brooklyn) and see many saved. 

The Church at war with itself



DWIGHT LOEWEN

by Layton Friesen

Maybe God is ending war by bringing into the Church, just as Christ took sin to himself in his incarnated body.

One hundred years ago Christians entered a plan to end war by killing each other. First, a group of Serbian Orthodox believers conspired and murdered an Austrian Catholic man in the streets of Sarajevo.

This angered the Catholics in Austria, who convinced the Lutherans in Germany to kill as many of the Catholics in France as possible. Soon the Anglicans jumped into the fray, as did the Russian Orthodox and believers (including Mennonites) from North America. Most of the dead in Church War I (1914–1918) were Christians killed by Christians.

This “holy war” set the conditions for Ioseb Jughashvili to leave Tiflis Spiritual Seminary and become Joseph Stalin. He offered up six million Ukrainians, mostly Orthodox Christians. Church War I also left the German believers feeling shamed and oppressed by their brothers and sisters in England, France, and the U.S.

They became so embittered that they gave all power to a Catholic, Adolf Hitler. He convinced German Christians that it was the Jews’ fault and that a holocaust (sacrifice) was needed. In righteous wrath they attacked their Catholic neighbours in Poland, drawing the Anglicans and American Baptists back into the slaughter (1939–1945).

This war did not end until one morning an American Catholic chaplain, Father George Zabelka, blessed Catholic air force pilots to drop an atomic bomb on the oldest and largest Catholic community in Japan, utterly destroying in one fiery inferno three orders of nuns.

On Jan. 17, 1991, two deeply Christian men, Baptist evangelist Billy Graham and Episcopalian President George H. W. Bush, met at the White House to pray

after Bush had declared war on a country with a Christian community of churches that had existed since the age of the apostles. They prayed fervently and watched television as American bombs began to rain on Iraq and Kuwait. Together with the second war on Iraq in 2003, this led to the near annihilation of the Iraq church.

In 1994, in Rwanda, churches of all kinds turned against their own Tutsi church members. Pastors, priests, lay leaders, and deacons attended church and then went out to butcher. Death squads entered church buildings, paused to pray before the altar, and then slaughtered fellow Christians who had taken shelter there. One observer noted that many of the 640,000 dead seemed to be killed in and around churches.

We could say all these killers were only “nominal” Christians and not the true Church of Jesus. But that evades both the scandal and the hope. Maybe God is ending war by bringing into the Church, just as Christ took sin to himself in his incarnated body.

As the Church spreads to all nations, the wars of the world become churchly, occurring now between baptized sisters and brothers. The world’s violence becomes the Church’s sin.

But as the world’s war is exposed as bloody Church disunity, the Church can turn the world from war by repenting and reconciling. To end war then, let us to preach to all nations and reconcile with all churches.

The EMC is pacifist, but if we share the disunity of the Body, we share the violence. We still feel the wounds of division related to the Church of God in Christ (Holdeman), the Large Church (Grosze Gemeinde), the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Jewish synagogue.

These wounds are gashes in the very body of Jesus. But if the Spirit salves these wounds through our repentance, world enemies become Jews and Gentiles reconciled “so that through the Church the wisdom of God . . . might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:19).



U.S. Marines practice in 1942.

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A Dialogue about War, History, and Faith



Layton Friesen and Darryl G. Klassen

Introduction: Layton Friesen wrote a column “The Church at war with itself” in *The Messenger* (April 2015), reprinted at left. Darryl Klassen had some concerns, which led to a dialogue published here with their permission. It is slightly edited.

Layton Friesen (left), BRS, MCS, MTh, has served as senior pastor at Fort Garry EMC. He is a ThD candidate at the University of Toronto.



Darryl Klassen (right), BRS, MA, is pastor at Kleefeld EMC. He is a DMin candidate at Providence Theological Seminary.

Friesen and Klassen are good friends. They have known each other for many years and were co-pastors together at Crestview Fellowship.

Preliminary Comments

Darryl: Greetings, Layton. I hope that your studies are going well and you are enjoying the academic life. Preparing for a course at Providence Theological Seminary [Radical Reformation: History, Thought, and Practice] must have been daunting as you attempted to finish your primary projects. I pray that God will give you strength for the task, as well as being a husband and father.

You have keen mind and an intellect that is well-suited to doctoral studies. I have no doubt that you will do great things for the Lord and for our conference as you continue to learn and grow. Many here back at home speak of you often and appreciate your ministry.

I do love my history. It is in this field that I take pleasure in studying and reading about the events and the feelings, politics, and motivations that lead to those events. For this reason I have chosen to respond to your latest article in *The Messenger*. It appears to me to be a revisionist history. To use a crude illustration: I feel as though you took the elements of history, politics and religion, threw them into a blender and came up with a smoothie that is undrinkable. Sorry, buddy, that was my reaction.

Layton: Hi, Darryl. Thanks so much for your response. You do not realize how honoured I am to receive it. Part of the difficulty of writing this monthly piece Further In and Higher Up is having it go out month after month and being met with largely silence. One does not know how to interpret that, but I think I do know how to interpret your thoughts, so this is way better!

In part, I can immediately blame logistics for this article. It's only 500 words and so I end up asserting all kinds of things that need more attention. That's why I end up having to do these 2,000-word explanations!

Let me address your last question first. The point of the article was to make the blunt declaration that church unity today is *brutal* and that war in the 20th century

is an indication of just how brutal it is. There is so little fraternal affection within the global church, so little sense that our relation in Christ is more important than our allegiance to state or tribe, so little actual *communion*, that we think nothing

I have chosen to respond to your latest article in *The Messenger*. It appears to me to be a revisionist history. To use a crude illustration: I feel as though you took the elements of history, politics and religion, threw them into a blender and came up with a smoothie that is undrinkable.

– Darryl Klassen

of killing others in our own spiritual body.

And so my larger point is not that all these wars were fought for religious reasons (although some were); my point is that church unity was so brutalized by this point in history that it offered no brake on killing across political, ethnic lines. I wanted to put this starkly to wake people to the *sacrilege* of war—it is

literally an attack on the body of Christ.

With that general statement I will address your individual points in the text below.

Darryl: What part did faith or religion play in the slaying of the Archduke Ferdinand Francis? My understanding of the context is that it played no part, but that this was an ethnic issue whereby Serbs felt dominated by the Austro-Hungarian empire. Christians on both sides? Yes, but not a faith issue.

Layton: I agree with the point you are making here; the reasons historians give for why the war happened have little to do with differences of faith. My point, however, is a simpler one than that, and I think it is uncontroversial from a historical viewpoint. The people fighting over ethnicity and politics did so as Christians. I am not making any point about the cause of the war, which I realize is very complex. This is why I chose the

a Christian war against the infidel on the other side. Pulpits and propaganda were used on all sides to argue that supporting this war was an act of Christian discipleship. He goes into considerable detail to show that whatever the real objective causes of the war might have been, it was sold as a crusade of the most religious sort.

After I wrote this article, I heard a lecture by a professor at Wycliffe on Anglican history in which he suggested that the demise of the Church of England began when English bishops threw their whole moral weight in favour of the war and sent the best and brightest out to fight in the name of the church and its faith. When the war turned sour and devolved into the tedious butchery it became, the English people turned against the powers that had sent them out in the name of Christ. The established church never regained the same moral stature in the eyes of the Brits.

to make considering that the Ottoman Empire (modern day Turkey) lost nearly 500,000 soldiers in the battle of Gallipoli alone? These of course were Muslim people predominantly. Oddly enough, Ottomans were allied to the German Lutherans in World War I.

Layton: This is a good point. I should have mentioned that there were many Muslims and presumably Jews who died as well. I wonder what the spectre of Christians killing 500,000 Muslims at Gallipoli has done for subsequent western/Islamic relations?

Darryl: What exactly was the influence of World War I on Joseph Stalin that this psychopath should leave seminary to embark on his reign of terror, and what was the church's part in that event? I believe that brief references that few are familiar with will leave the majority of *Messenger* readers perplexed.

Layton: You are putting your finger on a problem here. What I was trying to do was point out that World War I made possible so many of the other tragedies of the century. Some historians suggest we should call World War I/II the thirty years war, since they are so intimately connected. The sacrilege which was the Great War brought a bitter fruit, not least in Russia. I don't think it is controversial that the chaos and destruction of World War I for the Russian army made the Bolshevik revolution and rise of communism a possibility. World War I contributed to the disgust and alienation that the Russian people felt for their traditional leadership. With the Russian military in tatters, the Bolsheviks were able to chase Nicholas II from the throne and take control. Eventually Stalin filled the czar's shoes.

The bit about seminary should maybe have been left out even though it is accurate. He was preparing for the priesthood even though later he attacked

I did not mean to suggest that Stalin did what he did as a Christian. He presents a stark symbol of the way some of the worst tyrants in the 20th century began their lives by being nurtured in the churches, churches that simply failed to live the gospel of Christ.

– Layton Friesen

language of Orthodox fighting Catholics fighting Lutherans. All I am saying is that from a church unity perspective this war was a catastrophe.

However, I would like to extend my simple point. In writing this article I was influenced by Philip Jenkins' recent book *A Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade* [HarperOne, 2014]. He makes a good case (from this arm-chair historian's view) for the fact that the British, Germans, French, Americans and Russians all hyped this as

But that is all beyond what I was trying to claim in the article. All I was saying was that Orthodox were fighting Lutherans were fighting Anglicans, etc. I don't think that is controversial, although some Mennonites may quibble with calling these people real Christians. I am accepting their own self-designation for themselves.

Darryl: You said, "Most of the dead in Church War I (1914–1918) were Christians killed by Christians." Is this a fair summation

the church. My point again was that, as with so many 20th century barbarities, we are not dealing with barbarians but with, in this case, a man raised in the church preparing for the priesthood. The church had a chance in the 20th century to change history at certain points. However I did not mean to suggest that Stalin did what he did as a Christian. He presents a stark symbol of the way some of the worst tyrants in the 20th century began their lives by being nurtured in the churches, churches that simply failed to live the gospel of Christ.

On that note, what do you make of the Russian Orthodox Church today in its support of Putin and the Russian imperialism? It looks like a new form of fundamentalism. Scary.

Darryl: Are you saying, among other things, that Adolf Hitler attacked Poland because they were Catholic? Or, more correctly, was it because the treaty that ended World War I took lands away from Germany that they felt rightly belonged to them? Poland was Prussia before the War, a territory that Germany felt should remain Germanic. Again, this poses an ethnic dilemma over and above a religious one.

Layton: Again as with World War I, my point is only that Hitler was apparently a devout Catholic, and that, in fact, the people he attacked were also Catholics. This is not to suggest that Catholicism was the reason for the war—only to say that apparently German Catholicism was in such a state that it had no qualms killing Catholics in other countries, for whatever reason. Did any German Catholics refuse to fight Poland because the Poles were Catholic?

The larger point I think is reasonable

as well: without the support of the church in Germany, Lutheran or Catholic, Nazism would not have had the same power. Hitler needed the church to give him respectability and for the most part they gave it to him, to the point of being willing to go out and kill their fellow church members in other countries for the sake of the Fatherland.

Darryl: Rwanda? I do not dispute the horror of this tragedy. It is indeed horrible when Christians kill Christians. I do not

Rwanda? It is indeed horrible when Christians kill Christians. I do not pretend to know the causes of this grievous action, but is it not an oversimplification to paint this as a religious or faith-based atrocity?

– Darryl Klassen

pretend to know the causes of this grievous action, but is it not an oversimplification to paint this as a religious or faith-based atrocity?

Layton: From the reading I have done on this, I think this can be painted as a religious atrocity, though there is no such thing as a purely religious war. The essay to read here is Timothy Longman, “Church Politics and the Genocide in Rwanda” (available online). He suggests that not only did a lot of the killing happen by church leaders in churches, but that the power games within the churches’ leadership in Rwanda in the years leading up to the massacre contributed significantly to making this atrocity possible.

Darryl: You said, “Maybe God is ending war by bringing into the Church, just as Christ took sin to himself in his incarnated

body.” If God is doing this thing, and I am not saying He is, then wouldn’t war be a good thing? That goes against our Anabaptist core values and understanding of Scripture. I don’t think that is what you are trying to say, but it certainly sounds odd. It sounds as if God brings war into the church to redeem the world (?). If I am misunderstanding this point, other people will too.



Photographs of genocide victims, Genocide Memorial Centre in Kigali, Rwanda

Layton: Here I think I needed to express myself more clearly. Let me clarify. Say I have a nasty habit of using humour to cut people down. If I am an unmarried person with few close friends, I may never be confronted with that problem, and may never have to seriously grapple with how to get rid of it. I may not even realize I have the habit. Once I marry, that changes. There in the closeness of covenant that habit creates pain that I can see and feel in my wife’s hurt. As the nasty habit is brought into a close relationship, I am confronted with it, and it finally becomes a problem I have to deal with or my wife will leave me. This is why marriage can be so personally transforming.

I am trying to offer some hope to this picture of brutal church relations. Humans seem to have a nasty obsession with killing each other. But as we awaken to the fact that this killing is happening in the church, between brothers and sisters in Christ, we finally see the disgusting thing it was all along. God may be ending war by bringing it into the church where it can finally be exposed as the disgusting thing it always was.

I think this is how atonement works in the death of Christ. As Christ takes our sin into the love relation between himself and the Father, we suddenly see our sin for the brutal reality it is. As sin appears to threaten this holy bond between Christ and the Father, it appears utterly sinful, and there is exposed finally for the virus it is, and is judged and healed. The church is now the body of Christ that sets the sin of the world into stark relief and heals it by baptism, repentance, forgiveness, etc.

I have sometimes said in sermons that the best place to sin is in church, because there it can be seen for what it is, it can be named, repented of and forgiven. As warriors are taken into the church and held up against the light of the scriptural truth about the church being the very body of Christ in communion, war can finally be seen for the revolting thing it always was, and rejected.

Darryl: "As the church spreads to all nations, the wars of the world become churchly..." Are you saying that as the church goes, war follows? Yes, Jesus said that he came to bring a sword that divided families, but I don't think he would say that his intention for the church was that it start, perpetrate, perpetuate, or prolong wars.

Layton: I mention in the article that we need to preach the gospel to all

people. It seems to me that the spread of Christianity to all the earth in the 19th/20th century, with huge growth especially in the global south, has to change the way we think about war. As the church takes root in all sorts of cultures, eventually we start to realize that most war is now fought, to some degree, between baptized

As warriors are taken into the church and held up against the light of the scriptural truth about the church being the very body of Christ in communion, war can finally be seen for the revolting thing it always was, and rejected.

– Layton Friesen

Christians who intend to share the Supper of the Lamb. Eventually that has to shock us into realizing what we are doing to the body of Christ when we wage war. Whether it will have that effect or not remains to be seen.

There are other reasons to reject war: sometimes we hold up the common humanity of the people of the earth. That's fine. However, I am coming at this from the perspective of the church. There is no way to make a theological justification for killing fellow church members, even ones with whom we disagree. So church unity is in a brutal shambles, but I think there is hope since the church is in fact the body of Jesus even in its broken condition.

I have often thought that someone should start a Christian Just War Task Force. Whenever Canada thinks of going to go to war against, say, Iraq, this task force would send Canadian pastors to Iraq and they would sit with Iraqi pastors to consider whether this was in fact a just war, and what implications this would have for the Iraqi church. Then the Canadians could report to their

government and perhaps recommend military action, or perhaps not. This would be much better than either the blanket condemnations or boosting that Christians seem to revert to instinctively.

Darryl: What's the point? My final question is a question that my mentor and your father-in-law [Ralph Unger] would ask me when I told him about a sermon I was preparing. He was trying to get me to think about the application, a point to consider or an action to take. What were you trying to say with this article? I am sorry, but it seems vague.

This is hard stuff. I love you and I considered writing to *The Messenger*, but that would be unbrotherly and I didn't want to hurt you publicly. If I

can aid in your writing a little I would feel privileged to be a part of your ministry. So, instead, I write to you personally to reflect on what you wrote and share my reactions.

Layton: Thanks for dignifying this article with your thoughtful reply. You have obviously given good thought to 20th century history and have read much more than I have on these events. Please come back with a response.

Darryl: This is good stuff. I wish that you could have said all of this in your short article, but of course that is not possible. It is my privilege to receive your explanations in full. Terry, a thought occurred to me as I read this: could we include this dialogue in *Theodidaktos* as a follow up to *The Messenger* article?

Layton: Thanks, Darryl. I would be open to discussing something like this. Both of us may want to refine our thoughts for a wider audience, but I could see some value in putting out a formatted conversation like this. ☺

Nuggets for a Guest Preacher: A Look at the Early Bonhoeffer on Preaching and as Preacher



Terry M. Smith

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HOW WELL DO THEOLOGians preach? Lutheran minister Dr. Kayko Driedger Hesslein says having advanced degrees “allow[s] us to bring the insights of theologians and Christian scholars to pulpits” and other church settings.¹ Is it fair to question some of a theologian’s usefulness if the classroom-congregation link is broken by their own person in the pulpit? It was asked of Bonhoeffer’s mentor: “How does Karl Barth’s theology preach?”² So what of Bonhoeffer?

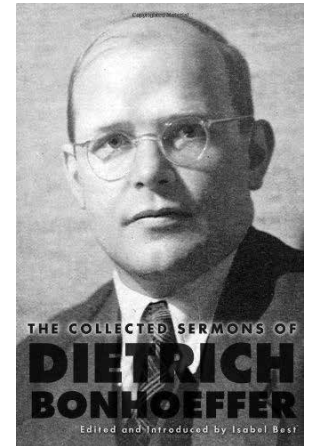
Drawing from a collection of his sermons,³ this paper will look at Bonhoeffer on preaching and as a preacher; consider a “nearly modern” discussion of preaching; and decide on

what I, as a guest preacher, might incorporate. I want to interact with him more than those who discuss him.⁴ As for the “nearly modern” discussion of preaching, my first instinct, as a minister who has invested in a library over decades, is to interact with Bonhoeffer amid this eclectic mix.

Bonhoeffer on Preaching

He held this view of preaching: “A truly evangelical sermon must be like offering a child a fine red apple or offering a thirsty man a cool glass of water and then saying,

It was asked
of Bonhoeffer’s mentor:
“How does Karl
Barth’s theology
preach?” So what
of Bonhoeffer?



‘Do you want it?’⁵ He gave this counsel, “Do not try to make the Bible relevant. Its relevance is axiomatic. ...Do not defend God’s Word, but testify to it.”⁶ This shows the offer, content, and confidence that he saw in preaching. On the Bible’s relevance, perhaps he was responding to a U.S. sermon that lost “a biblical focus on Jesus Christ and on the gospel’s repudiation of the bloated complacency that had infected Christian churches around the world.”⁷

Two sermons contain significant reflections on preaching: “The Joy of Ascension” (Berlin, May 25, 1933) and “Ambassadors for Christ” (London, Oct. 22, 1933). He taught a congregation to look beyond the preacher: “...heavenly joy Christ can give us...and we should look for it only from him, not from the

1 Kayko Driedger Hesslein, “Growing Faithful Servant Leaders,” *Canada Lutheran*, December 2014, 7.

2 Karl Barth, *Deliverance to the Captives* (New York: Harper and Row, ET by Marguerite Wieser, 1961), 8.

3 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, edited and introduction by Isabel Best (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 1–210.

4 In doing so, I am indebted to previous primary and secondary reading, along with course lectures and discussions, more than can be clearly located or fully indicated here.

5 Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy: A Righteous Gentile vs. The Third Reich* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 272. This quote, paraphrased, also appears on the back cover of Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*.

6 Metaxas, 272.

7 Summary of Geoffrey B. Kelly, “Prayer and action for justice,” in John W. de Gruchy, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 247.

preacher.”⁸ A congregation should have only one question of a sermon: “Is this truly the Gospel of our God that we are hearing? ...the eternal Word of God? Or is it the kind of arbitrary thinking,” “stones instead of bread,” “placebos”?⁹

He explains the reality and focus of a preacher’s calling: “...Christ alone guarantees the truth of the Gospel. We preach because we are called and sent by Christ; it is Christ who gives us the mission of delivering his Word...Not our word, but God’s Word: yet even so, God’s Word speaking through ours.”¹⁰ A sermon is “unique, ... completely different from any other kind of speech. When a preacher opens the Bible and interprets the word of God, a mystery takes place, a miracle, the grace of God, who comes down from heaven

into our midst and speaks to us”¹¹ He highlights grace and revelation.

He insists a preacher must be Christ’s messenger. People are bored and pass by the Church when pastors talk “passing things,” about thoughts or experiences, when, in fact, “we are no more than messengers of the great truth of the eternal Christ.”¹² This again reflects his U. S. experience: the German student presents “dogmatics”; the American

For Bonhoeffer, preaching is to point “toward Christ, toward the Lord, toward the Word of God, which is beyond all our words....”

student displays “religious experience.”¹³ As a student, he was critical of sermons, yet later he did not allow his students to be overly critical of each other’s sermons: “so as not to ‘talk it to death.’”¹⁴

For Bonhoeffer, preaching is to point “toward Christ, toward the Lord, toward the Word of God, which is beyond all our words....”¹⁵ He might have appreciated the thought, “One looks out from the self to find out who one is meant to be.”¹⁶

Or “focus most on...the historic doctrines of the faith...remember Robert Murray McCheyne’s rule: ‘For every look inside, take ten looks to Christ.’”¹⁷ Or Barth’s reply when asked “when he had been saved”: “in A.D. 34 when Jesus died on the cross.”¹⁸

Bonhoeffer said a sermon must emerge from a faithful life:¹⁹ “One act of obedience is worth more than a hundred sermons.”²⁰ In “And Have Not Love” (London, Oct. 14, 1934) he said “the power of the *Word*” can become unholy if the love is torn out of it and it becomes self-serving and self-absorbed.”²¹

From the Finkenwalde period come notes from “a discussion with his students about the relevance of preaching:”²²

1. A sermon is only relevant when God is there. He is the one who makes its message concrete.
2. God speaks to us through the Bible. Therefore, our task is to expound the Bible and not to elaborate it!
3. All texts are relevant and it is no part of the preacher’s task to find topical texts.
4. The preacher has no word of wisdom suited specially to the moment. He has to proclaim what he knows of God in the situation.
5. The concrete situation represents only the material to which the Word of

8 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 78–79, 89.

9 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 87 (Best’s introduction), 89.

10 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 90.

11 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 90. This appeared in secondary literature, influencing here.

12 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 90–91.

13 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928–1936 from the Collected Works, Vol. 1*. Edited and Introduction by E. H. Robertson. Translation by John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, 84. Similarly, Russell Doerksen, review of *Christianity After Religion*, by Diana Butler Bass, *Theodidaktos: Journal for EMC theology and education*, 9, no. 2 (December 2014), 13–15, holds that her “experiential theology” is insufficient.

14 Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945, Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance* (London: T. & T. Clark International; ET by Isabel Best, 2010), 195; Best in Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, xxvi. My indebtedness is wider.

15 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 90.

16 Jon D. Levenson, “Idioms of Creation and Covenant,” in Ben C. Ollenburger, ed., *Old Testament Theology: Flowering and Future* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 417–418.

17 David Murray, “Eight Ways Preachers Can Harm the Depressed,” *Theodidaktos: Journal for EMC theology and education*, 9, no. 2 (December 2014): 12. Bonhoeffer likely ministered to depressed people.

18 This is an unverified story of Barth. If it proves to be inaccurate in history, it seems accurate in its theology. Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, used an “unverified” (Best) quotation from Luther in “A Church That Believes, Hopes, and Loves” (London, Nov. 4, 1934), 161, but his example is not blamed for my action.

19 When I was present on Nov. 28, 2014, counselor Mark Moore reminded the EMC ministerial at Morris, Man., that the effectiveness of a pastor’s ministry can be negated by an inconsistency in personal family life.

20 Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 15 (Robertson’s introduction).

21 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 144. Emphasis original.

22 Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 15.



Memorial of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in front of St. Peter's Church, Hamburg

God can be spoken. There are no moments of eternal significance, heavy with God's message for us. All historical moments are ambiguous—in them God and the devil are at work!

6. The truly concrete situation is not some historic happening, but the sinner standing before God, and the answer to that situation is the crucified and risen Lord.²³

Of these, four can be addressed briefly now, one later.²⁴ Point one is indisputable: no sermon means anything unless "God is there."²⁵ Revelation is based on God's initiative. Is he also replying to Liberal Protestantism's neglect to hear the Word within the text?²⁶

Point three, on not choosing topical texts, affirms all of Scripture as God's Word, yet in London and Barcelona, he chose a text or a verse.²⁷ His text for "Repent and Do Not Judge" (London, July 8, 1934), the Tower of Siloam, seems chosen to fit a current event: Hitler's killing of Nazi rivals.²⁸ On point four, "no word of wisdom" strangely negates "the word of wisdom" (1 Cor. 12:8). Point six,

a sinner's stance before God was often his sermon's ending point.²⁹

Bethge provides more of Bonhoeffer's counsel: "Write your sermon in daylight; do not write it all at once; 'in Christ' there is no room for conditional clauses; the first five minutes on the pulpit are the most favorable, so do not waste them with generalizations but confront the congregation straight off with the core of the matter; extemporaneous preaching can be done by anyone who really knows the Bible."³⁰ Some of his advice is curious (why "daylight"?), but his counsel on "the first five minutes" will be examined later.

Bonhoeffer as a Preacher

When 22, Bonhoeffer was nervous, yet eager to preach. He wrote to Helmut Rössler, "I've never approached a sermon with such trepidation. But I'm looking forward to Sunday."³¹ It is said that soon "Bonhoeffer was already an expert in homiletics."³² So how does one assess him as a preacher? Mostly, it comes from his original hearers,³³ such as this from Finkenwalde: "When you saw him in preaching, you saw a young man who was entirely in God's grasp."³⁴ In Spain, Bonhoeffer was so

23 Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 16.

24 Point five perhaps requires a paper of its own.

25 For this and more on God's presence or absence in preaching, see Metaxas, 81.

26 As brought out in an earlier paper.

27 Schlingensiepen, 47.

28 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 127–128 (Best's introduction) and sermon, 128–132.

29 See, for example, Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, "My Strength is Made Perfect in Weakness," 169–170, and "The Betrayer," 186–191.

30 Metaxas, 273.

31 Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 35; similarly, Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 1 (Best's introduction).

32 Schlingensiepen, 47.

33 This is likewise proper for his contemporaries. After hearing Barth preach (1954–1959), prisoners reprinted his sermons, a positive act (Barth, *Deliverance*, 11–12). Helmut Thielicke moved as churches were bombed, excerpts of his sermons being copied by "hundreds of volunteer stenographers." See translator J. W. Doberstein's introduction in Helmut Thielicke, *The Waiting Father* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 9.

34 Metaxas, 276.

popular, Pastor Fritz Olbricht “no longer announced who would be preaching next Sunday.”³⁵ Olbricht praised Bonhoeffer’s preaching in his final report:

He was able to excite his listeners to such an extent that they came regularly.

35 Schlingensiepen, 47.

36 Schlingensiepen, 47.

His sermons were well thought through and contained profound and rich ideas; in his presentation he developed a self-confidence remarkable for his young age and gave the impression of a pastor with many years of experience.³⁶

Decades later, how does one fairly critique a sermon? In its written form, the pacing of a speaker is unknown. Language analysis is a challenge when it is mostly

that of the translator. Does one analyze the theology, the style? Schlingensiepen says this of the earlier Bonhoeffer as a preacher:

In Barcelona he was not at all concerned about standards or rules for preaching, although he later considered them quite important. But even then he warned his students against being tied down too slavishly by rules. For these

An Analysis of Isabel Best’s Collection

THE COLLECTED SERMONS OF DIETRICH Bonhoeffer, edited by Isabel Best, contains thirty-one sermons that span 1928 to 1939: 1928 (two), 1932 (five or six), 1933 (nine), 1934 (eight); 1934–1935 (one), 1935 (one), 1937 (one), 1938 (two), and 1939 (one).¹ Most are from 1932 to 1934. Keith Clements says, “In her selection of sermons, with great insight Isabel Best facilitates a unique encounter with one of the greatest and most courageous Christian thinkers.”² Yet the selection precludes assessing his over-all skill and growth as a preacher.

His life was brief, yet the collection centres on when he was 26 to 28, a relatively new preacher. The sermons are not well distributed during time periods: only two from his early work in Spain, one after the war began, and none cover 1940–1945. Does this reflect his being black-listed (though he kept preaching)³ or imprisonment (though he sent a homily to Eberhard Bethge⁴)? One wonders.

Of the 31, only two are based on Old Testament texts: “The Promised Land” (Berlin, March 13, 1932) and “Gideon: God Is My Lord” (Berlin, Feb. 26, 1933).⁵ There are two series. One, “Risen with Christ” and “The Things

That Are Above” (Berlin, June 12 and 19, 1932), based on Col. 3:1–4, occurred when he failed to finish his thoughts and negotiated more time.⁶ The other, a four-part series on 1 Cor. 13, ended on Reformation Sunday.⁷

The presentation locales vary, yet reveal a key omission: Spain (two), Berlin (ten), London (thirteen), London or Berlin (one), Germany’s countryside (five), and U.S. (none). One U.S. sermon exists, preached more than once.⁸ There is one short English sermon from London, its length likely reflecting the language challenge.⁹ The U.S. sermon would have helped us gauge his language growth and fit a book in English. We are indebted to Best, yet the sermon collection is inadequately representative of his preaching career.

Bonhoeffer’s question, “What do a church, a community, a sermon, a liturgy, a Christian life mean in a religionless world?”¹⁰ comes years after these sermons and is not answered within them. No answer is attempted. Considering his earlier sermons and thoughts on preaching is challenging enough. Perhaps this was Best’s rationale for her selection: it is challenging enough. **o**

1 The dates of a few sermons are tentative, according to Best.

2 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, back cover.

3 Schlingensiepen, 247 (funerals with sermons?), 427.

4 Schlingensiepen, 342.

5 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 23–28, 67–74.

6 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 41–48, 49–57, drawing upon Best’s introduction, 49.

7 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 139–166: “... and [sic] Have Not Love,” “What Love Wants,” “Must I Believe?” and “A Church That Believes, Hopes, and Loves” (London, Oct. 14, 21, 28; Nov. 4, 1934).

8 In Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928–1936 from the Collected Works*, Vol. 1. Edited and Introduction by E. H. Robertson. Translation by John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, 72–81, which includes

comments by editor E. H. Robertson, drawn upon here.

9 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, “My Strength is Made Perfect in Weakness” (London, 1934, undated), 168–170.

10 Cited in Clifford Green, “Human sociality and Christian community,” John W. de Gruchy, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 130. Emphasis added.

early sermons, and also in his London pastorate, he chose the Bible texts himself rather than following those provided in the church lectionary for each Sunday. In Barcelona he usually chose a short Bible verse. Before 1933, he liked to use dramatic images and a style which we would find flowery today, and it is striking that he almost never mentioned political issues.³⁷

First, it is surprising that the Scripture portions used often for sermons were so short: he chose a passage or “a short Bible *verse*”³⁸ (my emphasis). In “Forgiveness,” on the two debtors, a longer passage is used (Matt. 18:21–35).³⁹ (In one instance, his main text is from outside the Protestant canon [Wisdom of Solomon 3:3],⁴⁰ reflecting his indebtedness to Catholicism.⁴¹)

Second, some introductions seem abstract. “My Strength is Made Perfect in Weakness” starts stiffly: “All philosophy of

life has to give an answer to the question which presents itself everywhere in the world: what is the meaning of weakness in this world, what is the meaning of physical or mental or moral weakness? *Have we ever thought about it at all?*”⁴²

He says a preacher should start well: “...the first five minutes on the pulpit are the most favorable, so do not waste them with generalizations but confront the congregation straight off with the core of the matter...”⁴³ His openings could, at times, be gripping, using a short line or two: “Perhaps this text frightens you,

Bonhoeffer’s first sermon, in 1925, started off short and blunt: “Christianity entails decision.” Yet he did not always start well.

and you think it sounds only too much like the news of the day—too dangerous for a worship service.”⁴⁴ Similarly, “If we had our way, we would prefer to keep detouring around the decisions confronting us. If we had our way, we would prefer not to be dragged into this fight over the church.”⁴⁵ Or “You all know about accidents in mines.”⁴⁶

His first sermon, in 1925, started off short and blunt: “Christianity entails decision.”⁴⁷ Yet he did not always start well. “Forgiveness” (Finkenwalde, Nov. 17, 1935) seems ultimately direct, but takes longer to get going.⁴⁸ Joni Eareckson Tada might have appreciated it when Bonhoeffer quickly got to the point, for her pastor John McArthur “always cut right to the chase. ...you could always count on a meaty, challenging message right out of the chute.”⁴⁹

Third, some of his language style seems stiff, even if he does not (in translation, at least) use long words. While some of his early language was “flowery,”⁵⁰ his wording and sentence structure is more straightforward than the poetic style of Peter Marshall.⁵¹ He does have big ideas. Schlingensiepen says, “Certain expressions he used, and at times whole paragraphs of these sermons, may have gone over the heads of the [Barcelona] congregation.”⁵² But he then, sadly, immediately defends him:

But for one thing, it is always better to expect too much of the listeners than to aim below their level, and for another, here in the pulpit was the man whom their children loved, who talked with the teenagers, visited people at home and did what he could to help at the welfare office.⁵³

Is this relevant when assessing preaching? Stretching the listener is useful,⁵⁴ but does not excuse a language level that hinders understanding. To say that people will

37 Schlingensiepen, 47.

38 Schlingensiepen, 47.

39 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, “Forgiveness” (Finkenwald, Nov. 17, 1935), 177–183.

40 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, “As a Mother Comforts Her Child” (London, Nov. 26, 1933), 101–102, drawing upon Best’s comments.

41 Schlingensiepen, 22–25, 252–253, 427, refers to Rome and Catholics, but not to this text.

42 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 168. Emphasis added. Few have not thought about the meaning of suffering.

43 I have previously used this quote from Bonhoeffer in a published column about preaching.

44 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, “Repent and Do Not Judge” (London, July 8, 1934), 128.

45 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, “Who Do You Say That I Am?” (Berlin, July 23, 1933), 82.

46 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, “Come, O Rescuer” (London, Dec. 3, 1933), 110.

47 Schlingensiepen, 159.

48 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 178–179.

49 Ken and Joni Eareckson Tada and Larry Libby, *Joni & Ken: An Untold Love Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 37–38.

50 Schlingensiepen, 47.

51 Peter Marshall, *John Doe, Disciple*, ed. Catherine Marshall (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963), 72–90, as representative. I learned of his style in comments and sermons in Catherine Marshall, *A Man Called Peter* (New York: Avon, 1951), 10, 262ff, and more.

52 Schlingensiepen, 47.

53 Schlingensiepen, 47.

excuse a caring pastor's weak preaching says little positively about the sermons.

Fourth, a complex sentence structure sometimes makes the sermon difficult to follow whether read, heard, or both.⁵⁵ "Forgiveness" (Finkewald, Nov. 17, 1935) is an extreme case. Its sentences are run-on; it risks being a stream-of-consciousness that allows little time to think.⁵⁶ It is not a style to be commended, particularly not from a teacher of preachers. By contrast, "Come, O Rescuer" (London, Dec. 3, 1933) is powerful and direct. It uses simple and complex sentences along with an effective use of repetition.⁵⁷

Does sentence length matter? Dr. Rudolf Flesch says long sentences can be "gotten away" with by skilled people, but most American magazine readers prefer these to average 18 words.⁵⁸ Speakers should simplify, use language one step below the listener's ability, but without "talking down" or insulting their

intelligence.⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer did not talk down. In "The Promised Land" (Berlin, March 14, 1932), he said his confirmands wanted "a serious admonishment for our lives." He provided it.⁶⁰ But long sentences with big ideas are ill-suited for most congregations.

Fifth, Bonhoeffer sometimes deals little with the texts he cites, despite saying "our task is to expound the Bible and not to elaborate it."⁶¹ This reflects his training as a systematic theologian: biblical thoughts are stacked as a philosopher does with ideas or principles, foregoing detailed exegesis. Yet a comment about Thielicke's sermons fits him:

From the standpoint of pure exegesis or dogmatics, deficiencies may well be found in Thielicke's presentation . . . These possible weaknesses, however, give us the clue to the strength of Thielicke. He has a vivid awareness of the actual needs of actual people living

in this age of supreme storm and stress. He sees how the biblical message, how Jesus Christ Himself as this living message, answers powerfully and sufficiently to these needs.⁶²

Sixth, for all of his Christ-centredness, he did occasionally bring Christ late to the sermon: In "What Love Wants" (London, Oct. 21, 1934), Christ is unnamed till the third last sentence.⁶³ Seventh, he could be amazingly blunt: in "My Spirit Rejoices" (London, Dec. 17, 1933), he says, "What does this mean? Is it not just a figure of speech, the way pastors exaggerate a beautiful, pious legend? What does it mean to say such things about the Christ Child? If you want to see it just as a way of speaking, well, then go ahead and celebrate Advent and Christmas in the same pagan way you always have, as an onlooker."⁶⁴

Eighth, Bonhoeffer is wary of theodicy and apologetics. In "My Spirit Rejoices" (London, Dec. 17, 1933), speaking of Mary, he says, "God's path is free and original beyond all our ability to

For all of his Christ-centredness, Bonhoeffer did occasionally bring Christ late to the sermon.

understand or to prove."⁶⁵ In "Repent and Do Not Judge," he says "human beings must submit themselves before the mystery and power of God, and repent and submit themselves to God's justice."⁶⁶

Once this wariness failed him. In "Come, O Rescuer" (London, Dec. 1933), he is responding to "a gas explosion and a roof collapse at a mine in Derbyshire... where fourteen men, imprisoned a mile underground, died waiting to be freed."⁶⁷ Bonhoeffer speaks of a miner, waiting for rescue, who hears sounds of its coming. He wants people, during Advent,

54 My wife, Mary Ann, has often mentioned how her former Baptist pastor, Willy Kurtz, aimed a little above his congregants so they had to stretch themselves to get hit between the eyes. She appreciated his style.

55 The collected sermons were largely read aloud, which drew upon my ears, not just my eyes, to help measure the sermon. No doubt, Bonhoeffer read his material much more fluidly than did I. Yet if my tired mind struggled to follow some of his sentence structure, what of the people who gathered after a hard workweek in stressful times?

56 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 178–183. How much of this structure is demanded in the German text is unknown.

57 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 110–114.

58 Rudolf Flesch, *The Art of Readable Writing* (New York: Harper and Row, 1949), 116, from a chapter on "Our Shrinking Sentences."

59 Rudolf Flesch, *The Art of Plain Talk* (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1962), 152–155.

60 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 24. It is likely their request's wording was his paraphrase.

61 Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 16.

62 G. W. Bromiley in Helmut Thielicke, *The Silence of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), reprinted within *A Thielicke Trilogy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 100.

63 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 153.

64 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 119. See "Christianity entails decision," in Schlingensiepen, 33, 306, 285, et al.

65 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 117.

66 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 131.

67 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 109, (Best's introduction).

to believe that in Christ deliverance is coming,⁶⁸ but does not deal with a stark reality: the miners *died*. How do people know Christ will do for us what God did not do for these miners?

Ninth, though debated, he addressed the politics of his day. Best says, “As always, Bonhoeffer refrained from making direct political statements in his sermon.”⁶⁹ Schlingensiepen says “he almost never mentioned political issues.”⁷⁰ Victoria J. Barnett says, “...Bonhoeffer understood his sermons both as a way of confessing his faith and as a prophetic means to call his church and his students to withstand the ideological spirit of the times.”⁷¹

I was disturbed by a lack of explicit mention of Hitler, but accept that it was

First, preaching matters. Second, preaching is to involve a miracle. Third, the preacher is a messenger.... Ninth, respond to and beyond political realities.

too dangerous. Persecuted Christians are to be “as wise as serpents” (Matt. 10:16).⁷² The Book of Revelation reveals coded language used of political realities amid church persecution.⁷³ Bruce McLeod says the writer of the Book of Revelation “deliberately chose a form of writing that would be as puzzling to the average prison mail inspector as it is to you.”⁷⁴ Yet four examples show Bonhoeffer did not avoid political realities in the pulpit. His sermon “Gideon: God Is My Lord”

courageously stood against German Christians and Hitler: “Anyone who wants to build an altar to himself or to any other human is mocking God, and God will not allow such mockery.”⁷⁵

In “Lazarus and the Rich Man” (Berlin, tentatively

dated May 29, 1932), he refuses to overlook the parable’s socio-economic setting by focusing on the “inner life” of Lazarus or “the soul of the rich man.”⁷⁶ He challenges the Nazi emphasis on “our pride, our race, our strength.”⁷⁷ He agrees with communist concerns that “consolation in heaven” dismisses suffering “behind pious phrases,” alienating “millions,” but insists Christ cares about the here and now.⁷⁸

“Who Do You Say That I Am?” (Berlin, July 23, 1933) was preached on the day for national church elections⁷⁹ and his introduction reflects the politics: “If we had our way, we would prefer to keep detouring around the decisions confronting us. If we had our way, we would prefer not to be dragged into this fight over the church.”⁸⁰ Peter was “nobody but a person who confesses... his faith in Christ.”⁸¹ By this, he does not allow ordinary Christians to avoid their duty. He stresses, “Not only must church remain church, but you, my church, confess, confess, confess. ...Christ alone is your Lord.”⁸²

In “Repent and Do Not Judge” (London, July 8, 1934), preached shortly after Hitler’s Nazi rivals were killed, he “surprised his hearers by urging them not to judge, but to repent....”⁸³ He mentions how Pilate killed his opponents, but says, “Jesus does not judge!”⁸⁴ Whatever his intention, the message spoke to the politics of Germany.

A “Nearly Modern” Discussion of Preaching

Preaching is sometimes considered to be “an anachronism.”⁸⁵ New forms of

68 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 110–114.

69 Best in Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 81.

70 Schlingensiepen, 47. One wonders how Schlingensiepen’s father, himself a Confessing Church pastor, ix, dealt with the issue of whether or not to make direct or explicit political references.

71 She provided the foreword in Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, x.

72 Various influences.

73 N. Bruce McLeod, “Revelation Revealed,” *United Church Observer* (clipped copy, date and paper numbers removed. Circa 1970s).

74 N. Bruce McLeod, “Revelation Revealed.”

75 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 68–69. Emphasis original. This was influenced by secondary reading.

76 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 35–36.

77 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 37, and 33–34 (Best), and perhaps other secondary reading.

78 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 38.

79 Best in Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 81 (Best). This benefits from secondary reading.

80 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 82.

81 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 83–84 (Best’s introduction mentions the surprise and Peter).

82 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 85–86. A book of Martin Niemöller’s sermons highlights Jesus as his Führer.

83 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 127 (Best’s comment). The hearers’ surprise was noted elsewhere, I think.

84 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 130.

85 Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, third ed., 1979), 1–2.

ministry are developed without a pulpit, some seminaries devalue preaching, and the focus shifts from “words” to “activism.”⁸⁶ Reginald Fuller was shamed to see Anglican priests “celebrate the eucharist without preaching. They ought to have a strong sense of guilt at their dereliction of duty.”⁸⁷

Doubts, too, can arise from within a preacher. Edward K. Rowell writes, “I can come to believe that I am preaching to fools who just don’t get it. Worse, maybe I am the biggest fool for wasting my life preparing messages that don’t make one slight bit of difference in the lives and hearts of people.”⁸⁸ In looking at the discomfort with preaching, Ronald E. Sleeth says,

To put it starkly, many preachers’ malaise about the preaching task is not really their concern with the effectiveness of preaching to touch lives, but it is rather their own struggle with revelation—or even faith. To say it another way, some reject preaching for the wrong reasons. They may say that it is not effective communication—not dialogic enough, too rationalistic, too authoritarian—while the real reason could be that they no longer believe a Word has come to them.⁸⁹

Bonhoeffer, though, believed firmly that God has spoken. In “As a Mother Comforts Her Child” (London, Nov. 26, 1933), he says: “For it is God’s will

to be revealed to human beings who come and ask, who are longing for the word, the answer, the truth of God, who believe it when they receive it. To them, God will speak of this mystery.”⁹⁰ Helmut Rössler once wrote to him that “everything depends on working itself out in preaching.”⁹¹ (Fortunately, Rowell dealt with his cynicism⁹² and Craddock affirmed preaching.⁹³)

Fuller advocated rarely straying from the lectionary readings,⁹⁴ yet Bonhoeffer often selected texts. How do we view this? Some people are skilled at preaching from the lectionary—Walter J. Burghardt, for one⁹⁵—and the lectionary itself has a significance that goes beyond the passages it presents: it “restored the Old Testament” and usually “encourages... a christological exegesis” of it.⁹⁶ It moves a preacher from “subjectivism,” forcing them to “deal with texts” and seeks to “present the whole gospel.”⁹⁷

Yes, the Old Testament is valued and we preach it in Christ’s light; all of this fits Bonhoeffer.⁹⁸ For Achtemeier, an Old Testament text must always be paired with a New Testament one because they relate as promise-fulfilment,⁹⁹ yet she says lectionaries are not “binding” and are to be used “selectively as guides but not as authorities.”¹⁰⁰ Bonhoeffer, earlier, showed such freedom.

So how does he relate the Testaments? In “The Promised Land” he brings in Christ briefly early and speaks of him more at the end. Christ is vaguely seen as the fulfilment of an ancient promise to Abraham.¹⁰¹ In “Gideon: God Is My Lord” (Berlin, Feb. 26, 1933) based on God’s promise to Gideon, speaks to and beyond current political tensions. The New Testament references (1 Peter 5:5, 2 Cor. 12:9) are short and used in a minor way.¹⁰² These two sermons allow no fair assessment.¹⁰³

Nuggets for a Guest Preacher

First, preaching matters. Second, preaching is to involve a miracle. Third,

86 Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 3–5.

87 Reginald H. Fuller, *Preaching the New Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1974), xvii.

88 Edward K. Rowell, *Preaching With Spiritual Passion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 35.

89 Ronald E. Sleeth, *God’s Word & [sic] Our Words* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1986), 5.

90 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 104. The mystery spoken of in this sermon is death.

91 Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, 68.

92 Rowell, *Preaching With Spiritual Passion*, 43.

93 Shown by writing a homiletics guide: Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985).

94 Fuller, *Preaching the New Lectionary*, xxxii. The instance Fuller gives for straying is when U.S. President Richard Nixon resigned. If a political instance such as this is an adequate reason for straying from the lectionary, then Bonhoeffer’s ministry against the background of Nazism gives him adequate reasons for regularly doing so.

95 Walter J. Burghardt, *Grace on Crutches* (New York: Paulist, 1986), was called unequalled [!] by D. H. C. Read (back cover). I respect Burghardt’s skill, but the chapters of his *Preaching: The Art and the Craft* (New York: Paulist, 1987) read more like sermons, often down to his usual trifold numbered structure.

96 Reginald H. Fuller, *The Use of the Bible in Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 32–33.

97 Achtemeier, *The Old Testament*, 128–129.

98 As brought out in textbooks and class materials; for the OT, see Best in Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, xvii.

99 Achtemeier, *The Old Testament*, 142–144.

100 Achtemeier, *The Old Testament*, 129.

101 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 23–28.

102 Bonhoeffer, *Collected Sermons*, 72–73.

103 Preparatory course readings and lectures reveal a stronger relationship than indicated by these two.

the preacher is a messenger. Fourth, preaching is proclamation of the Word. Fifth, the preacher and congregation are to look beyond themselves to God in Christ. Sixth, use the introductory time well. Seventh, do not be bound to the lectionary. Eighth, see the Old Testament in the light of Christ. Ninth, respond

to and beyond political realities. Tenth, match lifestyle and sermon. Eleventh, beware of stilted speech and abstraction. Twelfth, balance exegesis and theology.

Conclusion

Was Bonhoeffer effective as a theologian-preacher? As judged by his hearers, yes.

Does he provide useful guidance on preaching? Yes. Did I benefit from his sermons? Yes. Any criticisms feel petty because I read his sermons safely, long after Hitler was dead.¹⁰⁴ As Thielicke said of his own sermons: "...distracted people whose eyes still reflect the glare of the last air-raid...have very accurate scales by which to assess the message."¹⁰⁵ Bonhoeffer preached, taught and was executed. His sermons must always be evaluated and valued with this in mind. **e**

104 Sermons "lose much of their point and thrust" when read in a different historical setting, says G. W. Bromiley in Helmut Thielicke, *A Thielicke Trilogy*, 100.

105 Helmut Thielicke, *A Thielicke Trilogy*, 102–103.

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Perspectives of Pacifism



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AMONG MENNONITES, “pacifism” can be either a “sanctified” word or a “swear” word. It does not matter if one is speaking to devout well-educated Anabaptists or to average “pew sitting” Mennonites, the word pacifism is difficult to deal with both theologically and in real life.

Within Mennonite circles, asking for a definition of “pacifism” may provide several different options to choose, each with a twist related to life experience or educational exploits. This exercise may conjure up images like thoughts of war, Conscientious Objectors (CO), or home invasion practices, depending upon how an individual has grown up within their own church context.

However it makes a person feel or whatever it conjures up, pacifism remains

a main plank in Anabaptist theology. For Anabaptist Christians seeking a life of pacifism, clarity of perspective is essential because tethered to any portrayal of pacifism remains questions of how to animate it within the context of Jesus’ gospel and the church community.

Scriptural Perspective¹

An appropriate perspective of pacifism must be primarily rooted in the person of Jesus Christ. By surveying Scripture concerning pacifism, further structures are illuminated affording proper alignment both theologically and ecclesiastically. Scripture provides the Christian with plenty of examples of Jesus’ life of pacifism or his teaching it to those following him. Isaiah 53 reveals important prophecy related to Christ’s form of pacifism.

He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. . . . He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth (53:5, 7).²

Isaiah’s words represent one example of pacifism which can be phrased as a *Divine Peacemaking*.³ Here, the Servant, Christ, restores humanity’s peace with God through the “peace-covenant (54:10).”⁴ With the Kingdom of Jesus Christ not of this world, the kings and nations were astonished by his kingship. It is within this milieu that Jesus suffers, hence establishing the covenant of peace producing the reconciliation required.⁵

The example is thus set long before human history records the Passion narrative. “The Servant offered no physical resistance to violence but “humbled himself”; he offered no verbal resistance but “did not open his mouth.”⁶ Motyer likens this to animals who “go as uncomprehendingly to slaughter as to shearing; the Servant who knew well, went to his death with a calmness reflecting not an ignorant but a submitted mind.”⁷ Christ’s pacifism (that which brought peace and reconciliation for all creation) demonstrates activism,⁸ rather than passivity.

The Sermon on the Mount is pivotal regarding pacifism. It provides several examples of Jesus’ teaching concerning peacemaking, approaches with enemies, and remains a cornerstone for Anabaptist theology regarding pacifism.⁹

1 *The Constitution and Bill of Incorporation of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference* (Steinbach, MB: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, revised 2007), 8, 12. Most of the Scripture passages used for this section come from its Statement of Faith (article 9. *The Life of Peace*) and its Church Practices (article 9. *The State*).

2 *The Holy Bible: The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 754. All Scripture citations are from the NIV unless otherwise indicated.

3 The idea of *Divine Peacemaking* simply notes that only God could fulfill this specific calling on creation’s behalf. This remains an example by which all pacifism should relate.

4 J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah : An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 430–431.

5 Willem VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 280.

6 Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 432.

7 Ibid.

8 This paper will return to speak more about activism.

9 Elwell, Walter A., ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 815.

Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:9–10). You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I [Jesus] tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well (Matt. 5:38–40). You have heard it said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I [Jesus] tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:43–45a).

These simple non-exhaustive examples reveal a nature of peace found in the person of Jesus. This embodies how followers can be the “salt” and “light” of the world (Matt. 5:13–16), flavouring and illuminating truth and forgiveness which leads to redemption of both accusers and offended. “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matt. 6:14–15).

The ultimate expression of peace for the believer is found, then, in the reconciliation demonstrated through the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20). One cannot engage fully in the Commission’s focus of “making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I [Jesus] have commanded you” if hatred, distrust, or vengeance is dominant.



Juxtaposed to Jesus’ actions and teaching regarding peace, are the actions which most often illicit controversy about Jesus’ peacefulness: that being his actions in the temple (Matt. 21:12–17; cf. Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–48). Here, Jesus is not passive in what could be a traditional pacifist/non-combatant manner. His actions reveal the conviction he held regarding God’s house and his reactions show the reader that a *form of resistance* may be justified in certain circumstances. For Jesus, resistance was warranted where opposition to the first Commandment reared itself (Exodus 20:3).

The Commandment is animated for Jesus through the words of Jeremiah 7:11 declaring that the Lord is watching Israel in its idolatry.¹⁰ Jesus’ actions in the temple are a response to the misappropriation of the sacrificial system that now was big business. Jeremiah points out that the religion practiced in the house of the Lord was false religion, not true worship of God, thus in breach

of the first Commandment.

The temple had become a place of commerce rather than a place of worship where prayer was supplanted by greed or opportunity. This business included a “temple tax” and sale of sacrifice animals,¹¹ making money off reconciliation laws and standards with Yahweh, all the while taking advantage of vulnerable people seeking to do what was right before God.¹² Questions surface about where a peace position is appropriate. Is there a position sufficient for this circumstance?

Nevertheless, addressing the Philippians, the Apostle Paul draws attention to the key component of Jesus’ character: his attitude. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others (Phil 2:3–4).” The passage continues by outlining Christ’s attitude of humility and obedience demonstrating well the servant attitude (cf. Matt 20:27–28). This mirrors that which Isaiah has already spoken regarding the Servant’s actions and what Jeremiah has expressed is important for the house of worship.

These examples, although not exhaustive in nature, demonstrate that

10 R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 302.

11 M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 320.

12 France, *Matthew*, 301.

13 Elwell, Walter A., ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 813.

pacifism requires an understanding rooted in Jesus Christ by which Christians can interpret Scripture and live faithfully as Great Commission people.

Pacifism Perspectives

A. Pacifism in Multiple View

Elwell defines pacifism in its most basic form as “A term, derived from the Latin word for peacemaking, that has been applied to a spectrum of positions covering nearly all attitudes toward war.”¹³ He continues to explore that “extreme pacifism also describes renunciation of force and coercion in all forms.”¹⁴ For Anabaptists this was fleshed out by rejecting not only the sword of war, but also a refusal to engage in political life.¹⁵

Dyrness notes that even with advocates of pacifism in the early church, “Refusal to serve in the imperial army appears to have been prompted more by being required to worship other deities than by having to engage in legitimate force.”¹⁶ “The new forms of warfare today (low-intensity conflict, deliberate killing of noncombatants,

terrorism and the like) have prompted some...to say that war in any form has become so immoral that pacifism is the only Christian response.”¹⁷

Reinhold Niebuhr

In light of how the dictionaries define pacifism, differing sources are helpful in reflecting upon it, each providing perspective to what is involved. Reinhold Niebuhr would distinguish “Christian pacifism” as non-pacifists: to “prove that pacifism is a heresy.”¹⁸ Pacifists then contend “the church’s failure to espouse pacifism unanimously can only be interpreted as apostasy, and must be attributed to its lack of courage or its want of faith.”¹⁹

Niebuhr then posits that it was not apostasy for the church to fail in espousing pacifism. Rather it “is derived from an understanding of the Christian Gospel which refuses simply to equate the Gospel with the ‘law of love.’”²⁰ Niebuhr concludes then, that Christian pacifism is “simply a version of Christian perfectionism.”²¹

Niebuhr concludes then, that Christian pacifism is “simply a version of Christian perfectionism.”

The Royal Canadian Legion, in their yearly service of remembrance (Nov. 11), offers a non-pacifist view on peace, also arrayed with Scripture and surrounded with visions of peacemaking reflective *through* war and conflict.²² Never in the midst of this remembrance is war or violence condoned or celebrated. Rather instead of celebrating violence, what is remembered is that violence was only tolerated in order to make peace. Here, the hymns *Let There be Peace on Earth* and *Make Me a Channel of Your Peace* are sung to reflect that true peace is not from the sword in human conflict, but from the empty cross and empty grave of Jesus who has paid the ultimate price no individual could pay.²³

Jürgen Moltmann

Jürgen Moltmann notes that even for the Confessing Church Christians during World War II, when “push came to shove,” difficulty was evident within the Barmen Declaration theses.²⁴ With the first thesis, “the Confessing Church freed the public form of the Church from the claims of state ideology and political religion: “the church must remain the church.”²⁵ Developed here is the separation of church and state desired by Anabaptists (this is meant to reflect the one Lordship of Christ and not become a form of dualism). This was a place where those who desired not to partake in Hitler’s war had measured success.²⁶

Trouble arose, however, with the second thesis as it “led to conflicts of conscience, when the war began. When drafted, confessing Christians also marched into war for Hitler, although “in faith” they rejected him and the war as an “unjust war.”²⁷ Demonstrated here is the conflict of real life for those who

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 814.

16 *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 639.

17 Ibid.

18 Larry Rasmussen, ed., *Reinhold Niebuhr: Theologian of Public Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 237.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 238. Niebuhr calls this a Menno Simons version of Christian perfectionism.

22 The Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 301, “The Royal Canadian Legion: Branch 301, Service of Remembrance,” November 11, 2013, 2. The service was held by the Caron, Sask., Legion.

23 Ibid., 3. The question may then be asked in return, why not spend more time focused on Christ in prayer than in developing methods of exacting vengeance?

24 Jürgen Moltmann, *Following Jesus Christ in the World Today* (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC, 1983), 43.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

profess something contrary to the state. Is it possible to live truly, convictions professed? Here, the tension remains that: “It is still an unresolved discussion in German theology whether inner-church resistance (speaking of Bonhoeffer in particular) is sufficient or whether this must be extended to political resistance.”²⁸

Other Views

What matters, however, is that Anabaptist pacifism needs clear distinctions and is not alone in the quest for resolution of violence. Jon Bonk points out that not all expressions of pacifism are done for Christian reasons.²⁹

Yoder identifies twenty-one distinct varieties of religious pacifism. These include the *pacifism of nonviolent social change*, with the examples of Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.,³⁰ and the *utopian purism* which posits that a “society which...says killing is wrong, punishes its killers by killing them—

thereby telling them that they were right—is so twisted that it is unworthy of defence.”³¹ Here, concern is raised over the pragmatism of such thinking. Yoder asks if there is an argument of criterion for responsibility possible or if that responsibility is itself a form of idolatry. Furthermore, “One disadvantage of this position is that, to those whom it challenges ... it looks like a new form of the monastic retreat, living parasitically on the very system which it rejects.”³²

The *pacifism of absolute principle* posits that simply put, if a law is made about the sanctity of human life, no crossing that barrier is allowed: absolutely.³³ Also included for Yoder, is the *pacifism of cultural isolation*. Here, the position remains that “Our family has always been Mennonite. We have never taken part in war. That is because we have nothing to do with the world and its ways.”³⁴ Wherever a person lands in the midst of this discussion, variations within

pacifism reveal that it is a complex multifaceted matter not to be ignored.

B. To The Point

Whether comprehended or not the essence of pacifism remains Jesus

Christ who demonstrated pacifism within tremendous turmoil. In Christology, Christ was spoken of by Anabaptists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of his “holy Manhood,” which refers to the humanness of Jesus as well as his divine nature, where “the man Jesus is a gateway to the ethical renewal of humanity.”³⁵

Important for Anabaptists is the way the God-man Jesus lived and acted in real life establishing appropriate examples to model. The Scriptural examples become some of the greatest defining factors of pacifism available. Thus, as already revealed, pacifism is not *passive* or a form of *passivity*. This could constitute a form of *non-involvement* within a social structure, but would then be inconsistent to the “salt” and “light” imagery Jesus taught (Matt. 5:13, 14). An example of this is the Amish form of non-involvement in society. However, is this pacifism as Jesus confirmed or passivity, which does not appear to mirror Jesus’ life and teaching—his “holy Manhood”?³⁶

EMC Perspectives of Pacifism

The Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) position on peace attempts to represent the Anabaptist view of pacifism. The Statement of Faith, article nine, *The Life of Peace* reads:

We believe in the life of peace. We are called to walk in the steps of the Lamb of God, the Prince of Peace. Everything about his life, his teachings and his redemptive death on the cross, summons us to a life of nonviolence. As nonresistant Christians, we cannot support war, whether as officers, soldiers, combatants or noncombatants, or direct financial contributors (not including taxpaying; cf. Matt 22:21). Instead of taking up arms, we should do whatever we can to lessen human distress and suffering, even at the risk of our own lives. In all circumstances, we should be peacemakers and ministers of reconciliation.³⁷

Whether comprehended or not the essence of pacifism remains Jesus Christ who demonstrated pacifism within tremendous turmoil.

28 Ibid., 43–44. It is interesting that Moltmann wrote those words in 1983, well after the two world wars in which Germany was involved. These concerns are contemporary, not necessarily linked to only war.

29 Jon Bonk, *The World at War, The Church at Peace: A Biblical Perspective* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Press, 1988), 15.

30 John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless: The Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism*, revised ed. (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1992), 52.

31 Ibid., 73.

32 Ibid., 74–75.

33 Ibid., 33.

34 Ibid., 99.

35 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christology: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 167.

36 The Amish are one example (among many) of Yoder’s pacifism by cultural isolation.

37 *The Constitution and Bill of Incorporation of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference*, 9.

Consistent to the Anabaptist cry for pacifism, the EMC declares itself to follow the “holy Manhood” of Jesus, expressed through the examples of his life and teachings. By walking in the steps of the Lamb of God, EMC members are called willingly to accept that this includes cross bearing rather than sword bearing similar to Jesus (Luke 14:27; cf. 9:57–62; 14:26). This sentiment is not expressed through the faith statement explicitly, but a direct result of pacifism’s actions if reflective of Christ.

With this, *nonresistance* becomes an arm of expression for pacifism with the EMC. This nonresistance is framed within specific contexts. It is worth noting that it is within this framework of nonresistance that a form of activism is allowed to present. The EMC presents nonresistance in the following context.³⁸ Viewing all forms of lethal violence with horror, a commitment to love all people, including enemies, recognizing that an “expression of love is more important than the defence of personal rights.”³⁹ In conflicts, work is to be done to seek peace and reconciliation, instead of seeking vengeance.

Nonresistance also includes, for the EMC, rejection from all forms of retaliation (including abuse, litigation, physical attack or persons or property, or destructive gossip), active participation in warfare because this is destruction of

life and property. As the people of God, entrusted as stewards of the good news for all people, promotion of the kingdom principles of love and justice are best expressed by verbal witness.⁴⁰

Noteworthy here, by going to the cross, Jesus’ actions spoke a politics foreign to both Israel and the Romans. His

By walking in the steps of the Lamb of God, EMC members are called willingly to accept that this includes cross bearing rather than sword bearing.

form of activism, although nonresistant to the nation state of Rome and in the face of Israel’s ignorance of her own Messiah, Jesus poignantly resisted the Devil’s traps and schemes (Matt 4:9–10; cf. Luke 23:35; John 18:33–37) once more revealing where resistance is justified.

Although military combat is not endorsed within nonresistant pacifism (and not demonstrated by Jesus’ actions), what is encouraging to see is how nonresistance is not defined as non-involvement, thus for EMCers the idea of nonresistant pacifism is given life to resist properly that which opposes God’s first Commandment and the hope offered humanity through Jesus’ sacrifice.

[For the EMC], Nonresistance does not mean 1. that we believe in unqualified submission to any demands that might be made upon us; 2. that we must have an attitude of passivity in the face of every

evil; 3. we must reject all use of forceful discipline; 4. that we can never make use of legal procedures; 5. that we have to be indifferent about exploitation of people or international aggressions; 6. that we have no concern for the maintenance of law and order in our land and among the nations of this world.⁴¹

A Way Forward

So much has been said about what identifies pacifism within Anabaptism. By recognizing other forms of religious pacifism

(possibly pseudo-pacifism in this context) as previously stated (cf. Yoder), two main pieces rise up as practical expressions to implement and live out a proper Anabaptist pacifism, the first being *activism*.

Activism has been expressed several times throughout this paper. It is a deliberate attempt to demonstrate that pacifism is neither *passive* nor *non-active*, but rather an approach of Christian discipleship rooted in Jesus Christ. If this seems uncomfortable to some, it may be because activism for Mennonites has been equated as opposition of pacifism where activists approve of “participation in the wars of one’s own nation.”⁴² This is not the intent of this paper. To express one’s pacifism through activism is rightly to incorporate Murray’s positive conviction that if peace is at the heart of the gospel,

As followers of Jesus in a divided and violent world, we are committed to finding nonviolent alternatives and to learning how to make peace between individuals, within and among churches, in society, and between nations.⁴³

Note Murray’s phraseology. The quote does not possess a passive voice. One cannot “find nonviolent alternatives,” “learn” new pathways to “make peace”

38 General Board, ed., *Evangelical Mennonite Conference Handbook* (Evangelical Mennonite Conference, June 1999), IX, 7, 8. The following expressions of nonresistance come from this text.

39 *Ibid.*, IX.7.

40 *Ibid.*, IX.8.

41 *Ibid.*, IX.7.

42 Bonk, *The World at War, the Church at Peace*, 14.

43 Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010), 46.

within conflicts of any sort without actively seeking, researching, and applying. Jesus' actions demonstrated what it means to be a *peacemaker* or to *pacify* a situation. This too should reflect upon the actions of Jesus' disciples.

Within evangelicalism⁴⁴ of which the EMC shares, active participants are crucial for the gospel's transmission. With this action-oriented expression of pacifism not resembling that of passivity, it can be celebrated that Anabaptism is a frontrunner in evangelicalism and that evangelicalism, also rooted in Jesus Christ, is best expressed in nonresistant pacifism. As found in David Bebbington's definition of evangelicalism, Anabaptists have been expressing well the activism portion found in Bebbington's quadrilateral,⁴⁵ recognizing that since the launch of Conrad Grebel or Menno Simons' break from the Reformers, "the doctrines of Anabaptism are *actually* rooted in the 1st, not 16th century."⁴⁶

Finally, practical pacifism for every day Christians is found through the expression of prayer. Loving one's enemies, doing good to those who hate, and blessing them (Luke 6:27, 28), is a true test of peacemaking.⁴⁷ It is unhealthy fear that leads to anger, rejection, resentment or disdain. Along

44 Evangelicalism is not necessarily evangelical. Rather it is cognizant of the evangelical movement often distinguishing between High Church and Low Church models for gospel transmission equated often with 1730s and following.

45 Mark Hutchinson, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 16. Bebbington's quadrilateral consists of *conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism*. These attributes are essential within true evangelicalism.

46 Willard M Swartley, ed., *Essays on Peace Theology and Witness* (Elkhart, IN.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1988), 61. Emphasis added.

47 Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Peacework: Prayer, Resistance, Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 70.

48 *Ibid.*, 73. Emphasis added.

with Jesus, peacemakers learn to resist not the world and its fear and destruction, rather the traps and schemes of the Devil who promotes fear. "For us life *in Jesus* is stronger than death, love *of Jesus* is stronger than fear, and hope *in Christ* is stronger than despair."⁴⁸ Jesus' life reveals that through prayer, focused on the Father's will, fear of evil disappears and is replaced by power in the Holy Spirit (Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 22:40–43, 23:46).

Conclusion

Nonresistant pacifism is not simply defined or applied in the life of the Christian. For Anabaptists, it is a central plank of faith requiring continual work to address and maintain. The perfect example, Jesus offers hope to each follower exploring and actively living the pacifist life. **✠**

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Feature Sermon

Leviticus 24:19–21; Genesis 4; Romans 13:1–6; Matthew 5:38–42, 26:53; Luke 23:34

Am I a Hypocrite for Being a Pacifist?



Russell Doerksen

Russell Doerksen (Fort Garry EMC) is on staff at Providence University College and Theological Seminary and serves on the EMC Board of Church Ministries. He holds a BA (Business Administration) and an MDiv (Biblical Languages) from Providence. He and his wife Shannon live in Winnipeg.

A M I A HYPOCRITE FOR being a pacifist? The first time I was ever accused of this was when I was first beginning college. I had a friend who at the time was just out of basic training for the light infantry and he believed very strongly that pacifism was nothing more

than an excuse to not get your hands dirty.

I Agree

To some extent I agree with him. We live in a world with monsters of men. In the past century we have had dictators

and criminals who have redefined what “total depravity” can imply. Hitler killed millions, Stalin more. Gacy, Bundy, and Bernardo will haunt the dreams of anyone who dares to read about what horrors they committed in the name of compulsion. How can I believe in

I live in a world of comfort that was built and maintained through threat. I enjoy this life afforded me through violence ensuring civility.



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non-violence in a world with such animals?

Or, and this is the case that is far more convincing to me than being wary of scary men, what of the victims? What of the poor who are oppressed at the hands of tyrants? What of the people who are hunted near extinction because they, through no fault of their own, were born into the wrong genealogy? How can I be a pacifist when there are victims such as these?

In a world with such horror, I have to say that I am thankful for the work of the police and the military. However, how can my being thankful and yet at the same time claiming pacifism not betray me as a hypocrite? I live in a world of comfort that was built and maintained through threat. I enjoy this life afforded me through violence ensuring civility.

Am I a hypocrite for being a pacifist? Undoubtedly, and unabashedly, yes.

Old Logic

The world is maintained through the threat of violence, and to see this, you don't need to look much further than the Cold War. People are hesitant to hurt others when the others can hurt them back. It is a system of elegant simplicity, and it is a system that largely works. Wars become uncommon when they can lead so easily to mutually assured destruction. This is old logic, though. We read in Leviticus 24:19-21:

Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury. Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a human being is to be put to death.

It is this cycle of violence that ultimately maintains the world we live in. In a



world where there is violence, you have to maintain a threat of violence, or else you will be oppressed; you will be taken advantage of. By nature of being alive you have something of some worth, be it your possessions, be it your ideas, be it your family, or your labour.

A Paradoxical Threat

For a pacifist this is doubly true as is shown throughout Anabaptist history. If you are weak by choice, you are also in some ways purposely contradicting a system that is built around violence and threat.

Somewhat paradoxically, you are a threat to the system because you choose to not be a threat to anyone. This is how it has been historically. When the great persecution of the Anabaptists happened in the 16th century, it was in large part because the Mennonites were not willing to participate in the army.

We have moved beyond this to some extent today because we live in a world of bombs and drones. One person pressing a button can kill more people than an entire army used to be able to in ten lifetimes. So governments are more willing to be lenient to pacifists, but the tension is still

We see not only that violence and the threat of violence are used to make things right, but we read that God himself is involved in the process.

there, as my friend calling me a hypocrite will show.

Partly God Ordained

It may sound like I am talking negatively about this cycle of violence, and in a way I am, but I also fully recognize that it is what has afforded me the comfortable life in which I live. I will even go one step further and say that to at least some small extent, in some odd form, it is in part God ordained.

In Genesis 4, what is one of the first things we read about Cain after he is cursed by God? We read he builds a city. The earliest mention that we get of civilization in the Bible, and it is a man whom God forbids violence to surrounding himself with others. Later when we read about the Judges and the cycle they live through, what do we see? The people fall away from the Lord, and then usually through some act of violence God sets things right.

We see not only that violence and the threat of violence are used to make things right, but we read that God himself is involved in the process. There is instance after instance in the Old Testament where violence is used, where civilization is used, to keep things from spiralling out of control; and in the New Testament we get passages like Romans 13:16 seemingly condoning it all. The cycle of violence, while unfortunate, while unfair, does keep us from destroying ourselves.

There is little doubt in the minds of an overwhelming amount of orthodox theologians that God has ordained that the powers that be are placed there in

order to keep things from getting out of hand. The extent to which they are allowed to do this, and the way in which they are allowed to do this is hotly debated; but the fact that the government has been placed where it is, and they have been allotted the use of coercive force for the explicit purpose of keeping the law, from keeping us from killing each other and robbing each other blind, that is not.

It is not a just system, but it is necessary.

It Raises a Question

This is the unfortunate state of affairs that the world finds itself in. But this raises a question. If I believe all of that, then why am I even claiming to be a pacifist?

For the answer, we again must look to scripture. Let us read what Jesus is saying in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:38–42:

You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

In their excellent book *Kingdom Ethics*, Christian ethicists Glen Stassen and David Gushee take an in-depth look into the Sermon on the Mount. They point out that the Greek words that are used, when taken in the context of the whole sermon, seem to indicate that the passage is to be read as a type of progression—as working towards something greater than what we currently have.

In English we do not necessarily get this full effect because we do not have a language that allows for us to easily speak in this way. But what Stassen and Gushee claim, and what I agree with, is that when Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek, he is telling us to do this because if we don't the cycle of violence will never end. There is progression in his words; by turning the other cheek we are ending the cycle of violence.

The Problem With a Cycle

This is the problem with a cycle. While it works well at keeping things from getting out of control, it is not redemptive. The anger is still there. The malice is still

When Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek, he is telling us to do this because if we don't the cycle of violence will never end. There is progression in his words; by turning the other cheek we are ending the cycle of violence.

there. It is just that violence is restrained because of the threat of the outcome. If I kill someone, that person's family will want to kill me; and if they kill me, my family will want to kill their family. The cycle of violence does not end until neither side is capable of fighting anymore.

This cycle is what Christ is trying to end in the Sermon on the Mount, and it is what I believe us as Christians are called to do. If we are hurt we shouldn't fight back, because only through forgiveness, only by fighting that urge to strike back, will we ever stop the cycle of violence.

This is what I believe we as followers of Christ are being called to in the Sermon on the Mount. And this same call for non-violence I believe can also be seen throughout Christ's ministry and his death. The man we hung on that cross all

those years ago—the one we placed there with all of our violence, malice, and sin—we are to remember that he is the same man who in Matthew 26:53 said: “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”

If Christ had wanted to at any point, he could have called down all of the force of heaven, a power beyond what any earthly mind could possibly imagine. What is more is that he would have had every right to. But he didn't. Instead while hanging there, he said what we read in Luke 23:34, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

I do not know if there is any better example of turning the other cheek than that.

That is Why I Am a Pacifist

This is why I am a pacifist. When I am confronted with Christ, be it in his teachings, in his life, death, or in the resurrection, I honestly believe that it is the right

decision to make. In the resurrection, we see the Christ, who chose to turn the other cheek to end the cycle of violence, get the grand okay from God—the clearest indication, short of the Second Coming, that this is the way we are supposed to live.

But this still does not answer my friends from all those years ago. If I am a pacifist, am I not a hypocrite for enjoying the benefits bought for me by violence?

I answered yes to that question, and even after explaining why I am a pacifist, I have to hold to it. This is why. Pacifism as demonstrated by Christ should not be thought of as passive. We are told that when we are slapped, we are to turn the other cheek. When we are asked to walk a mile, we are to walk two. These are active exhibitions of non-violent belief, not passive.

Many Pacifists Are Hypocrites

What I believe this means is this: if I say that I am a pacifist and yet I do nothing to end the cycle of violence, then, simply put, I am a hypocrite. Sadly, for most of my life and for most of the life of many pacifists living comfortably in a world afforded to them by the suffering of others, this is the case.

If you claim to be a pacifist and yet you do not do everything that you can to make it so violence would never have been the considered option in the first place, then how are you a pacifist?

For many of us this thought is too large-scale to be interesting, so what if I instead say this? If you are opposed to stealing and yet you do not feed those who are thieves by necessity, how are you a pacifist? Or, and this is more risqué, if you are opposed to abortion and yet you are not willing to make a community of love where a young women will not be afraid to raise a child, then how are you a pacifist?

To be a pacifist is hypocritical, and—to go further—is even immoral if you are not willing to work towards a world where violence is not necessary. We live in a world afforded to us by violence, a world where the military and the police are still very much so required to keep civility. As pacifists, we are to be opposed to this use of violence, but in claiming this we must recognize that having such beliefs comes at a steep cost.

If we are to oppose war, we must also work as a force alongside the soldiers and governments in whatever capacity we can to diffuse conflict before violence is a necessity. To do anything less would be hypocritical and immoral. How many wars are started because people are hungry? How many battles are fought for resources? These are problems that can be solved without any need for bloodshed.

If we are to call ourselves pacifists, then we must acknowledge that we are saying to the world that we will work as


a force alongside the police feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, comforting the widows, the orphans, the sick and the destitute. To be a pacifist means that we are working to create a society that is such that if violence must be used to keep order, its use will be shocking to us. Only by going to this extreme can we end the cycle of violence.

If you have ever wondered, this is why so many Mennonites are known for social justice, because it is not possible to follow Christ in his witness of non-violence and be known for anything less.

An Uphill Battle

I am working hard in my life to get to a point where I can claim to be a pacifist and not think of myself as a hypocrite. However, the truth is that in the world that we live in, this is an uphill battle. We live in a world where it is costly in terms of time, effort, and finance to fight against violence on the scale that is necessary to see real change. As such for many it is not the path taken. This does not mean that it is not the right thing to do.

I would encourage everyone to look out into your communities, or into the larger world for places where you can invest your time, your effort, and your resources to live this kind of life. Even if you are not a pacifist, it is still a good thing to do. I encourage you to do what you can. Volunteer at homeless shelters, or schools. Donate to the Red Cross or MCC. Above all, I encourage you to not give up in your efforts to make the world a better place.

To be a pacifist is not simple. It is easy for our words to speak louder than our actions; and, when that is the case, we become the hypocrite that my friend accused me of being all those years ago. But if we stay the course, if we fight for the poor and the down trodden, if we feed the hungry and the sick, and work to make the world such a place where violence is abhorrent, then we will know we are following in the footsteps of Christ. Amen. 



We live in a world where it is costly in terms of time, effort, and finance to fight against violence on the scale that is necessary to see real change. As such for many it is not the path taken. This does not mean that it is not the right thing to do.

The Final Word

IN A WORLD GONE PAGAN, WHAT IS A Christian to do? For the world is gone pagan. Members of the body of Christ are tearing one another, and this body is bleeding as it once bled on Calvary, but this time the wounds are dealt by His friends. It is as though Peter were driving home the nails, and John were piercing the side.

— William Temple

As quoted by Philip Jenkins in his book *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade* (New York: Harper One, 2014, 63). Temple was referring to the horror of World War One, particularly the travesty that Christian nations were at war with one another and killing brothers in Christ.

William Temple (1881–1944) became an Anglican priest in 1908, a bishop in 1921, an archbishop in 1929, and archbishop of Canterbury in 1942.

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