Unity in Difference: Hans Urs Von Balthasar’s Christology as Resource for a Mennonite Theology of Peace

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Wycliffe College and the Graduate Centre for Theological Studies of the Toronto School of Theology. In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology awarded by the University of St. Michael's College.

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Abstract

This thesis exposes a deep tension within the historical understanding and practice of pacifism in the Mennonite tradition. Beginning with early Anabaptist understandings of the union of the believer with Christ I show that the *Martyrs Mirror* is a transposition of this union-with-Christ tradition into post-martyrdom settings. However, alongside this spiritual understanding of pacifism there has always also been the reality that pacifism is a form of civility. Anabaptist practices of pacifism partially fit with emerging early-modern concerns about ordering the masses, laicizing the faith, ending barbarity, and constructing secure, productive societies. Secularity, as Charles Taylor has shown, takes over aspects of the church’s gospel of peace and re-deploys them as instrumentalist techniques to further this-worldly human flourishing. In the twentieth-century this creates a continuity between the secular trajectory and forms of Mennonite peacemaking that seem not to depend on the church’s confession of faith. I discuss James Reimer’s concern with the worldliness of contemporary Mennonite theological ethics and show how he used Paul Tillich’s Protestant principle to envision a trinitarian pacifist ethic that was both immanent and transcendent. I discuss the limitations of Reimer’s use of principle to solve problems in Mennonite peace theology.
I then go on to show how Hans Urs Von Balthasar’s Chalcedonian Christology provides a dogmatic momentum for pacifism in a secular age. By the active contemplation of the descent of God into the world the church mingles spiritually and ethically in Christ’s on-going and Scripturally revealed overcoming of evil in the world. The church assumes a Christic unity in difference in the world that is nonresistant both to the Father and to the human community even in its evil manifestation. It takes to itself Christ’s embrace of the human and offers it as a return of thanks to God. Believers absorb the collision of a world that kicks back against the goads, refusing the incarnation’s synthesis of its deep fissures. The solidarity of Christ with his enemies is the soul of the church, issuing in peaceful judgement of the world.
The entire futility and decay of earthly existence can, as such, be transformed into fruitfulness, if it understands itself as the ‘pangs’ of the new aeon and as a sharing in Christ’s sufferings. It follows that everything that human endeavour achieves in respect of the commission given at creation—the struggle against injustice, hunger, sickness, need and depravity, and the struggle for better conditions of life, education, wages, etc.—acquires a positive significance in view of what God has done in Christ and of the help of the Holy Spirit, and that nothing of this will be lost ultimately. God assumes that his creature will be at work, even when he reserves to his own sovereign synthesis to determine how the contributions of his creature are applied. The convergence of human achievement and the coming of God as the omega is absolutely incalculable…but this does not make it any less certain.¹

Acknowledgments

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My family (Glenda, Carmen and Marcus) have lived costly love while I wrote about it. Glenda, my wife, walked me out of the slough of despair on too many occasions to number. Her glad friendship and love have been simply heroic. My children selflessly packed
their things and moved from friends and family to the strange land of Oakville because, as they insisted, “Dad needs to do his PhD”. I love you three to the moon and back.

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of Harry Friesen (1942-2010); father, preacher, theologian, farmer, and nonresistant Christian. I have no doubt that what attracts me to Hans Urs Von Balthasar has much to do with how he returns me to the faith of my father.
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Introduction

In the fall of 1968, John Howard Yoder was in no mood for a merry Christmas. At the time he was a professor in the heart of Mennonite country in Indiana, having spent his formative years in Europe working with Mennonite Central Committee to re-establish a French Mennonite and pacifist church after the devastation of the world wars. Now back in America, he was disturbed by the complicity of “bourgeois” Mennonites, who had become assimilated, prosperous, and comfortable in America. Of course, it was 1968; Bohemian subculture was in full-flower; the Tet offensive of that year signalled the failure of the U.S. in Vietnam and the vindication of anti-war agitation; the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. marked a martyr in the cause of nonviolent cultural change. Revolution was in the air across the nation and the time was ripe for Mennonites to shake off their bucolic lethargy and raise an assertive resistance.

Yoder was a member of the “Concern Group”; young, radical Mennonite theologians who had worked together in Europe and who now joined their prophetic voices in a series of pamphlets known as Concern. In the fall of 1968, the editorial board decided that, for its next issue, the way to address the nest of problems the nation faced (“Vietnam, the urban crisis, or communism”)¹ was to attack Christmas.

Before Yoder’s contribution at the end of the volume, we find a poem titled “Nasty Noel”² and Marlin Jeschke’s piece “Getting Christ back out of Christmas”, leaving little doubt about where the “Concern Group” stood on the Yule: Christ has no place in Christmas

and none should be sought. There are the boilerplate criticisms one often hears of Christmas; it is sentimental syrup, it is crassly pagan, it tames Jesus, it is consumerism, it misreads the gospels, etc. But then Yoder ties in with a deeper connection:

Christmas is typical of a strategy of cultural accommodation. All the dates on the liturgical year have been diluted by an element of accommodation to pre-Christian cult patterns, but only Christmas, of the major feasts recognized by most Christians, has no base either in the early church or in Israel…. Thus it is only Christmas which must be explained primarily as an assimilation or displacement of its pagan predecessors in the age of Constantine. It thereby represents in a quintessential way the issue of accommodation versus iconoclasm in Christian cultural strategy.3

Christmas stands “at the intersection of two competing conceptions of what the Christian faith is all about.”4 A church that is “religious”, “established” and committed to “responsibility” seeks to “add depth or meaning to the world as it is, by giving a dimension of transcendence” to its natural wisdom.5 It exists to bless the cycles of harvest and fertility.

The other type of faith we may call "historical" or "covenantal." Here the focus is on events in this world which change it. "Transcendence" means not a dimension "beyond" this world but a power active within it. The cycle of life and of the year are broken through by a history which is linear, which is going somewhere. The given unities of family, class, nation are broken up by two new loyalties: by a visible, voluntary new community of those who respond in faith to what God has done, and by the vision of the stranger, the enemy, the outsider, the ends of the earth as the measure of the extent of that God's purposes.6

Christmas and all its Constantinian acclimatization is to be contrasted with Anabaptism, a believers church determined in its visibility by the transforming power of the Christ—a faith

4 Ibid., 14.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
which stands in opposition “to every religious sacramentalizing of natural relationships that tends to undermine the importance of the church.”

Why do I raise here this rather hyperbolic, mid-sixties dispatch against Christmas? It’s a window into the modern Mennonite struggle to find a home for the Anabaptist ethic in this world without becoming worldly. At one level these iconoclasts are sure that the American status quo badly needs to be contradicted and interrupted. Christ’s community must be forever setting out, departing like Abram from hearth and home. The old Mennonite concern about worldliness is still sharply evident. And yet at the same time, this is no call for withdrawal from the world in traditional Mennonite terms. These are men of the world, fresh into their Mennonite villages from the universities of Europe. They are drinking in the spirit of the sixties; anti-establishment, anti-authoritarian, and de-ceremonializing. Rather than viewing farming as the vocation best suited to Mennonite world-resistance, this is an urban faith which uses agricultural metaphors as symbols of complacency and complicity. Their concern is to recover communities of counter-cultural discipleship modeled after Jesus.

But this also serves our purposes because it deals immediately with the incarnation. Yoder at this stage is suspicious of it:

[W]hat fourth-century Christendom celebrated was not an event but a doctrine, not a life breaking into the world but the miracle of incarnation transforming it. If in the effort to save Christmas, we bring to it the full weight of the miracle of God-made-infant, we fall into the docetic heresy, affirming the full divine presence apart from the story of the man.


9 Ibid., 19.
Here, Yoder sees “incarnation” as another word for liberal Protestants’ attempt to impart a divine hue to the world that might illuminate our otherwise arid rationalistic existence. It is a Constantinian word, a word that tames Christ’s intent to initiate God-sent but still verily human socio-political outposts in the world which interrupt the numbing cycles of time. “Incarnation”, as Yoder and company perceived it in 1968, suffers from the collapse of holy difference into compromising unity. In Chalcedonian terms it named a divine/human mixture that ultimately left humanity un-transformed. Rather than raising a resistance against the violence enshrined in the world’s ideology of politics, this mixture compromised Christ’s plan to found a counter-culture of peace.

All of this forms a backdrop to this thesis on the relationship between incarnation, unity in difference and gospel pacifism in Mennonite theology. Immediately, I need to say a word about the term “unity in difference.” Sometimes that phrase is used to refer to how the church can remain united in spite of differences. That is not how I use it. I use it to refer to a set of questions about the unity in difference God has with the world, the way these two are related, and the implication this has for the unity our lives might have with God and with the world around us. Simply, God is different than the world and God is united with the world: how do these two assertions cohere in a Christian vision of reality?

Mennonites have spent much time in their history talking about unity in difference. What is worldliness? Who are the pure and unstained, yielded only to God? Is it possible for the church to be in the world but not of it? I will look at how pacifism can be situated as a gospel ethic within a secular world. A secular world has derived many of its instincts from the Christian tradition, but nevertheless conceals these origins, and often uses these instincts against its Christian context.
A central locus for the Christian answer to the question of unity in difference is the incarnation, the event in which God entered the world and accomplished reconciliation with his creation. This was done not in spite of his difference with the world, but through it, gaining thus a covenant of love between Creator and creation. My thesis will seek to show that the incarnation, when interpreted rightly, not only describes the act of God’s unity in difference, but also gives the church an analogous pattern for its relation to the world. I will argue that when the incarnation is interpreted according to the Chalcedonian tradition of the church it can be seen as deeply twined with gospel pacifism, or a Christ-formed intent to address evil without violence, through love.

In the descent of Christ into human flesh, in the relation Christ maintained with the Father during his sojourn, and in the ways in which he directed the church to imitate his relation with the Father through the Spirit, we find a social vision. This can be compared to twentieth-century proposals about the Trinity being our social program or vision. I am arguing, in a sense, that the incarnation is our social vision. It is this “incarnational social

\[\text{\textsuperscript{10}}\text{In the twenty-first century, one is conscious of how divine pronouns are used. Though I am comfortable with the masculine pronoun for the deity, I recognize this is a contested question in academic theology. Since this thesis spends much time with authors for whom this was instinctive, I will use the traditional masculine pronoun for God. In other matters, I try to be as gender-neutral as possible.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{11}}\text{The fount of this was Jürgen Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God (Fortress Press, 1981) and Jean Zizioulas, Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985). A Mennonite entry into this field is Thomas N. Finger, Self, Earth & Society: Alienation & Trinitarian Transformation (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), which argues for an ethic of egalitarian mutuality based on the Trinity. The classic critique of “social trinity” proposals has become Karen Kilby’s, “Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity,” New Blackfriars 81, no. 957 (November 2000): 432–45. Miroslav Volf follows a path very close to ours by his insistence that any trinitarian ethic must be ‘economic’ and rooted in the narrated love of God for the world in Christ. “‘The Trinity Is Our Social Program’: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” Modern Theology 14, no. 3 (July 1998): 403–23.}\]
“trinity as social program” in a way that highlights the incarnation’s special relation to enemy love:

[I]t is not so much the [divine] giving that feeds on and delights in love's reciprocities that the disciples are called to emulate…but rather the kind that seeks to elicit the non-existent response of love in those who practice the very opposite of love. Jesus demanded not so much that we imitate the divine dance of love’s freedom and trust, but the divine labor of love's suffering and risk.12

We turn to the incarnation for our social vision because it is here that God’s love for enemies is shown in a way that demands our participation and discipleship. It is here that the church’s unity in difference with God and the world is figured as enemy love. Gospel pacifism, I believe, is the attempt to describe unity in difference in a way that imitates the incarnation. The pacifist church contemplates God’s encounter with a good but evil world through the lens of the incarnation and seeks to extend the incarnation by its own relation to the world in the form of enemy love, and it does all this through the transforming work of the Spirit.

To the on-going struggles of Mennonites with “unity in difference” I would like to offer some key aspects of Hans Urs Von Balthasar’s Christology to see if incarnation might yet be the dogmatic undercarriage needed for a theology of peace lived within a secular age. I am seeking a pacifist ethic that is linked dramatically, mystically, and concretely to the descent of Christ into the conditions of human life. This calls for a pacifism that is deeply contemplative, calibrated by the real-time movements of Christ in the Spirit. It must be scriptural, attentive to and imitative of the decisions of Christ in his earthly sojourn. It shall be eschatological, lived in patient expectancy under the conditions of this world. It must also

12 “‘The Trinity Is Our Social Program,’” 413.
be contextual, taking up the language, wary of the hazards, and attuned to the possibilities of the world it now inhabits. For us, in this thesis, that world is modern, secular North America.

Deepening the Mennonite theology of peace with the reception of Roman Catholic Hans Urs Von Balthasar’s Christology is not something attempted before. This might bring three questions to mind and addressing them in turn will give us a sense of what is in store. First, do Mennonites really need supplemental resources for a theology of peace? This project intends to offer a deeper, more dynamic doctrine of peace to a church I love. But what could this tradition need in the way of peace resources? They are, after all, known as “peace churches” for their 500-year rejection of violence in the name of Christ.13 Some have wondered whether Mennonite ethics is about anything other than nonviolence. Writing as a pacifist who served as a Mennonite pastor, however, I have seen that Mennonite ethics labors under tensions about what it means to be good people for the sake of Christ. Prior to the

13 The Mennonite argument about pacifism has been more focused on biblical studies than on doctrine specifically. An early attempt in doctrinal pacifism was Donovan E. Smucker, “The Theological Basis for Christian Pacifism,” Mennonite Quarterly Review 27, no. 3 (July 1, 1953): 163–86. Works from the broader theological world that have grappled with the doctrinal basis for pacifism include Arthur C. Cochrane, The Mystery of Peace (Elgin: Brethren Press, 1986); Miroslav Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996); J. Denny Weaver, The Nonviolent Atonement, 2nd ed. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011); and J. Denny Weaver, The Nonviolent God (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2013). Stanley Hauerwas calls his own work “a strange mix of philosophy, literature, a few historical asides, theology and ethics”, but he has been an important thinker in developing an ecclesiology suitable to the gospel of peace. Cf., Stanley Hauerwas, “The Humanity of the Divine,” The Cresser XXXV, no. No. 8 (June 1972): 16–17, where he begins to demonstrate his interest in removing the division between doctrinal convictions and ethical practices. Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, “Peacemaking: The Virtue of the Church,” in Doing Right and Being Good: Catholic and Protestant Readings in Christian Ethics, ed. David Oki Ahearn and Peter R. Gathje (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 25–32 as well as the staple A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). John Howard Yoder explored many doctrinal aspects of pacifism. He wrote of his “messianic” pacifism that it was “the only position for which the person of Jesus is indispensable. It is the only one of these positions which would lose its substance if Jesus were not Christ and its foundation if Jesus Christ were not Lord.” Nevertheless: The Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1971), 125.
twentieth century it was clear to most Mennonites that a nonresistant ethic was central to belonging to the church and could only be maintained in the church. That no longer holds. In my observations as a pastor, I noted that when people came to faith, a Mennonite peace ethic was often the last thing they adopted; when they left the faith, it was the last thing to go. What that suggested was the lack of an organic or natural transition between believing with the church and living the church’s ethic. That transition no longer appears organic or natural to many people, not least Mennonites, in a secular age.\textsuperscript{14}

Secularity, I will argue, has strained the theological underpinnings of the Mennonite pacifist ethic. Secularity has tendencies to quarantine religiously-grounded ethical convictions to the church sphere, or alternatively, to orphan Christian ethical convictions out in the world with no further need of the church or theology. As several authors have noted, ethics in a secular age tends to be a sphere unto itself, seeking neither communal embodiment nor spiritual transformation nor the involvement of God.\textsuperscript{15} As we will discuss in chapter one, 

\textsuperscript{14} In my thesis I am speaking to the situation of assimilated Mennonites. Old Colony, Amish, and Hutterite churches have a different relation to secularity and so their issues of unity in difference are unique.

\textsuperscript{15} For a discussion of these problems of ethics in a modern setting see Matthew Rose, “Theology and the Limits of Ethics,” \textit{Pro Ecclesia} 23, no. 2 (May 1, 2014): 174–94. Though I will not be exploring his work in depth in this thesis, in the background here hovers the work of David Martin, the British sociologist and theologian. His work has shown the intractable Christian linkages within secularity, especially in secularity’s approach to violence. Christianity, in his view, harbors a radical discontinuity with nature. In its ongoing relation to society, however, Christianity has had to broker half-sincere compromises that allow it to continue as a part of culture. But the church has nevertheless balked at these concessions. It continues to use the language of radical discontinuity and pacifism in its liturgy. It spawns monastic orders, sects and other forays that call nature into question and give witness to its radically peaceful convictions. The secular world, however, finds ways of taking a hold of these forays and taming them for its own purposes, thus creating the need for new missional resistance. The best introduction to his thought on these matters is his interview on the CBC program “Ideas”. “The Myth of the Secular, Part 2,” \textit{CBC Radio}, accessed March 22, 2017, http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-myth-of-the-secular-part-2-1.3143513. See also the chapter “Peace,
modern Mennonites’ concern with societal peacemaking and social justice has much less need for explicit reflection on doctrinal issues than the practice their older Mennonite forbears assumed. Further, secularity has looked harshly on one of the central elements of the traditional Mennonite practice of pacifism, which is the spirituality of Gelassenheit. This is a nonresistance to God, or a humble acceptance of hardship in faithful submission to Christ and it is accused of opening the door to the abuse of power.

To point out continuities now between pacifism and secularism should not be interpreted to mean that pacifism and nonviolence are the natural life choices for moderns or that shalom now comes easily for people. In modern western society, violence is mostly given over to the state. This arrangement asks the non-military, non-police citizen to rarely, if ever, act violently. This may reduce violence (which is not a bad thing) but it does create the suspicion that secularity does not finally address the violent instinct in people—it only takes away the opportunity for it to manifest. For a Christian, concerned not only with people’s actions but with the moral gist of their souls and with the direction of their desires, the reduction of violence by sequestering it in the state is not morally impressive.

I will explore this dynamic in the first two chapters. In the first, I will take a broad historical look at how pacifism has been related to the world and to Christ in early Anabaptism, in the Martyrs Mirror, and in the twentieth century. This will necessarily be panoramic. Here I will argue that pacifism began as an ethic grounded in a mystical union with Christ. It took over concerns specific to medieval asceticism and laicized them for a commoner’s church. I will show how Thieleman J. Von Braght translated a martyr’s

mysticism into a communion of the saints for seventeenth-century Mennonite denizens of early modernity making peace with the world. Then I will show how this understanding came into uncharted waters in the twentieth century with its own success. Charles Taylor will provide us with the analysis we need to understand the significant overlap in the agenda and concerns of secularity and gospel pacifism; this will give us a context within which the theological work we do later can find a home. I will look at how certain modern Mennonite theologians have sought to re-situate the pacifist ethic in this new context of unity in difference.

In my second chapter, I will take on board the diagnosis of A. James Reimer, a life-long participant in Mennonite questions of unity in difference and their relation to pacifism. We will focus there on an aspect of Reimer’s thought that has not often been explored, which is his interest in Paul Tillich’s method of unifying modern questions with ancient dogmatic answers. Reimer believed that twentieth-century Mennonite ethics shriveled under a worldliness that manifested as an arid historicism, a concern only for this-worldly change and improvement. He addressed these questions in a way that opens the door for what Balthasar can offer us subsequently.

This addresses then the first question of the need for Mennonites to consider further their theology of peace. Secondly, one might ask, why does pacifism need a dogmatic undercarriage? Why concern ourselves with its relation to the dogmas of Trinity, incarnation, salvation and eternal hope? Is simple obedience to the commands in Matthew 5:38-48, Romans 12:14-21 or 1 Peter 2:18-25 not enough? From a secular perspective, why do Christians need all this ancient dogma to prevent them from committing violence? Most non-believers are peaceful people.
What changes when an ethic becomes a *theological* ethic? Most broadly, a theological ethic describes a way of living that is attuned to the highest vocation of humankind to enjoy God forever. These are lessons for living that have an eye to the great realities of God’s action within us, and for the salvation of the world. Joseph L. Mangina says, “For ethics to be Christian, the theologian must think first of all in terms of what God has done, and only then proceed to consider what that implies about human beings and their choices. Rather than beginning with the question ‘What should I do?’, theological ethics begins by asking ‘what is real?’”

What this already suggests is the blurring of the clean division between theology and ethics. Balthasar, in *Love Alone is Credible* states:

> Dogmatic theology is the articulation of the conditions of possibility of Christian action in the light of revelation…. There is not a single proposition of dogma that Christian action can dispense with, even if the one acting does not have explicit knowledge of it or, though he knows it, does not take notice of it in relation to the existential situation of the encounter. Christian action is above all a secondary reaction to the primary action of God toward man…

Note here the realism of Balthasar's vision of theology and ethics. Neither theology nor ethics is a game invented by thinkers to conjure order in things. Rather, both are descriptive activities glimpsing a reality in which truth about God and skill for living are seamlessly united. This reality is operative even for people who don’t realize what sort of world they are living in. However, by learning and reflecting on who God is and what sort of place creation is, our “secondary reaction” is better tuned to “the primary action of God toward man.” This is a view of the relation between dogma and ethics that I am seeking for Mennonite pacifism. By contemplating the reality of who God is vis-à-vis his enemies, an ethical agenda emerges

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that situates present human flourishing within the long arc of God’s intent to bring us to his home in the kingdom of Heaven.

Further, Balthasar says in the same section, an ethic that seeks to operate apart from dogma runs into “inevitable limitations that arise from living in community”. It is confined to “equalizing the interests of the I and the Thou (suum cuique)”.

In other words, an ethic confined to only this-worldly concerns cannot rise beyond a calculation of balancing interests. In Balthasar’s theology, as we will see, these limitations become vexing for secular persons and are at the root of modernity’s periodic spasms of violence. We rightly assume our claims to be absolute, as applying universally, notwithstanding the “vanity, all is vanity” of the shifting sand in which we walk. Theological ethics offers an account of why our choices matter ultimately, even eternally, beyond the balance of reciprocities in front of us. An ethic discerned within the God-revealed order of nature and grace can account for our common perception that mere reciprocity does not do justice to the vigor with which we hold forth on our moral beliefs. Pacifism, of all ethical positions, has great difficulty justifying itself, ultimately, in a context where the eternal has been foreclosed and only reciprocity and the balancing of interests remains. Though secularity has made huge strides in some areas of nonviolence, a purely this-worldly absolute refusal of violence is not only unadvisable, it is impossible. To the extent that the Mennonite pacifist ethic is not a theological ethic, it will fail to provide a coherent wisdom for how to live in this world.

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18 Ibid., 112. One thinks here of Reinhold Niebuhr’s argument that in the real world, love must be qualified with justice. “In the field of collective behavior the force of egoistic passion is so strong that the only harmonies possible are those which manage to neutralize this force through balances of power, through mutual defenses against its inordinate expression, and through techniques for harnessing its energy to social ends. All these possibilities represent something less than the ideal of love.” An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 139–166. Ibid., 140.
In this thesis I will occasionally use the phrase “dogmatic momentum.” What do I mean by this? I am seeking a way of talking that suggests that the convictions Christians hold to are not merely static, unmoveable foundations or frameworks but are more like adverbs describing the action of God in his perfect love. God is moving, creating, sustaining, judging, saving; theological speech is our God-breathed attempt to keep up with God, to match with our words, in some analogous way, the drama of God in the world. Through prayer, worship, obedience, reflection and study our words gain traction in the movement of God and thus gain a “dogmatic momentum.” Theological ethics, in my view, has a moving, living centre in the saving Lord.

Dogmatic ethics, of Balthasar’s description, is an ethic that seeks to be conformed not only to doing the best thing in quandary cases, but doing good as an act of worship, deep gratitude, and joyful reception of God’s actions. It seeks to know not only the basic requirement to qualify as a good person, but aims at “placing oneself entirely at the disposal of divine love.”19 A dogmatic ethicist begins ethical inquiry not with a moralistic calculation, but with the wonder that such momentum should have been granted her at all. This does not leave behind laws, rules, norms, or virtues, which are directed to the larger horizon of participation in what God is doing.

Thus, in this dissertation I am looking for a dogmatic momentum by which to think about and practice pacifism. Many interesting questions about pacifism will be left aside through this focus. This thesis cannot really be seen as an apologetic for pacifism. Indirectly, of course, a deeper connection to divine action does brighten its attractiveness to Christians.

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But my audience here is those who fail to appreciate the ethic’s participation in the mystery of salvation even though they acknowledge the severe condemnation of violence in Jesus’ words and are searching for alternative solutions to conflict. I am also not entering into the question of whether pacifism or just-war doctrine is the appropriate Christian approach to war. I am assuming that the scriptures place a severe restriction on redemptive violence and that this restriction, if it leads to pacifism, needs to be linked up with the trajectory of God’s action in the world. Likewise, I will not delve into the many important questions about how pacifism can be lived out within difficult dilemmas. I grant that the church will always struggle with how to adequately match the love of God within the structures of the world, but I am not concerned here with the nitty-gritty of how that is best done within the realities of late-modern political life. What I am assuming for the purposes of this thesis is that the scriptures have mandated a drastic refusal and resistance against violence for the Christian. I am trying to show that such a drastic refusal does align with the reality of who God is, as that reality has been unveiled in some of the bedrock convictions of the church across time. In the terms of the gospel of Matthew, if we have truly seen the perfection of the heavenly Father as this is explained to us in the incarnation, nonresistance is an appropriate imitation of that perfection (Mt 5:48).

So much about the need for a dogmatic exploration of pacifism in a secular age.

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20 I should also make a note about my use of the terms pacifism, nonviolence, and nonresistance. Generally, “pacifism” refers to all absolute refusals of violence, whether religiously or secularly based. I affix gospel to “pacifism” when I refer specifically to a Christian faith-based ethic. Nonresistance is an older word that I make much use of because it seems to me to retain a spirituality that “pacifism” lacks. “Nonviolence” is used for a more general attempt to reduce violence in society, and need not indicate complete pacifism.
Thirdly then, why should a Mennonite theological ethic of pacifism look to *Hans Urs Von Balthasar* as a dogmatic resource?²¹ Balthasar is, after all, a Roman Catholic. There are many well-known disagreements between Mennonites and Catholics. This relationship has festered over time in mutual suspicion on both sides. The *Martyrs Mirror* is filled with stories of sixteenth-century Catholics who persecuted Mennonites. Why now look to one of them for counsel on peace?

However, the time is right for Mennonites and Catholics to join together in developing the church’s understanding of peace. In the recent five-year official Catholic/Mennonite dialogue, the theology and practice of peacemaking was identified as a key area offering substantial common ground and a site of great potential for healing the painful history between the two traditions. The title of the document, *Called Together to be Peacemakers*, suggests as much.²² As Mennonites embrace more direct cultural transformation, as Roman Catholic leadership gives stronger voice to nonviolent witness as an valid counterpart to the just war tradition, and as both now live as dis-established minority churches within a secular age, the two communions become more in need of the other’s

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²¹ Mennonite theologians have yet to engage Balthasar. However, Harry Huebner has written an admirable introduction to his life and thought in *An Introduction to Christian Ethics: History, Movements, People* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), 277–92.

strengths. As John A. Radano said of the dialogue, “Among international partners in which the Roman Catholic Church has participated, Called Together's concentration on a theology of peace is the most intense, bringing into constructive conversation the rich experience of Mennonites… with the vast literature and practice of Catholic social teaching.”

But what about Balthasar specifically? Few words of introduction are needed. Hans Urs Von Balthasar (1905-1988) was an instrumental thinker in the nouvelle théologie movement that influenced the Catholic church toward the renewal of the second Vatican Council. Key here was the Council’s abolishing of every dichotomy between the confession of faith and the holy life. Balthasar sought for his church the union of ethics, sanctity, spirituality and theology that we are seeking for pacifism. His deep engagement with scripture, his interest in the early church as a resource for Christian thought, his vision for the unity of nature and grace as described by Henri de Lubac, and his knowledge of Protestant concerns through a life-long friendship with Karl Barth, have made him an interesting bridge-builder with the Protestant church more generally.

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23 The U.S. Bishops in their pastoral letter “The Challenge of Peace” gave unprecedented weight to the pacifist tradition within the Roman church. They wrote, “the ‘new moment’ in which we find ourselves sees the just-war teaching and non-violence as distinct but interdependent methods of evaluating warfare. They diverge on some specific conclusions, but they share a common presumption against the use of force as a means of settling disputes.” National Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response (St. Paul: St. Paul Editions, 1983), para. 120.

24 Sharing Peace, ix.

25 Many good introductions to Balthasar’s thought have been published. In my opinion the best two general introductions are Edward T. Oakes, Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar (Bloomsbury Academic, 1997) and Mark A. McIntosh, Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs Von Balthasar (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).
My engagement with Balthasar has certain limitations that need to be acknowledged. I am not claiming to uncover never-before-seen doctrinal emphases in Balthasar’s work. The theology from which I am drawing is, for the most part, from the un-controversial aspects of his thought.\(^{26}\) What is unique in my project is the appropriation of Balthasarian themes for a Mennonite theological ethic of pacifism. Thus, this should not be seen as a “dialogue” between Balthasar and Mennonite theology. Mostly this will be a one-way appropriation of Balthasarian themes to Mennonite ethics. Though we need to be aware of where Balthasar is not helpful to our project, I make no attempt to suggest what Balthasar might have to learn from Mennonite theology. I take it as obvious that there are significant differences between Balthasar and North American Mennonites on issues such as the sacraments, Mariology, apostolic succession, and the role of the papacy in the church.\(^ {27}\) But this was a man who wrote courageously and fiercely about the “nonresistance” he saw at the centre of the gospel, and thus he needs to be heard by Mennonites who have discarded that term after centuries of usage.

Balthasar brings an approach to ethics that I believe can help tether Christian pacifists in the drama of the gospel without a tactical retreat from the world. In a short synopsis of his theological pilgrimage he remembered:

[I]t was clear to us from the beginning that the bastions of anxiety that the Church had contrived to protect herself from the world would have to be demolished; the Church

\(^{26}\) So, for example, I deal directly with Christ’s utter yieldedness unto deprivation and death before the Father, but I do not engage at length with Balthasar’s vision of Christ’s descent into hell.

\(^ {27}\) Called Together to Be Peacemakers has begun the work of exploring the long-held differences between Mennonites and Catholics. The work of the late Ivan Kaufmann should also be mentioned here as a pioneer in re-shaping the relation between the two churches. Bridgefolk, a movement which he co-founded with Gerald Schlabach, Marlene Kropf and Weldon Nisly, is an annual retreat for sacramentally minded Mennonites and ethically minded Catholics to learn from each other and develop friendship.
had to be freed to become herself and open to the whole and undivided world for its mission. For the meaning of Christ’s coming is to save the world and to open for the whole of it the way to the Father; the Church is only a means, a radiance that through preaching, example and discipleship spreads out from the God-man into every sphere.28

But this mission could not be accomplished except by retrieving once again a transforming vision of the acts of God. Here he stands in the train of thought developed by Karl Barth in his reaction to liberal Protestant complicity in empire and unholy culture. Ethics in modernity, according to both of these theologians, has a propensity to be “bourgeois”, that is, self-authenticating, perduring without reference to God, and thus largely complicit in whatever idolatry happens to be in vogue. Too often, “ethics” names the attempt to understand the good according to ‘common sense’ or purely ‘natural’ norms, apart from revelation and grace. Barth’s dogmatics was a mighty attempt to reject this form of ethics and to recover a way of being human rooted in God’s determination to be human for and with us in Christ. This is not so much the priority of theology over ethics, but the priority of God’s action and word in establishing the conditions for human action.

Balthasar was in agreement with this retrieval and, if anything, pushed this further. One concern that Balthasar had with Barth was that while Barth sought to distribute ethics throughout the dogmatic loci, the church, in Barth’s theology, failed to retain its deep union with Christ as his body, the prolongation of the incarnation.29 The church’s sanctity remained too orphaned. As we saw in the above quote from My Work, in Balthasar’s view, the church was the prolongation of the incarnation, without collapsing Jesus of Nazareth into the


29 This is D. Stephen Long’s argument in Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Preoccupation (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 212–24.
This disagreement is symptomatic of a larger difference between the two thinkers, and it suggests why we are looking to Balthasar for a grounding of pacifist ethics in the church’s dogma. Balthasar’s Christocentric view of the *analogia entis*, learned from Erich Pryzwara, was that, through the divine reconciling descent, nature could be taken up and transformed by Christ without departing from its natural qualities and ends. The qualitative difference between God and the world was figured by the union and difference of the Chalcedonian definition. No sharp dichotomy could be posited between nature and grace for those who recognized the beauty of the incarnation. What this led to was a greater expectation that the daily human life of the church could be offered as an acceptable offering of love to God, and that this offering was in some sense participatory in salvation. The church in all its humanness was a key sacrament through which the world is given to God. While Barth moved in Balthasar’s direction on this over his life, he maintained that the church as the prolongation of the incarnation was a “blasphemy.”

So I will offer three “moments” in the incarnational drama of salvation as emphasized by Balthasar: incarnation, provocation, and convocation. This is the descent of God into human conditions and the revolt which this engenders, as well as the gathering of the church in solidarity with Christ’s enemy-love.

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30 As noted in Ibid., 219. William Cavanaugh writes that Balthasar describes the church as the incarnation’s prolongation without falling into four common errors: it does not ignore the church’s sins, it does not equate Christ’s unique hypostatic union with the church, it does not identify the church’s infallibility with its institution and fallibility with its people, and it does not conclude with a triumphalist ecclesiology.

31 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. IV/3.2 (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 729. Barth was concerned that any suggestion that the church mediated Christ would imply that Christ was absent unless the church, in its mastery over him, made him present. Cf. Long, *Saving Karl Barth*, 215–16.
Balthasar was keenly interested in the establishment of “secular institutes” within the church and founded such a fellowship in the Community of St. John, together with his friend Adrienne von Speyr. These institutes were to be “invisible” within the world, that is, those who joined these institutes would live and work in the world rather than in community. For Balthasar, this was an important mediating position between the more traditional monastic devotion and the life of the laity, and it was an essential witness within a secular age.\(^{32}\) In fact, D. Stephen Long shows that this emphasis on the secular institutes was for Balthasar the fruit of the church freshly freed from the shackles of Constantinianism. It represented the new possibility of the church existing within the secular separation of the spheres to live by the teachings of Jesus in the world without compromise, and with defiant resistance to the world’s structures.\(^{33}\) Though we will not delve into Balthasar’s theology of the secular institutes in this thesis, his interest alerts us, it seems to me, to a point of contact with the Mennonite tradition. Anabaptists too, sought to translate the monastic counsels of perfection into the difficulties of lay, secular life and have struggled with the tensions involved. Mennonite theology has sought ways for the rigorous spirituality and discipleship of Christ taught in the Sermon on the Mount to become a reality in the streets, homes and workplaces of the world. Baptism, the Lord’s Supper and church discipline have been important in the Anabaptist tradition as the church’s Christ-given ways of sponsoring the believer’s “pledge” to live a holy life of peace. Because of this interest, Balthasar was keenly aware of the


travails with which the Kingdom of God enters the world. He was both intent that Christ’s teachings should be the un-surrendered ethic of the Christian, and also aware of the suffering that such a life entailed. His words of counsel to the institutes ring true for Mennonite church life as well:

When hiking along the sharp ridge between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world, it is not just individual persons but whole institutes that can be affected by dizziness and be in danger of falling into the gulf either of one-sided spirituality or of excessive secularity. They exist and remain alive only in a daily “watching and praying,” a continual discernment of spirits. Whoever is looking for a secure barn has to look elsewhere.34

The Mennonite church has been no secure barn. Any criticism that this thesis offers must acknowledge that what the Mennonite church has sought to do, in regards to peace and nonviolence in the world, is a mighty and dizzying attempt to “hike along the sharp ridge between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world”. The scrapes and bruises produced by such a venture are only a testimony to the height of the attempted expedition. Christ and the world are a hard union.

For Balthasar these communities of “paradox” (in the world but not of the world) could be lived “because the whole God has involved himself in Christ for the entire world, and because the place where he does this ever anew, is the church of Christ, the ‘sacrament of the world.’”35 Because of the incarnation, both the first time in the historical ministry of Christ, and the second time in the historical presence of the church, the Kingdom of God can verily be lived within the world—though always with suffering and weakness. Though one cannot make a straight-forward translation of the secular institutes to the Mennonite believers

35 Ibid., 304.
church, there are strong continuities in the intent and the challenges, and especially in the
dogmatic undercarriage which both such outposts of the gospel in the world must assume.

But can Balthasar be called a pacifist and would he be interested in being used as a
resource for such an ethic? This is a delicate question. My thesis does not claim that he was a
pacifist, only that his theology of the incarnation can fruitfully provide a dogmatic
momentum for the loving refusal of violence in the name of Christ. But it is helpful to have
some sense of what he would have thought of our project. Balthasar’s theology points
incessantly to Christ’s nonresistance and the church’s union with it, and yet is very cautious
about prescribing the gospel for the establishment of this-worldly political and economic
structures. Thus, Balthasar frequently needs to add after an exposition of Christ’s role in the
world, “but this does not necessarily mean pacifism.”36 He associates the word with what he
saw as the errors of Catholic liberation theologians who were too optimistic about the
immediate translation of the Kingdom of God into earthly progress. He was nervous about
the cross being used as “a ‘tactical’ instrument”, or a “technique for the attainment of
political goals.”37 Balthasar had an Augustinian instinct for the difficulty with which the
gospel finds a home in the world.38 His dismal view of the hegemonic pretensions of

Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 484; Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Engagement with God: The Drama of
Christian Discipleship, trans. R. John Halliburton (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 86; Hans Urs
‘Beatitudes’ and Human Rights,” in Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Explorations in Theology, Vol. 5: Man

37 Theo-Drama, 1994, 4:484. This quote occurs in “Theodramatic Dimensions of Liberation”
which is his most direct engagement with the pacifism of Gandhi used in various forms of Liberation
Theology.

38 Balthasar, A Theological Anthropology, p. 215, describes in Augustinian terms the
wretchedness of the life of the church in its earthly sojourn. “Is the cross an energy factor for the
secularity assured him that any too-easy translation into earthly kingdoms would compromise a gospel which had only promised tears and sorrow to its disciples. Balthasar saw clearly that the old Constantinian union of state power and church sanctity was a mistake and he saw a close relation between the new “liberation” progressivism and the old Constantinianism. Both underestimated the inherent and abiding opposition between the gospel and the world.

The atonement of Christ, for Balthasar, was accomplished through the utter nonresistance of Christ’s love, and this atonement is carried forward by the church immersed in that same font. As we will see, atonement for Balthasar is a relentlessly political incursion by Christ into world affairs, an invasion that goads worldly power into a desperate revolt. One would be hard pressed to discover any sort of just-war doctrine in Balthasar that could offer wisdom for how violence could itself be used in a chastened, Christ-like way. His relentlessly rigorous understanding of Christian discipleship as union with Christ’s surrender to the Father, yielding to death, does not lend itself easily to sanctifying these kinds of prudential processes. Further, his strong critique of the titanism of the modern state and its promethean arrogance, not least in its massing of arms, offers little hope of a Christian evolution of the world? The cross of Christ means to have the will of complete impotence, to the fear of the Mount of Olives, to the most extreme shame and bitterness, to being betrayed, denied, abandoned, to a death as bankruptcy. The cross signifies relinquishing all hope which one has experienced….”


40 “In the Book of Revelation there is only one way to combat the trinity of hell, which is the final shape of evil: believers must bear witness in their lives and in their blood, thus fully incarnating their faith as they pit it against utter, satanic, dis-incarnation…. This eschatological opposition between the apparent omnipotence of evil and the apparent powerlessness of believers cannot be dismissed as mere vision. It is genuine prophecy.” Balthasar, Theo-Drama, 1994, 4:452.
vocation in modern military exercises. The military industrial complex, as it is sometimes called, is positioned in demonic resistance to the mystery of the powerlessness of Christ. Even if Balthasar grants that monarchs can be saints, he doubts that the destructive capacity of modern warfare can ever be accepted by a Christian.

But does Balthasar have an answer for how a Christian ruler can dispense with the sword? No. But while Balthasar disliked the ideological stance of pacifism, he had much positive to say about saintly nonresistance and was deeply hopeful about the fruit such sanctity could bring to the world. This brings us to his lifelong admiration for the German poet and novelist, Reinhold Schneider, about whom he wrote in *The Tragedy of Grace*. Schneider was a gospel pacifist and it was this aspect of his thought that fascinated Balthasar. Schneider looked deeply into the question of power: “the omnipresent drama of the encounter between two missions that are equally original and yet stand in deadly mutual conflict: the mission of the one who is entrusted with the task of administering the earthly realm and the mission of the saint as the real symbol of the kingdom of God that descends into the world.”

This was a deadly conflict for Schneider, but it was one that Christians nevertheless needed to enter and suffer. It was incumbent upon Christians to seek what power and authority the cross inherently had vis-à-vis the world, and use it, to the extent that it was possible, for the witness to God’s original plan of creation. What made Schneider such a stark figure for Balthasar was Schneider’s commitment to maintaining the unity in

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41 See “The Battle of the Logos” in Ibid., 4:441.
difference of the saint within a total immersion into worldly affairs. Utterly fixed on the cross and transformed by a personal union with Christ to reject violence, this faith nevertheless lived in the world and suffered the travails of the “refraction” that necessarily occurred when the Kingdom of God sought to take up space in worldly reality.\textsuperscript{44} Thus, Schneider’s personal suffering of the clash between worldly power and the nonresistance of the saint had given the church a “guiding image, an image to be retained at all costs” for the secular institutes.\textsuperscript{45} “Their fundamental aim is to combine the radicalism of the gospel with a total, active, involvement in secular work, enduring in their own selves the conflict described here.”\textsuperscript{46} 

_Tragedy Under Grace_, was dedicated to the furtherance of the secular institutes which we have already described, suggesting that Balthasar thought they should take up Schneider’s pacifism in the world. What Balthasar (following Schneider) seems to have in mind for these institutes were people molded by the love and nonresistance of Christ, quietly involved in the world, seeking to plant the seeds of a new creation. These people would be devoted to Christ, and constrained by the Spirit to go and experience the tensions and conflicts that the clash between Christ and the world occasioned. Without using violence, but without withdrawing, these institutes were to be pioneers (and martyrs) in the redemption of worldly power by the church.

Secularity offered a unique opportunity for a more faithful unity in difference that gave space to nonresistance in a way the earlier more infused church/state relations had not. Balthasar believed that in the providential working of God, this kind of nonresistant

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 127.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
involvement in the world could create mighty change. Over time the conscience of the world might develop to where a complete rejection of violence became practicable. There was today within secularity a growing “ripeness” for the claim of nonviolence. This understanding of secularity is a significant one for our thesis:

The New Covenant is a spirit, a yeast in history… its inner power works through all ages, and its ultimate logic will have come into force only on the Last Day. Insights that will one day break out of the womb and emerge clearly as demands develop in a mysterious maturing process, and one cannot say how much of this process is due to the natural development of humanity and how much to the gospel seed that sprouts in individuals and peoples. A few centuries ago, humanity was ripe for the insight that slavery is incompatible with human rights. Today we see the dawning of the day when responsible humanity will be ripe for the insight that bloody war contradicts its present adult state and is no longer an appropriate means to resolve questions and conflicts of the humanity that has become indivisible and takes charge of its own self; this is the day when the best men begin to be ashamed of war.47

And so, I might predict that in Mennonite terms, Balthasar would find the traditional two-kingdom theology which withdrew the church from the world to be too insusceptible to the travails of the world, especially in a modern secular milieu where there is a heightened consciousness about the evil of war. On the other hand, I suspect he would find current Mennonite optimism about peacemaking and social justice to be in a vulnerable place. He might worry that it could forget just how exalted the nonresistance of Jesus really was and how much of a challenge such utter self-abnegation for God’s sake is to an age that takes this-worldly human flourishing as its only north star. Balthasar’s message might be, open yourself daily to the heart of the world, and allow yourself to be irradiated by this furnace of love at the centre of the world, and then live the difficult but ultimately beautiful life that this

enables. In some contexts this will be a hidden life, in others it may be more open and welcomed.

So much then about using Balthasar to resource a Mennonite peace ethic. What remains now is to say a few words about this project in relation to other Balthasarian studies that need to be recognized as part of this conversation. There are several key works that have greatly enhanced our understanding of Balthasar’s contribution to theological ethics. These were significant in Balthasar studies because it was not immediately obvious what a Balthasarian ethic might be, since he did not often write in a consciously ethical frame. Christopher Steck’s book, *The Ethical Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, is a summary of Balthasar’s contribution to ethics that is not likely to be surpassed, and I have benefited greatly from it in developing my root understanding of how ethics emerges in Balthasar’s theology. Steck shows that the ethical in Balthasar emerges from contemplation. “Von Balthasar understands the central act of the Christian, the response of faith, not primarily in terms of an intellectual or fiduciary response, but rather as the creature’s doxological response to the glory of God in Jesus Christ.”48 It is not that the glory of God should be acknowledged by the creature, but that the very openness and reception of the person to the glory is already in itself an ethical posture. Glory (and its earthly analogue, beauty) establishes the conditions of its own perception in the one who is receptive to it.49 Further, Steck argues that glory when it appears in the world, incites a drama, a *theo*-drama, that includes a real, earthly response. Steck shows beautifully how, for Balthasar, the *theo*-drama

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49 See especially chapter one, “Aesthetics and Human Response”. Ibid., 7–33.
incited by the appearance of God’s Christic glory in the world does not trample or overwhelm the creature, but transforms the creature to be what it was created to be. In this sense, glory has a decidedly Catholic framing in Balthasar: it includes the work of grace without leaving behind nature. But even further, Steck is helpful in his description of how ethics takes on a *bivalent* posture for the Christian, including both a vertical yielding to God and a horizontal yielding to the neighbour.\(^{50}\) This was instrumental in helping me understand the Balthasarian bi-directional nonresistance I describe in chapter three.

A second source that has proved foundational is Melanie Susan Barrett’s excellent work on Balthasar’s ethics as it pertains to virtue. Barrett wants to complement the account of Steck (which argues for a modified divine command ethic in Balthasar) by offering a virtue ethic reading of Balthasar. Because ethics for Balthasar is so keyed to the contemplation of Christ as divine beauty, so keyed to the aesthetic active passivity, and so formed by the contemplation of the beauty of love, it is much more concerned with how we become certain kinds of people than it is with following commands or rules. What she demonstrates is the prevalence of love in Balthasar’s theology and the ethical richness that this reality brings.\(^{51}\) Love is expressed in the world in the beauty of Christ’s gift of salvation on the cross. There is an educative process in which the Christian, through the encounter with this beauty, cultivates the virtues over time. What Barrett emphasises is the strong place of

\(^{50}\) See especially chapter 5, “Contemplation and Action”. Ibid., 123–49.

desire, emotion and ecstasy in the ethical life as seen by Balthasar. We are shaped by that beauty which presents itself before us, and which stirs us to reach for it.\textsuperscript{52}

A third resource that has been formative is D. Stephen Long’s book \textit{Saving Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Pre-occupation}. This book demonstrates the intense and often combative friendship between these two thinkers, and it shows how Balthasar welcomed so much of Barth’s theological ethics while re-casting it within the Catholic “and” as we have already noted. Balthasar welcomed the biblical and christological centring that Barth’s theology brought to ethics, but saw that Barth did not fully come to grips with the incarnation in the way created, human life, ordered according to the gospel, could be offered to God. Long was also helpful in helping me see the importance that nonresistance and pacifism played in Balthasar’s thinking. He shows clearly how large metaphysical questions of unity in difference fund Balthasar’s concern to bring the message of the gospel in all its contrariness (its ethics!) to bear on the modern world without compromising its glory. He is one of the few commentators on Balthasar who take seriously his interest in Reinhold Schneider.

So this then is our project: to consider the travails with which Mennonite theology has struggled to bring about a genuinely world-involved but no less Christ-centred pacifism, to consider Reimer’s critique of what became of Mennonite unity in difference, and then to see three moments in the Balthasarian theo-drama that form a trajectory of divine glory into the world. As believers are drawn into this divine movement they become attuned to living

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 31.
peacefully, lovingly and courageously in a world that may welcome, but more likely resist their love.
Chapter 1. United with Christ or Just Civil Folk? Mennonite Pacifism in Secularity

Before we lay out the contributions of Balthasar, it is important to grasp the condition of Mennonite peace theology, its dreams and hopes, as well as the hazards it has faltered under during its five-century history. Obviously we cannot offer anything close to an adequate history, but I do wish to describe a basic tension that has long lain at the centre of Mennonite expressions of pacifism. It is a tension between two historic manifestations of pacifism; union with Christ and secular civility. The first is ecclesial, scriptural, baptismal and spiritual. The second is instrumental, rational and egalitarian. Both are anti-violence. We will see how twentieth-century Mennonite theology, in its broad strokes, has sought to respond to these co-existing but often competing, embodiments of Mennonite ethics. In the following chapter, I will take on board the criticism thrown into this tension by A. James Reimer and see his proposed answer. In this way we will have a good basis from which to see how Balthasar’s understanding of the incarnation could provide an undercarriage for greater Mennonite wisdom discerning the relationship between these two manifestations.

It has become a truism to say that North American Mennonites face an identity crisis in terms of their peace position. This has been alarming to church leaders. Recently, Mennonite churches who have weakened their commitment to gospel pacifism associate it either with a legalistic past, or a liberal social-gospel mindset.¹ The ethic has struggled under

¹ According to the recent Global Anabaptist Profile conducted by the Mennonite World Conference, fifty-five percent of North American Mennonites surveyed would reject any form of military involvement. This is compared to a global rejection percentage of sixty-two percent. John D. Roth, Conrad Kanagy, and Elizabeth Miller, Global Anabaptist Profile: Belief and Practice in 24
two major kinds of accusations: its irresponsibility and luxurious withdrawal from the grind of history on the one hand, and its association with liberal Protestant or secularist instincts on the other. In Willard Swartley and Cornelius Dyck’s bibliography of Mennonite writings on war and peace between 1930 and 1980, 10,000 books, essays and pamphlets are listed. What this avalanche of material points to, I suggest, is not that pacifism is secure and established within Mennonite life, but that it is questioned, shifting and in need of much assistance.

1.1 Early Anabaptist Views on Christ and Nonresistance

What was the original vision of the Anabaptist churches around violence and love? Recent historical work has shown that nonresistance was not the original default conviction of all Anabaptists but rather the conviction arrived at after debate, catastrophe and the elimination by persecution of those who held certain positions. Anabaptism was first a spiritual awakening of the laity within Swiss and South German regions that united around a rejection of priestly mediation of the sacraments, the elevation of a subjective appropriation

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3 Instability is not necessarily a sign of trouble. Chris K. Huebner has argued in *A Precarious Peace*, that there always needs to be a certain “crisis of certainty” about an ethic like Mennonite peace theology. What most needs to be feared is Mennonite attempts to secure and lash it down as a denominational possession. Chris K. Huebner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2006).

4 James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1972) has convinced a recent generation of scholarship that pacifism was not one of the uniting convictions of the first generation of Anabaptists.
of spirituality by the laity, and the rejection of infant baptism.\(^5\) The twin poles of anti-clericalism and the direct engagement with scriptures by obedient disciples formed its first and uniting impulse. In the first years after the initial believer’s baptism in Zurich in January of 1525, it was not always easy to distinguish between Anabaptist and peasant unions more generally. After the Peasant Revolt of 1525 was viciously stamped out, many disaffected peasants found the new emerging Anabaptist conventicles in the Swiss cantons to be the most appropriate continuation of their instincts. The failure of the Peasant Revolt led many to embrace the nonresistance being advocated by leaders such as Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz and Michael Sattler.\(^6\)

At the time the Schleitheim Confession was written by the Swiss Brethren led by Michael Sattler in February 1527, the question of “the sword” was not yet settled. However, within ten years the rather stark separatist position taken in the Confession came to represent much of Swiss, South German/Austrian and Dutch Anabaptism, even though the confession itself never had the status of an authoritative creed across the movement’s groupings.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) Conrad Grebel, in the first correspondence between a future Anabaptist and Thomas Müntzer in September, 1524, said “the gospel and its adherents are not to be protected by the sword, nor [should] they [protect] themselves, which as we have heard through our brother is what you believe and maintain. True believing Christians are sheep among wolves, sheep for the slaughter.” Leland Harder, *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1985), 290.

\(^7\) Howard John Loewen notes that it is only alongside the “Anabaptist Vision” statement of Harold Bender in 1944 that Schleitheim finally comes to an authoritative status within Mennonite life. *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America: An Introduction* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985), 28.
Here I would like to point out the way scripture is employed to make the argument on the sword in the Confession. Rather than appealing to dominical commands against revenge found in the Sermon on the Mount, Sattler refers to the manner of the incarnate Christ in relation to the world around him. Should Christians be involved in using violence to protect the good out of love for neighbour? Sattler answers:

Christ teaches and commands us to learn from Him, for He is meek and lowly of heart and thus we shall find rest for our souls (Mt. 11:29). Now Christ says to the woman who was taken in adultery, not that she should be stoned according to the law of His Father….but with mercy and forgiveness and the warning to sin no more, says: ‘Go, sin no more.’ Exactly thus should we also proceed, according to the rule of the ban.  

Should Christians be magistrates? “Christ did not wish to decide or pass judgement between brother and brother concerning inheritance, but refused to do so (Lk. 12:13). So should we also do.” Should Christians take up political office? “Christ was to be made King, but He fled and did not discern the ordinance of His Father. Thus we should also do as He did and follow after Him…. Peter also says: ‘Christ has suffered (not ruled) and has left us an example, that you should follow after in his steps’ (1 Pet. 2:21”).

In each of these appeals to scripture a contemplation of Christ’s life-choices yields up the determining posture. Sattler assumes a union between the believer and Christ which determines the believer’s place in a world of evil power and violence. “In sum: as Christ our Head is minded, so also must be minded the members of the body of Christ through Him, so

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9 Ibid., 40.
10 Ibid.
that there be no division in the body, through which it would be destroyed.”\(^{11}\) It is a pacifism rooted in *Nachfolge Christi*, the imitation, participation and solidarity of the body of Christ with the meek, incarnate Christ. To use an anachronistic expression, nonresistance in the Confession demands a contemplative posture vis-à-vis Christ, that is, a posture of attention and imitation through spiritual union to the Lord portrayed in the scripture.

Arnold Snyder has argued that Anabaptism in the hands of Sattler, the author of the Confession, is an extension and translation of Benedictine monastic values. The Confession’s emphases of the denial of the self, the battle between spirit and flesh, and meek, humble suffering in union with Christ are traced by Snyder back to the Bursfeld Benedictine renewal led by Johannes Trithemius of which Sattler was a part. Regarding the rejection of the sword, for the Bursfelds, “the point is not simply a renunciation of killing. More fundamental than the command not to take life is the following of Christ which lies at the heart of monasticism.”\(^ {12}\) Snyder also states, “Michael Sattler understood the incarnate Christ to have been, above all, meek and lowly, the rejected, persecuted, suffering Christ who yielded up his will and, trusting wholly in God, walked the way of earthly trial through the cross on to death.”\(^ {13}\) According to Snyder, it was union with this suffering Christ that formed the separatism apparent in the Schleitheim Confession, rather than the failure of the Anabaptists to achieve political ends. “[O]n the issue of the Christian’s involvement in political or temporal affairs, Sattler agrees with the Benedictines that a following of Christ precludes any

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 41.
\(^{13}\) Ibid., 12, 17.
such involvement.” Anabaptism, the way of Christ became the disciplined ideal of the whole church, for every baptized member, set against the kingdom of the world.

This identification of the meek Christian with the lowly Christ became the spiritual centre of the Anabaptist peace conviction. Pilgram Marpeck, one of Anabaptism’s first-generation theologians is instructive here. Though untrained as a theologian Marpeck wields the traditional Chalcedonian Christology of the church in some of Anabaptism’s most creative and original ways to refute spiritualists such as Caspar Schwenkfeld. He emphasizes the incarnational pattern of divinity, taking up speaking and acting through the lowly humanity of Christ. This pattern is formative for the church which integrates the inner and the outer in the same way. External actions of the church are a witness that points to the earthly Christ who lived an “unglorified countenance on earth”. In “Pilgram Marpeck’s Response to Caspar Schwenkfeld’s Judgement” he wrote;

If Schwenkfeld recognized Christ truly, not only by his glorified reigning countenance, but how he lived and worked on earth before his glorification and works today through his unglorified body on earth, he might understand our language better and be able to judge how we speak about Christ. Because Schwenkfeld’s eye is always on the degree of transfiguration, as it is pictured above, he doesn’t take seriously what the unglorified face of Christ did on earth, together with the internal working of the Father and the simultaneous co-operation of the invisible Word. Even today he works through his unglorified body (which is the church). It is the very temple of God—at work outwardly because God is at work inwardly.

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14 Ibid., 17.
15 Marpeck is sometimes clumsy in how he refers to the divinity of Christ. Often he seems to conflate the divine nature of the Word with the Holy Spirit. Or he talks about “the Father, through the power of the Spirit”, acting in Christ, in addition to more traditional language. See Neal Blough, Christ in Our Midst: Incarnation, Church and Discipleship in the Theology of Pilgram Marpeck (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2007), 147 for a discussion.
17 Ibid.
Further, Marpeck says, the Lord’s “untransfigured body (understand, his church)…. is his outward work: teaching, baptism, Lord’s Supper, admonition (ermanen), ban, discipline, evidence of love and service for the common good, a handclasp, improving and retaining Christ’s commands and teachings”. This outward work “is brought about in and through the church by the reigning, glorified Christ with his and the Father’s Holy Spirit.”18 In another writing against Schwenkfeld, Marpeck talks about the unity of the physical voice of Christ with his “Spirit and life” which taught and performed miracles. “The physical voice of Christ never simply came from Christ without Spirit and life.”19 And as the divinity of Christ did not coercively demand acknowledgement of those who heard his physical voice, so the church must work gently on those coming to believe in Christ.

This union between Christ and the churched believer is salvific, it effects both the justification and sanctification of the believer, which for Marpeck are joined inseparably as they were for most Anabaptists. To be justified is to be given the free gift of the power of the Spirit of Christ for sanctification. It is this incarnational pattern which yields the meek, gentle, forbearing love of the church for each other and for enemies.

This extends further than a general ethic of love. It results in the Spirit-empowered imitation of the manner of Christ in matters of force that precludes the use of arms for the benefit of the churches. The question of the Schmalcadic league of 1530 which the Lutheran churches of Strasbourg and Augsburg participated in against Emperor Charles V galled

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18 Ibid., 85.
Marpeck for decades.20 Near the end of his life, as the league was days away from defeat, Marpeck wrote a kind of “told-you-so” letter called “The Deep Humility of Christ” to small clusters of Anabaptist churches in Grisons, Appenzell, St. Gall and Alsace. To point out again how opposed the violent Evangelical defense of the faith was to the spirit of Christ, Marpeck described how Christ descended into hell, “and dwelt with the condemned and those imprisoned in perdition, and with those held in death.”21 The descent into hell was not triumphant as some wrongly proclaimed.22 Rather, “the Son conquered the sin of many precisely by this descent into the depths, this greatest humility with which he humbled himself before the Father and by which the Father afflicted and humbled the Son. All the saints of God must learn the depths of Christ, these same depths of humility and damnation, into which the leaven of our sin brought Christ”.23 To “learn the depths of Christ” in this way is what it would mean for the church to be the physical body of Christ.

As Neal Blough points out concerning the soteriology implicit in this use of the descensus ad infernos, Marpeck understands the salvation wrought by Christ in his death historically, narratively and concretely. Not only by the events carried out in the death,


21 Klassen and Klaassen, The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck, 432. In a gloss written in the margins of this letter, Marpeck writes, “that is the way it was in the Schmalcald War and in Switzerland with Zwingli.”

22 This is an interesting parallel to Balthasar, whose theology of the descent into hell also resisted the triumphant proclamation of the traditional harrowing of hell.

23 Klassen and Klaassen, The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck, 434.
descent, resurrection an ascension of Christ, but by the manner of humility and patience with which Christ embarked on this journey, “redemption is indeed accomplished in time and history”.  

 Salvation is the imprinting of a like pattern and posture in the believer.

One final witness to Anabaptist Christology as it relates to nonresistance comes from Menno Simons. He is instructive because aspects of his Christology could have led him in the direction of a stark separation between a heavenly Christ and the earthly church. Menno is known for his quasi-heretical “heavenly flesh” Christology, which posited that Christ’s human flesh did not originate from Mary but was implanted in her from heaven. Several other Anabaptists at the time rejected this for diminishing Christ’s embrace of the human condition. And it is certainly the case that more than any other Anabaptist, the pure perfection of Christ, and thus of his church is emphasised throughout Menno’s work.

However, whether or not his theology of the incarnation was docetic, Menno’s understanding of the relationship between Christ and the saint’s daily moral life is one of the

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24 Blough, Christ in Our Midst, 200. Thus it is obvious that for Marpeck as for other Anabaptists, the necessity of Christ’s death could be joined with a christus victor understanding of the atonement. It was necessary that by means of his nonviolent surrender to the powers, Christ would take death down into hell.

25 This heavenly-flesh Christology has been well studied by scholars; however no one has proven that Menno’s understanding of Jesus lacked an adequate humanity. In other words, the Christ that was born through this heavenly implantation of flesh was every bit the human. For a discussion see Irvin E. Burkhart, “Menno Simons on the Incarnation [1],” Mennonite Quarterly Review 4, no. 2 (1930): 113–39; Irvin E. Burkhart, “Menno Simons on the Incarnation [2],” Mennonite Quarterly Review 4, no. 3 (1930): 178–207. Stephen H. Webb recently revived an orthodox articulation of heavenly flesh Christology in Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

26 Peter Riedemann rejects this explicitly in 1543. Peter Riedemann’s Hutterite Confession of Faith, trans. John J. Friesen (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1999), 68. Pilgram Marpeck engaged with Caspar Schwenkfeld on this matter.

27 This, according to some interpreters, resulted in the severe and imbalanced practice of church discipline in the Dutch Mennonite church. See C. Arnold Snyder, Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1995), 381.
closest possible union. The nuptial metaphors used repeatedly throughout Menno’s work convey this; a lush, immediate and transformative encounter between Christ and the church. The church is “the lovely bride of Jesus Christ, flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone…which he placed in His chamber, and kissed with the mouth of His eternal peace.”

It is this mystical participation of the church in Christ that is the source of the church’s holy life. In another passage he repeats the “burning love” with which the church is loved by Christ, who “in love taught and preached unto you the eternal kingdom of God; in love performed miracles; in love prayed, suffered tribulation, anxiety…; in love was beaten, mocked…; in love was raised up, has ascended to heaven….”

This stream of “burning love” turns, in this same passage, into Menno’s oft-quoted statement on true evangelical faith which will not lie dormant but will clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and return good for evil. Menno wields every Scriptural metaphor he can to show that the church’s holy life comes through her intimate communion with Christ in heaven. Through the church’s ingrafting to Christ, the church takes on Christ’s means of fighting his enemies with the sword of his mouth. As co-reigning with Christ, the servants of the Lord bear no sword of iron or steel but the Sword of the Spirit for “eternal welfare and peace.”

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29 “For they are born with Him of one Father, they are the new Eve, the pure, chaste, bride. They are flesh of Christ’s flesh and bone of His bone. . .They are the children of peace who have beaten their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and know war no more.” Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 94.


31 Ibid., 44.

32 Ibid., 217, 223.
peaceful life of the church are thus steeped in a potent experience of lavish love union between Christ and the church.33

This glance at a trio of Anabaptist writers has demonstrated that in its Swiss, South German and Dutch manifestations, Anabaptism’s original vision of nonviolence could emerge from a theology of spiritual union with Christ by all believers in the church. Rather than simply relying on a curt recital of the commands not to revenge oneself, Anabaptist pacifism (at least in these three core leaders) assumed a spiritual union with the living Christ that led one to be attentive and imitative of his manner. It sought a meek and humble life for all believers that was informed by a mystical participation with the Master. It reached, at times for the most erotic of metaphors to glimpse the relation between Christ and the church that yielded the fruit of nonresistance.

This implied necessarily, either initially or with time, a separatism from the mechanisms of the state which were still held to have been granted by God. Anabaptists were unable, by and large, to articulate a vision for involvement in society that remained coherent with their core conviction of the believer’s union with the meek and peaceful Christ. Even Marpeck, who in fact tried to live such involvement, did not offer an explicit description of how such involvement could be justified and delimited. He saw the dangers and complexities but did not articulate a political theology to guide the discernment needed. All they could assert was the incompatibility of their experience of union with Jesus with the sword. Their extension of this counsel of perfection to the whole congregation put them at odds with

33 Speaking against those who use violence in and against the church he writes, “If they were the bride of Christ they would not be hateful, cruel, and bloodthirsty, but meek, gentle, and merciful, minded as is the good and faithful bridegroom, Christ Jesus.” Ibid., 232.
sixteenth-century assumptions about how public order was maintained. Both persecution and the inability of Anabaptists to articulate a theology of involvement apart from the Christendom model of their world, resulted in their withdrawal. We turn now to look at how this mystical defenselessness was translated into a spirituality of everyday life in subsequent centuries.

1.2 Martyrs Mirror and the Translation of Anabaptism into Daily Gelassenheit

Europe was not ready for such an assertion and persecution extended in some areas into the seventeenth century. But then Mennonites and Hutterites began settling on truces with the powers around them, agreeing that if they were left to live quietly without persecution, they would set up productive, orderly settlements in Holland, Switzerland, Prussia, and later in Russia and America. A second-generation Anabaptism emerged that integrated pacifism within a theology of hardship and willingness to follow Christ in life. Colonies and villages developed as self-sufficient church-led communities in which worship, piety, and rural family life wove together with a spirituality of nonresistance. Here we begin to note how the Mennonite tradition began to feel the pull between union with Christ

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34 Recent scholarship has awakened to this second-generation spirituality as a source for modern devotion. An early essay of significance for this recovery was Ethelbert Stauffer and Robert Friedmann, “The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom,” Mennonite Quarterly Review 19, no. 3 (1945): 179–214, which showed how hymnody, devotional writings and especially the Martyrs Mirror were instrumental in transporting a martyr spirituality into a non-persecuted context. Robert Friedmann (1891-1970) was a scholar who worked to recover spirituality as a focus for research in Anabaptist studies. More recently, see Walter Klaassen, “‘Gelassenheit’ and Creation,” Conrad Grebel Review 9, no. 1 (1991): 23–25; Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., Spiritual Life in Anabaptism (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1995); and Daniel Liechty, Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings (New York: Paulist Press, 1994).
and good civil behaviour. However, though the Mennonite “apologetic” before rulers turned on their contributions to civility, one major work sought to translate the older spiritual union into lives determined more and more by the new civility.

To demonstrate the way second-generation Mennonites translated the nonresistance of the martyrs into more mundane lives, it is helpful to see how the Dutch Mennonite pastor Thieleman J. van Braght positioned the martyr tradition vis-à-vis his readers. These were, by then, comfortable seventeenth-century Dutch Mennonites. *Martyrs Mirror* was written during the “Golden Age” of Dutch Mennonite life when Mennonites were becoming heartily involved citizens of the new Dutch Republic and when uncertainty prevailed about the continuity of the original Anabaptist vision. More than any other work, *The Bloody Theater, Or, Martyrs Mirror of the Defenceless Christians* published in 1660, has tempered and sustained a particular Mennonite spirituality as a nonresistant church.\(^{35}\) This was not written for strict separatists. His work interpreted the spirituality of first generation Anabaptism as an enduring piety for subsequent Mennonites in other conditions. Here I want to focus on the devotional commentary that van Braght provided in the introductory material to mediate the martyr stories.

\(^{35}\) Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenceless Christians: Who Baptized Only upon Confession of Faith, and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus, Their Saviour, from the Time of Christ to the Year A.D. 1600*, trans. Joseph F. Sohm (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1951). The *Ausbund*, the hymnal which has been in continuous use among Mennonites and Amish since the sixteenth century, should also be noted here. It contains numerous hymns that recite the torment and death of the martyrs. However the *Ausbund* has not had the breadth of exposure across the Mennonite community which the *Mirror* has. The *Martyrs Mirror* has been through twenty English editions alone and still sells several thousand copies a year and has been used broadly in both the Russian and Swiss traditions. Cf. *Ausbund* (Lancaster, 1815), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.ah69g6.
At the time of writing, van Braght was a pastor in his 30’s who was often sick. He died shortly after completing the book. In the “Author’s Invocation” he describes how, during the course of this work, this fellowship with the martyrs strengthened him: “snares of death had compassed me, keeping me bound nearly six months during last fall, winter, and spring, so that I often thought I could not survive… [N]evertheless Thy power strengthened me…for the zeal and love of Thy saints had taken complete possession of me.”\(^{36}\) This “offering…was accompanied with many tears caused partly by my distress….” In his own mire of pain, van Braght felt his own life to be mingled with that of the martyrs:

Yet that which more than all else caused my tears to flow was the remembrance of the suffering and death of Thy martyrs…. Ah! how often did I wish to have been a partaker with them; my soul went with them, so to speak, into prison…. It seemed to me as though I accompanied them to the place of execution, scaffold or stake, saying to them in their extremity, Fight valiantly dear brethren and sisters; the crown of life awaits you. I almost fancied that I had died with them; so inseparably was my love bound up with them; for Thy holy names sake.\(^{37}\)

What van Braght envisions here is a drama of mystical unity between the reading Christian, the martyrs and Christ. Van Braght describes the writing of this book (and thus also its reading) as a tortuous and ascetic spiritual pilgrimage. At the half-way point of the book, arriving in the story at the end of the fifteenth century, he pauses and says,

\[ W \]e long to take our leave from this century, since we cannot longer behold this misery. However, we have only reached the summit of the mountain of martyrdom. In our ascent we have met scarcely anything but skulls, thigh-bones and charred skeletons. In our descent deep pits…threaten us…. But the merciful Lord, who has led us by the hand, and thus far aided us, will lead and help us still further…for when the bands of death were around me, by reason of a half year’s severe sickness, which attacked me in the midst of this work, His gracious hand restored me.\(^{38}\)

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 5.

\(^{37}\) Ibid.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 352.
Besides showing the early influences of pietism on the Dutch Mennonites, these descriptions suggest that for van Braght the function of the martyr story is to mediate an experience of suffering and a surrender to God in the reader. As the reader prayerfully lingers over these accounts she will be lifted up into the realm of Christ and there be found faithful to him. The holiness of the martyr becomes the audience’s sanctity through reading: “Read it again and again, and with the same attention and emotion with which we have written and re-written it.”\(^\text{39}\) This communion leading to sanctity belongs not to the “blind worldly-minded” but to the “heavenly-minded who, as spiritual eagles, contemplate with the eyes of the soul the mysteries of God…and find their delight in His saints and well-beloved who sacrificed their lives for His holy truth.”\(^\text{40}\)

What facilitates this sanctifying encounter with the martyrs is the framework of apostolic succession within the book. The entire arrangement of the book is structured to immerse the reader in a personal succession of saints who have confessed their faith in bodily witness—blood. After an account of Scriptural figures who faced martyrdom—“Yea the whole volume of holy Scriptures seems to be nothing else than a book of martyrs, replete with numerous, according to the flesh, sorrowful, but according to the spirit, happy, examples of the holy and steadfast martyrs”\(^\text{41}\)—van Braght describes the crucifixion of Christ: “To Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we have accorded the first place among the martyrs of the new covenant; not in the order of time…but on account of worthiness of the person, because He is

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 7. This contemplating with the eyes received new meaning in the second edition of the *Mirror*, printed after van Braght’s death, that included 104 copper engravings by Jan Luyken depicting martyr events. See Sarah Covington, “Jan Luyken, the Martyrs Mirror, and the Iconography of Suffering,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, no. 3 (2011): 441–76.

\(^{41}\) Van Braght, *The Bloody Theater*, 12.
the head of all the holy martyrs, through whom they all must be saved.”42 He then works meticulously forward through each century in Christian history devoting a section to the practice of baptism and nonresistance which that century evinced, and a section to the martyrs of that century. This creates an unbroken chain from Abel to Antwerp of “Anabaptist” succession.44

This succession is both personal and doctrinal, consisting of a train of right teachers and also right teaching. The doctrinal succession of the church is “a sign and evidence” of the personal, so that the personal cannot exist without the doctrinal. Where there is an obvious succession of doctrine the succession of the personal “need not be looked for so carefully. But where both are found in truth and verity, it is not to be doubted that there is also the true and genuine church of God, in which God will dwell.”45

The succession, both of the personal and the doctrinal is carried forward through each century by the mediation of believer’s baptism, suggesting that through the readers’ baptisms

42 Ibid., 67.

43 Van Braght insists that these all be called Anabaptists, though he understands that the term does not properly apply to Christians before the sixteenth century. However, the opponents of the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century derisively gave those who practice believer’s baptism this ancient title and so he will let them have their day. Ibid., 16.

44 I would hold up Martyrs Mirror as at least a partial challenge to Dennis D. Martin’s accusation that Mennonites have “split the institutional from the spiritual” sense of tradition and have rejected any continuity with the past. He writes, “one necessary prerequisite for the modern worldview is common to all Mennonites. This prerequisite is the rejection of continuity in history, a rejection of tradition. It is a revolutionary approach that shoves off against the immediate past in order to pursue a present or future utopia.” We may find the Mirror’s polemical rejection of the old catholic church ill considered (as Martin does), but it cannot be explained as a spiritual vs. institutional dichotomy. Van Braght goes to considerable pains to show that the “Anabaptist” church has existed continuously in the writings, lives and visible churches of each of the past sixteen centuries. The question for van Braght was not whether the church was spiritual vs. institutional, but what sort of institutional continuity there existed between Christ and his church. Dennis D. Martin, “Nothing New under the Sun: Mennonites and History,” Conrad Grebel Review 5, no. 1 (1987): 4.

they too will be inducted into this procession.\textsuperscript{46} Baptized into this ecclesial solidarity across time, the reader will be imprinted with the martyr’s image of holiness.

To show doctrinal succession he includes in the introduction the full text of the Apostle’s Creed\textsuperscript{47} and three Dutch confessions written between 1627 and 1632 which van Braght says were meant to more fully interpret and explain the Apostle’s Creed in light of problems that have arisen in the church. In my calculation these official confessions, together with other official church confessions sprinkled throughout the *Mirror* take up approximately 57,000 words.\textsuperscript{48} This was the confessional era of the Mennonite church when the distinctive convictions of the early Anabaptists, asserted on the run, were being solidified and located within the broader beliefs of the church.\textsuperscript{49}

For van Braght the spiritual transformation of reading is a mingling of several elements. Within the succession of believer’s baptism, nonresistant martyrdom and true dogmatic confession as it proceeds through the centuries, the reader will be joined in this company with Christ. The confessions of faith illuminate martyrdom for van Braght. In the second confession that van Braght includes, the October 7, 1630 confession of Amsterdam, Christ is presented as prophet, priest and king. Under kingship we read,

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 8.

\textsuperscript{47} “This is the most ancient and simple creed, which it appears, was confessed already in or about the time of the apostles; and for which many, yea the greater part of the first Christian believers, have sacrificed their lives.” Ibid., 27.

\textsuperscript{48} In addition to the confessions included as introductory material there is an extended confession on ibid., 373.

\textsuperscript{49} Karl Koop includes the writing of martyrologies themselves as an aspect of the confessionalisation of churches. *Anabaptist-Mennonite Confessions of Faith: The Development of a Tradition* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2004), 32.
But since His kingdom was not of this world, He did not take possession of it by
carnal weapons of iron and steel, but through suffering and fighting in the flesh; to
which end He prepared Himself for temptation, tribulation and suffering, and took
upon Him the cursed death on the cross, under Pontius Pilate; we confess moreover
that this same Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified at Jerusalem, and tasted death on
mount Calvary, with exclamation of His groaning Spirit, and amidst the convulsions
of heaven and earth, was the only and own Son of God, and that we are reconciled
unto God by the blood and death of His Son, who by Himself purged our sins.  

Then further we read on the “Office of the Secular Authority” that this office is ordained of
God “…but we do not find that…Christ taught His disciples such a thing, or called them to it;
but, on the contrary, that he enjoined them to follow Him in his defenseless life and cross-
bearing footsteps, prohibiting all revenge….”

In addition to these formal confessions, the compilation is full of the personal
confessions of faith given by various martyrs in their interrogations, some of them mirroring
and expanding on the Apostle’s Creed. Countless letters, diaries, last testaments, written
prayers, hymns, and interrogation transcripts were included which repeat endlessly the faith
convictions and beliefs of the martyrs. According to van Braght, the witness of the martyrs
was much more than a moral protest against the violence of the oppressor—it was the
confession with the ancient church, worshipping the Christ revealed in scriptures.

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50 Van Braght, The Bloody Theater, 35.
51 Ibid., 36.
52 Van Braght’s first goal in this book is to show that true baptism has always been preceded
by confession of the church’s faith. In addition to his voluminous use of the patristics to this end, see
the confessions of the Waldenses, ibid., 284., those submitted by Hendrick Terwoort and Jan Pieterss,
ibid., 1017., and the extensive transcripts of interrogations he includes, such as the one by Claes De
Praet, ibid., 554–60.
53 This contrasts with the Hutterian Chronicle, which, while it lists 2173 martyrs, contains
little more than a short account of the place and means of death for each. Gerald C. Studer, “A
Van Braght envisioned that all his compiling and mediating work would induct his readers into the drama of union with Christ. As readers linger on these martyrs situated now within the church of Jesus spread across time and place, their own sufferings would come to be suffered in faithfulness. I would argue that this is van Braght’s translation of the Anabaptist *Nachfolge Christi* that we noted above in relation to Sattler, Marpeck and Menno: the believer shares in the sufferings of Christ as she is baptized and assumes his manner of gentle response to evil and mistreatment exemplified in the saints.\(^{54}\) The mediation between Christ and the present day saint is the succession of martyrs and the witness of baptism.

Which leads us to ask about how nonresistance fits into van Braght’s vision of a Christocentric communion of the saints in a succession of suffering *Nachfolge Christi*. At first glance it is most obviously believer’s baptism that qualifies members to consider their pain as participating in this succession. However, it is also clear that van Braght considers nonresistance to be an integral part of what constitutes a true martyr.\(^{55}\) This is, after all, the mirror of the *defenseless* Christians. Throughout the book, these martyrs are depicted as

\(^{54}\) Here the words of Anna of Rotterdam in a last testament to her son Isaiah express a common view within the compilation: “Behold, I go the way of the prophets, apostles and martyrs…. I go, I say, the way which Christ Jesus, the eternal Word of the Father, full of grace and truth, the Shepherd of the sheep, who is the Life, Himself went…. Having passed through, He calls His sheep and His sheep hear His voice and follow Him…. This way was trodden by the dead under the altar…. In this way walked also those who were marked by the Lord, and have received the Thau upon their foreheads (Ezek. 9:6).” Van Braght, *The Bloody Theater*, 453.

\(^{55}\) In his discussion of martyrdom in the fourth century he notes that now “many errors began to arise among some of those who were called Christians… who went so far as to resort to carnal weapons….through which the defenseless and meek lambs of Christ suffered not a little distress, fear and sorrow.” However he has done his utmost diligence so that none of the martyrs reported on can be “shown to have been guilty of gross errors, much less of the shedding of blood.” Ibid., 174.
nonresistant and gentle lambs who testify with their blood against the violent regimes that torture them.\(^{56}\) As John Roth, a commentator on the Mennonite martyr tradition has written:

From beginning to end, the entire structure of the book offers a testimony to the Christocentric worldview of the Anabaptists: Christ’s life, his death, and the Christian’s victory—through Christ—over the powers of death are the subtext of the martyr stories. In van Braght’s eyes, it is God’s expression of love incarnated through Christ in the world, Christ’s violent death at the hands of the world, and his triumphant resurrection over the principalities and powers of the world which sustained the Anabaptists’ own witness of nonviolent suffering love.\(^{57}\)

Further, for van Braght, the martyrs themselves are warriors. “Through earthly wars countries and their inhabitants are destroyed, the innocent killed, the fugitive robbed of their property, and much weeping and mourning caused among those who remain.”\(^{58}\) But through the warfare of the martyrs, “the prosperity of the countries and their inhabitants was promoted because of the fervent prayers offered up by the martyrs to God for those who did them harm and for the common welfare of the inhabitants.” Real, tangible changes occurred in the lives of people on account of the martyr’s “medicine” for the world: “The estates of men generally, both according to the soul and the body, they improved and multiplied, causing them to increase thirty, sixty, and even a hundred fold, by their uprightness, fidelity, benevolence, compassion, and incomparable mercifulness toward their fellow men.”\(^{59}\) Here the blood of the martyrs is not only the seed of the church, but of mundane society as well. This too was a communion of the saints whereby the martyr’s witness worked beyond her

\(^{56}\) See especially the accounts of Hendrick Alewijns (754), Wouter Capelle (1096), Jacques Dosie (498), John Schut (655), Adriaen Brael et. al (655)


\(^{59}\) Ibid.
life to effect real change in the history of the world. This was the martyr returning good for evil.

And yet, for the modern reader tuned to hear arguments for and against participating in war, there is very little in the *Martyrs Mirror*. The unwillingness of Mennonites to serve as magistrates is mentioned by numerous interrogators, but the refusal to kill or participate in the state’s arms is not a large issue in the *Martyrs Mirror*. Mennonites were denied entrance to the army of the Dutch Republic in any case, and so there was little to be gained here. What nonresistance has become, is the gentle lamb-like meekness of the martyr willing to share the suffering of Christ and through this weakness overcome the enemy, be that enemy human or spiritual. I would argue that van Braght has spiritualized the “enemy” from the literal assailant of the sixteenth century to seventeenth-century entities such as “numerous large, expensive and ornamented houses…which are seen on every hand.” It is the image of the martyr’s defenseless suffering that will lead the believer to remain steadfast. To resist this enemy one must yield to Christ and witness the devotion of the martyrs even to death. It is this participant with Christ that deserves the title “defenseless.”

A full reception history of the *Martyrs Mirror* through its four centuries has not been written, nor need such a concern in its details detain us here. 

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60 “The Christian reader may here perceive and firmly conclude that the cross is also the ensign of those who serve and follow Jesus Christ, the Captain of the faith; and that, on the contrary, those who afflict others, with crosses and sufferings, do not belong to this Captain, but are under another leader.” It is the willingness to suffer persecution rather than inflict it that is emphasized as the root of the nonviolent example of Christ to be followed. Ibid., 357.

this book itself mediated a theology of peace from first generation Anabaptism and translated it into discipleship for less austere times. Defenselessness, seen vividly in the portrayals of Christian martyrdom, became the meekness, gentleness, love, and forbearance of Christ that these saints inspired in those who lingered over their stories and looked at their pictures. Readers would receive the strength to accept their own sufferings, like van Braght’s own approaching death, as coming from the hand of God. The way in which the Mennonite and Amish churches revived their interest in the *Martyrs Mirror* in subsequent centuries, especially during those times when looming war threatened to dissuade young men from nonresistant practice, points to the way this kind of suffering was understood to be part and parcel with pacifism.62

So this is the union of Christ by which significant shapers of the Anabaptist tradition prior to the twentieth century understood the refusal of violence. Many of these themes were carried through and maintained in the twentieth century, though, as we shall see, other concerns emerged as well. Mennonite pacifism prior to the twentieth century sought to be orthodox in its affirmation of the divinity and humanity of Christ and understood the church to be a continuation, in some sense, of what God was doing in Christ. This participation of the believer in Christ was a salvific, Spirit-empowered likeness to Christ from which flowed the obedience of the disciple. It was particularly attentive to defining Christ-likeness by

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examining his manner, or posture vis-à-vis the authority structures in the world about him. It understood this participation with Christ as embedded in an “apostolic succession” of suffering disciples who confessed through baptism their willingness to be “defenseless Christians” across the centuries. It was closely connected with believer’s baptism, the voluntary surrender of the saint to participation with Christ as Christ moved through the world. We are of course treading here at the level of churchly ideals and grant that the practice of nonresistance for individuals was fraught with difficulty. We are not claiming that everyone lived like van Braght’s martyrs, only that this was the vision Mennonites placed before themselves.

1.3 The Troubled Defense of Defenselessness in the Twentieth Century

The evolving shape of Mennonite pacifism in the twentieth century has been detailed elsewhere and here we will paint in broad strokes. What I am interested in is the changing context of the Mennonite apologetic of pacifism. In general terms, prior to the twentieth century, Mennonite pacifism had “gone down into the bones” as a spirituality of Gelassenheit. Its main external manifestation had been the regular need to negotiate and re-

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negotiate *privilegia* with the reigning monarchs to allow the church to live in peace with its war refusal and the consequent attempts by church members to forgo violence in their dealings with their neighbours. But with the dawning of the twentieth century, this was increasingly seen as inadequate by Mennonites. It failed to measure up to the mission of the church. In the gradual awakening of interest in international missions and relief work at the end of the nineteenth century, Mennonites increasingly took on the optimistic, can-do, assertive religion of their Protestant cohorts. Further, urbanization, the rise of “white-collar” vocations, and rising levels of education, created a milieu in which the more withdrawn traditions of the old community were questioned. To what extent could traditional nonresistance be “exported” to church plants, or further to the wider world beyond the church?

In addition, to the question of how pacifism could fit into the mission of the outreaching church, there were external events which pushed nonresistance into a precarious position needing shoring up. World War I brought suffering to American Mennonites in the form of imprisonment and death sentences for conscientious objection. Churches exerted great effort to clarify their position in the face of a cultural wave of patriotic furor. In spite of

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65 Guy F. Hershberger, Albert N. Keim, and Hanspeter Jecker, “Conscientious Objection,” accessed August 7, 2014, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Conscientious_Objection&oldid=103534. Due to lack of clarity in the legislation, it was left to the U.S. military to deal with objectors. Mennonites were drafted and placed at the mercy of generals who had little sympathy. One-hundred-thirty-eight Mennonite men were imprisoned, many were mistreated in army camps by misinformed generals, and several were put to death. Governments during WWII were more humane for Mennonite war resisters, though Jehovah’s Witness with their more absolute resistance to government cooperation saw 6000 imprisoned. Charles C. Moskos and John Whiteclay Chambers, *The New Conscientious Objection: From Sacred to Secular Resistance* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993), 12–13.
this great effort though, many Mennonite boys enlisted, fought and returned wondering if they would be received in their churches. Further, an immigration of 26,000 Russian Mennonites to North America arrived in the mid-1920’s. In the anarchy of the Russian Revolution, some of these Mennonites had formed their own militias to defend their colonies. This was a decision that haunted memory for years and raised dark questions about the efficacy of nonresistance but also firm resolve never to go down that path again.  

During WWII, greater mercy was shown to Mennonites refusing to fight; however, many in North America enlisted. Almost forty percent of the eligible Mennonite men drafted in Canada and the U.S. entered combative roles rather than alternative service. These experiences around the world wars created a sense that pacifism truly was an ethic against the world that needed fierce reinforcement from the churches. And yet, as Perry Bush argues, the adoption of “total war” in the world wars made it increasingly difficult for Mennonites to withdraw from the “industrial-military complex.” Mennonites began to realize that being nonviolent was more complicated than it had seemed in the past.

But it was not only opposition that created stresses. Western governments in the twentieth century became increasingly humane in their willingness to tolerate conscientious

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66 Of interest here is the assertion by John B. Toews’s account of the selbschutz in Russian Mennonite life, that prior to the October Revolution, “for more than a century the Mennonites in Russia, except for splendid isolated examples, did not expand their views of nonresistance to include a martyr-theology and the doctrine of the suffering church.” “Origins and Activities of the Mennonite Selbstschutz in the Ukraine, 1918-1919,” Mennonite Quarterly Review 46, no. 1 (1972): 10.

67 Driedger and Kraybill, Mennonite Peacemaking, 73; Regehr, Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970, 58; Bush, Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties, 97–98.

68 “Was it still sufficient, for example, to imagine oneself as uninvolved in the sin of war when the government urged people, as it did in the First World War, to ‘Win the War with Wheat,’ or when it proclaimed ‘Every Garden a Munitions Plant’?” Bush, Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties, 16.
objection. But this tolerance corroded the sense of prophetic witness which such war-refusal intended. Perry Bush shows that this was in fact the explicit intent of the U.S. Selective Service in its adoption of alternative service opportunities for conscientious objectors. If war-refusers were sequestered at work in a mental hospital, they would not create additional trouble for mobilizing a war effort.\textsuperscript{69} By the latter decades of the century, refusing to serve in the military had become much less of a courageous counter-cultural posture. It had also become a much less distinctively religious action.\textsuperscript{70} As warfare evolved after WWII, governments relied less on massive numbers of recruits and, in the U.S., conscription ended in 1973.\textsuperscript{71}

Alongside this increased tolerance, there was interest in pacifism from war-weary Protestant churches who looked to Mennonites as exemplars. Mennonites, who were already deeply involved in their own fundamentalist/modernist controversy, could not help noticing that those most interested in pacifism were liberals—not the companions that conservatives wished to embrace. In this bitter controversy, could a fundamentalist Mennonite still hold to pacifism?\textsuperscript{72} It was a certain kind of pacifism that was lauded by liberal protestants; an activist attempt to end war. This role as the “paradigmatic peace churches” in the eyes of liberal Protestant churches has been a significant factor in the shifting self-understanding of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 269.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Moskos and Chambers, \textit{The New Conscientious Objection} describes the secularization of conscientious objection in detail across the west.
\item \textsuperscript{71} This will only develop further as militaries turn to drone and cyber warfare.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Goshen College, one of the earliest Mennonite post-secondary schools in North America, was closed for the 1923-24 school year over the controversy. The church sought to re-establish control of its school by purging it of liberal elements. Harold Bender, author of “The Anabaptist Vision” was hired when it re-opened. The association of pacifism with liberal theology still lingers in those parts of the Mennonite community most affected by Evangelicalism.
\end{itemize}
Mennonites. Pacifism was becoming part of a political program and this was something new to Mennonites who had lived the assumption that their nonresistance disqualified them from political engagement.73

But the possibilities for nonviolent government involvement were also evolving. The increased interest from “liberals” must be seen in tandem with the rise of what is known as “the welfare state” after 1960. Governments in the west became increasingly involved in providing social insurance against the ills of life and greatly expanded the percentage of GDP committed to these ends. Social programs abounded to help the disabled, the disenfranchised, and the victims of all manner of oppressions. This not only enlarged the sphere of opportunities for a Mennonite wishing to be involved in societal change in a nonviolent way, but it also made possible the argument that the greater a role the state played in these ways, the less violence a society would experience.74

In the civil-rights movement of the 1950’s and 60’s Mennonites recognized an ally in the thinking of Martin Luther King Jr., and he was invited to speak at Goshen College in 1960. His language of agape, community and love resonated with the emerging language of involved discipleship. King was especially condemning of those who stood by and merely prayed for change in the long run. What King offered Mennonites was a picture of Christian pacifism utilized to change society for the better. However, his willingness to break unjust

73 See Guy F. (Guy Franklin) Hershberger, “Biblical Nonresistance and Modern Pacifism,” The Mennonite Quarterly Review 17, no. 3 (July 1943): 115–35 as but one example of the great effort exerted to distinguish Mennonite nonresistance from liberal pacifism in the first half of the twentieth century.

74 Alternative service work in mental health hospitals gave Mennonites in the U.S. and Canada helpful exposure to the possibilities of this kind of service to society in the name of war-resistance.
laws raised questions.\textsuperscript{75}

So that, in broad strokes, are some of the larger dynamics that have changed the context within which pacifism was held by the Mennonite church. In all kinds of ways, the correlation between pacifism and good civil citizenship was being accentuated and its specifically spiritual foundation was becoming ambiguous. It is this context that our thesis is directed to. These new dynamics called into question the need and the sufficiency of “union with Christ” as the core form for nonresistance. Secular opportunities beckoned in which peace could be achieved not only through spirituality but through hard work, social engagement and political organization.

What this resulted in, by the end of the century, was a situation in which it could be said that Mennonites already knew what the Lord required. Most had decided that nonviolence, social justice and peacemaking were obvious, even common sense moral actions. There was little debate or questioning, or any real sheepishness about not being able to live the ethic. Nonviolence had become Mennonites’ good news for the modern world and they could live it. Bigger more ironic questions emerged: could God be made to fit into what we already know is the right thing to do?\textsuperscript{76}

But that is probably to assert more than to argue. What is needed is a closer comparison of the trajectory of secularity and Mennonite pacifism. To that we now turn.


\textsuperscript{76} Thus a key debate for Mennonites in the twenty-first century has been not whether we can be nonviolent but whether God is nonviolent.
1.4 The Relation of Anabaptism and Secularity

These internal and external challenges thrust Mennonite pacifism into uncharted territory and triggered the avalanche of writing noted earlier in the Swartley bibliography. However, to get a fuller sense of why Mennonite nonresistance exists now in a state of ambivalence vis-à-vis its earlier understanding of union with Christ, I wish to broaden our view and glimpse its complex existence within the history of secularization. A secular age presents a set of opportunities and challenges for a pacifist church.77 Traditionally Constantinianism, the vision for a society ruled by church and state together, has been the perceived opponent of Mennonite peace theology. Constantinianism and secularity are not mutually exclusive ways of understanding western society but rather two different maps by which the same geography can be measured.78 Secularity can look like the end of Constantinianism because a differentiation of the sphere of church and other spheres such as state, education, media, and trade are signal aspects of secularity. But in the west, the churches have shown the ability to retain forms of power and responsibility within society in

77 I recognize that the meaning of the term “secular” has shifted. In the Middle Ages “secular” referred to temporal existence between Christ’s ascension and second coming. “Secular” named a time, not a space. In late modernity “secular” rather became the autonomous sphere of rule, now opposed to “religious.” Secularity names a set of conditions pervasive in twentieth-century western societies in which a high value is placed on order and civility; the role of religion vis-à-vis society has become smaller, various, and pluralist; religion has become more attentive to individual personal engagement and authenticity; the church and the state have separated into distinct spheres, and therewith, the methods for achieving the commonweal have become distinctly instrumental, rationalist, and bureaucratic.

78 I partake of the growing agreement that secularism as an ideology is only one possible aspect of secularity. Secularism applauds the withering of religion with the rise of science, rationalism, and humanism. It is what Charles Taylor calls the subtraction thesis of secularization theory which says that for every advance toward secularity, religion must thereby retreat. Secularity as I use it is what Taylor describes as the modern possibility of living as though God does not exist. In 1500 this was impossible. Today it is possible, and for many people, almost inevitable. A Secular Age, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 26–27.
spite of, or even through disestablishment. These mutations have been equally troubling to Mennonite theologians.\textsuperscript{79} However the relation of Mennonite pacifism to secularity has been much less understood.\textsuperscript{80}

The aspect of secularity that I am interested in here is the end-point in a trajectory in which it comes to be assumed that specific religious convictions are possible but no longer inherent in human flourishing. They become options among others and are not required to be a member-in-good-standing within society. As twentieth-century assimilation occurred, Mennonites became exposed to the persuasiveness of this secularity in new and potent ways. While Constantinianism questions the possibility or relevance of nonviolence, secularity can welcome aspects of nonviolence, but questions the necessity of nonviolence as a specifically theological or ecclesial stance. With social differentiation it creates large nonviolent swathes within society where no one, religious or not, is expected to engage in violence.

To see how this has affected Mennonite theological ethics it is helpful to understand Anabaptism in a dialectical relation to the secularizing trajectory. Charles Taylor is a commentator on the secular trajectory who is particularly sensitive to the close affinity that religious impulses towards reform had with what eventually became the “exclusive

\textsuperscript{79} See John H. Yoder’s essay “Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics” in The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 141–44.

\textsuperscript{80} Earl Zimmerman begins to do some of this work in “Beyond Secular and Sacred: An Anabaptist Model for Christian Social Ethics,” Conrad Grebel Review 25, no. 2 (2007): 50–67. His account is tuned to what Anabaptist theology can offer a society seeking to be rid of the secular/sacred divide. It does not address ways in which secularity and Anabaptism are part of the same set of early modern impulses.
humanism” we now know as the secular age.⁸¹ And yet one other aspect of Taylor’s argument also needs to be kept in mind throughout this thesis: none of the “stages” on the road leading to secularity pre-determine the endpoint to be a life lived without reference to God. Each of the steps can always, even now, go in another direction. This is important to keep in mind in subsequent chapters when we seek to re-immerse pacifism in the event of Christ’s incarnation.

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor tells the long and zig zag story of how secularity had its original impetus in late medieval society’s attempts to finally Christianize Europe all the way down to the bottom of society.⁸² What this often looked like was the abolishing of various forms of barbarity. A disgust with the vulgar brutality of pre-modern society was a key impetus for this reform from both the church and the state’s perspective. This began among the elites but was eventually adopted across society. This reform eventually resulted in the suppression and monopolization of violence by the state, the rejection of killing for religion’s sake, the gradual regulation of warfare, and a general repression of the violent frenzy that was earlier believed to be innate and needed to be unleashed, say, at carnival.⁸³ A quote from

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⁸¹ One of the major arguments of his work is that secularity began not with the loss of faith but with its intensification and expansion. In understanding Taylor’s work I have benefited from James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

⁸² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, chapter 2, “The Rise of a Disciplinary Society” is a central section for us. Kenneth Davis shows how Anabaptism partook of the growing conviction by the sixteenth century that reform leading to a real change in lay piety would need to be a cataclysmic re-planting of the church, rather than an increased adherence to laws already in place and only needing to be obeyed. He affirms Albrecht Ritschl’s assertion that “the first [Anabaptist] leaders were primarily motivated by ascetic ideals which still permeated much of early sixteenth-century society owing to the vitality of late medieval ascetic reform movements.” Kenneth R. Davis, *Anabaptism and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1974), 127.

⁸³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 47–50, 119–20, 121. “Barbarism” was a concept that was sharply debated over reports that the inhabitants of the new world were cannibals. For a discussion of how
Jan Laski, the sixteenth-century Polish reformer who debated Menno Simons, distills this societal vision of order, decency, virtue and piety which propelled the making over of the masses:

Princes and magistrates would be more peaceful; wars would cease among the nobility; the ambition of prelates would be punished; and all would do their duty in their calling. Children would be instructed from a young age in holy discipline; doctrine would be purely preached; the sacraments properly administered; the populace held in check; virtue would be prized; vices corrected; true penance restored and excommunication pronounced on the obstinate and the rebellious; God’s honour would be advanced together with the proper invocation of his holy name; the most honourable estate of marriage would be restored to its original form; brothels would be abolished; the poor would be cared for and all begging eliminated; the sick would be visited and consoled; and the dead honoured with an honest burial devoid of superstition.  

A key impulse against violence, according to Taylor, was the rising Renaissance notion of “civility”, a refined ideal of human interaction that was defined over against the “savages” that were coming to the attention of Europeans now exploring the world. “It is what we have, and those others don’t, who lack the excellences, the refinements, the important achievements which we value in our way of life.” To leave behind the savage existence “one needed to be governed in orderly fashion, under a code of law.” Civility required a secular state which “badgered, bullied, pushed, preached at, drilled and organized [commoners] to abandon their lax and disordered folkways and conform to one or another feature of civil behaviour.” This government would not “consort with rowdiness, random and

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84 As quoted in Taylor, A Secular Age, 105–6.
85 Ibid., 100.
unauthorized violence, or public brawls, either in young aristocratic bloods, or among the people.”

Several mindset changes were important in the rise of civility. Key was a new awareness of the malleability of the human person and community, that everyone could really and truly live a different life. Partly this was a religious realization that all vocations and stations of life came under the blessing and providence of God’s graces. Partly this involved the subsiding of the whole “enchanted” understanding of space and time in which humans lived at the mercy of spirits and other forces. Taylor’s description of the modern “buffered self” is a person who has the freedom and power to make her own choices about actions and is not in thrall to greater powers round about. In all these ways, early-modern society moved to suppress unruly violence—and this was part and parcel of what eventually became the secular age.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was a seamless connection between the religious reforms which sought a sanctified church, and the social reforms which sought an ordered, less brutal society.

Religious Reform…was inhabited by a demand, felt with increasing power during the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, that not just the élite, but as far as possible all the faithful live up to the demands of the gospel…. Everyone was called on to live their faith to the full. And this meant that the lives and practices of ordinary

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86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 104.
88 Ibid., 131.
89 As Taylor shows, none of this anti-barbarism was necessarily anti-religious. In fact it often grew out of a more intense religious fervour.
people couldn’t just be left as they were. They had to be exhorted, commanded, and sometimes forced and bullied into giving up [impious practices].

Taylor shows that time and again, when reform originated in the church with spiritual renewal, it would soon become evident that once achieved, the new “civility” could stand on its own.

There’s a long story here; but shortly put, we can see that this new understanding of world and time, originally arising within a Christian outlook...gradually slips over more and more in a secular direction.... Among other things, modern versions of this latter [social order] are much less tolerant of violence and social disorder than earlier variants. The sixteenth century sees the taming of the unruly military aristocracy, and its domestication in court service, court attendance, or estate management. The eighteenth century begins to see the taming of the general population. Riots, peasant rebellions, social disorders begin to become rarer in Northwest Europe. Until we reach the rather high standards of nonviolence which most Atlantic societies expect in their domestic life.

Because a key part of the move to civilize the masses was the elevation of the “natural” aspects of life (marriage, work, etc.), it was not a far step to see the natural value of the life apart from its relation to God. In summary, Taylor shows that in the early modern period there was a growing symbiosis between religious revival, the imposition of decency and civility on all levels of society, and anti-violence.

In this description we can glimpse some of the larger currents swirling in Europe at the same time Anabaptists were gaining their footing. It is not difficult for someone familiar with Anabaptist ideals to see that in some key features, they were not living against the spirit of the age when they began their churches. Anabaptist discipleship was based on the belief that lay people could live holy lives and that through strong community discipline all could

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90 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 104.
91 Ibid., 124–25.
92 Ibid., 143.
attain the love of Christ. Anabaptists yielded to no one in their belief in the malleability of the person. Conrad Grebel’s letter to Thomas Müntzer, which can stand in for many statements by early Anabaptists, shows the connection between the reform of all people, the malleability of all, the discipline needed for this, and its connection to non-violence:

There is more than enough wisdom and counsel in the Scriptures on how to teach, govern, direct, and make devout all classes and all men. Anyone who will not reform or believe and strives against the Word and acts of God and persists therein, after Christ and his Word and rule have been preached to him, and he has been admonished with the three witnesses before the church, such a man we say on the basis of God’s Word shall not be put to death but regarded as a heathen and publican and left alone.93

In its focus on the suffering lowly Christ, Anabaptism found a way to connect Christ and his commands to the disenfranchised commoners that swelled its ranks.94 Kenneth Davis in his classic work, Anabaptism and Asceticism, showed that one cannot understand Anabaptism except against the background of late medieval lay vitalization movements such as the Devotio Moderna which manifested a concern “that the church, visibly and practically, should manifest moral righteousness and holiness of conduct and life, patterned on the imitation of Christ motif, guided by the ‘Rule of Christ’ and explicitly obedient to the law of Christ in the New Testament.”95

93 Harder, The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism, 290.
94 Taylor shows that a growing awareness of the human accessibility of the Christ, seen especially in paintings, was a key devotional plank in this laicization of the faith in the early modern period. Taylor, A Secular Age, 93–94.
95 Davis, Anabaptism and Asceticism, 296. Mediating this into the Anabaptist churches can be explained through its close connection to the humanism of the time, especially to Erasmus. Anabaptism was also deeply apocalyptic in places, and manifested many of the expectations, developed in the tradition of Joachim of Fiore, that a third age was breaking upon the world, an age of the Spirit when hierarchies would crumble and all would be priests. Apocalypticism, developed by Anabaptists such as Hans Hut and Melchior Hoffmann, was deeply utopian and anti-hierarchical. I discuss this in my master’s thesis, “Seditious, Confusions and Tumult: Sixteenth Century Anabaptism
The rejection of public order cornerstones such as infant baptism and penance was entailed by the Anabaptist quest to bring discipleship “down” from the monastery and the high church to a band of common souls who could answer to their Lord without recourse to the hierarchy of priestly mediation. Adult baptism, a plain Lord’s Supper and the ban were answers to the question of how each person, no matter what station in life, could take responsibility and live a godly, orderly life. Anabaptism’s theology of the unity of the believer with the pattern of Christ’s life was the way this could transpire in concrete practices of daily life. In all this Anabaptism can be seen as a vanguard movement in the quest for “civility” which Taylor describes as the trajectory of secularity.

Pacifism followed this. Anabaptist writings abound with condemnations of the brutal barbarity of peasant life and the constant warfare of aristocrats jockeying for honour and land. Loud denunciations of religious violence were common. But in even larger terms, Anabaptism contributed to the rejection of a whole understanding of society that adjudicated permissible violence based on one’s station in the world. Traditional clerical exemption from as a Threat to Public Order” (Regent College, 2001). See also Jarold K. Zeman, “Anabaptism: A Replay of Medieval Themes or a Prelude to the Modern Age?” Mennonite Quarterly Review 50, no. 4 (1976): 259–71.

96 It is this application of ethics to everyone which has occasioned the claim heard frequently in the “Anabaptist Vision” tradition of Harold Bender that Anabaptism was the culmination of the reformation. Harold S. Bender, “The Anabaptist Vision,” Mennonite Quarterly Review 18, no. 2 (1944): 74.

97 Menno Simons provides a sample: “Man, o Man, look at the irrational savage creatures and learn wisdom. Roaring lions, fierce bears, and rending wolves keep the peace among their kind. But you, weak and wretched worms, you are created after God’s own image and are called rational beings, born without tusks, claws, and horns and with a frail and feeble nature, born without rationality, speech and power; yea, unable to walk or stand up, and dependent entirely upon a mother’s help—all of which ought to teach you to be peaceable and not contentious. But when you attain to understanding and manhood, you are so turbulent, tyrannical, and cruel, so bloodthirsty and unmercifull, that it is inconceivable and indescribable.” Simons, The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, 190. A similarity with Erasmus is obvious here. Compare his “A Complaint of Peace” Erika Rummel, ed., The Erasmus Reader (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 292.
war, such as Thomas Aquinas prescribed, was built upon a multi-faceted approach to the gospel and culture in which some members of society (the clergy) gave witness to salvation through nonresistance, while other members served as soldiers and were not expected to be Christian in the nonresistant way. In the Anabaptist priesthood of believers, a new form of uniformity was expected, and this expectation of moral consistency across the board, throughout the year is a trademark of the secularizing trajectory Taylor describes. Now, one’s station in society or the church (or the day of the church calendar, or the site of action) did not affect the licitness of deeds. Here clerical abstention from war was extended to the laity, and was impressed upon them for reasons not unlike Aquinas’ reason for clerics to abstain from killing: all Christians are those who mingle with Christ in his crucified response to evil, and should thus sooner be killed rather than kill.

Anabaptists, like many who called the church to order, were repulsed by what they perceived as the corruption and decadence of the church hierarchy, and Anabaptist application of heretofore clerical counsels of perfection to the ploughboy was part of their revolt against those who had failed to uphold it in their given station. It is also significant

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98 Aquinas said clergy are forbidden to kill because “all the clerical Orders are directed to the ministry of the altar, on which the Passion of Christ is represented sacramentally, according to 1 Cor. 11:26…. [W]herefore it is unbecoming for them to slay or shed blood, it is more fitting that they should be ready to shed their own blood for Christ, so as to imitate in deed what they portray in their ministry.” Also, clergy “should imitate their master” who “when He was struck did not strike.” *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Benziger Bros. edition, 1947, II–II, 40.2, 64.4. The widespread understanding that soldiers were barred from the Mass until they had done penance, even after a licit war, further testifies to a nuanced understanding of how sin affected all, but affected each differently, depending on the role they played in society.

99 See his excellent discussion of the worldview behind medieval carnival, those times of misrule and societal chaos when hierarchies and moralities could be flipped upside down. Mutually contradictory moralities could be in play depending on the day of the year. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 45–54.

100 Snyder, *History and Theology*, 27–29.
that key Anabaptist statements on the sword such as the Schleitheim confession, and the records of the Bern Disputation in 1538, placed the sword not in the hands of the non-believing lay-person, but in the hands of the state. In this way they participated in the governmentalization of violence.\textsuperscript{101} In these key areas, Anabaptists fit into the trajectory of overcoming barbarity and elevating the ethics of the commoner that Taylor describes.

Going forward from Anabaptist beginnings, it should be noted that the “Mennonite apologetic” through the centuries, by which they secured their \textit{privilegia}, relied heavily on their claims to offer productive, peaceful, and orderly service to their hosts.\textsuperscript{102} This was most obvious in Russia during the nineteenth century when impeccably disciplined, peaceful Mennonite colonies endeared themselves to Czarist governments and offered themselves as exemplars and instructors of the civilized society that Russian governments sought. Through the well-documented leadership of Johann Cornies (1789-1848), the industrious and zealous promulgator of new forms of agriculture as well as higher education and cultural reform, Mennonites proved to “out-modernize” their neighbours and demonstrate that nonresistant Christians produced a peaceful, harmonious society that could further the economic prospects of its host.\textsuperscript{103} As Natila Venger, a Ukrainian scholar of Russian Mennonite history concludes in her study of Mennonite industrialization, “in objective terms the Mennonite settlements

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103 John R. Staples, “‘On Civilizing the Nogais’: Mennonite-Nogai Economic Relations, 1825-1860,” \textit{Mennonite Quarterly Review} 74, no. 2 (April 2000): 229–56, shows how Johann Cornies sought to modernize the nomadic Nogai people in Molotshna by constructing a model agricultural village for them, among other things.
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played the role of an experimental field for Russian modernization…. [Mennonites] were the architects of the [modernization] process.”  

Though other Mennonite migrations did not offer the same autonomy to establish self-sufficient pacifist life, similar stories could be told wherever Mennonites had settled: they justified their refusal to bear arms by the peaceful, harmonious and productive communities this pacifism resulted in.

This Russian Mennonite “experiment” also shows that though the path began with both religious and secular concerns working in unison, when this order was in fact achieved it soon became evident that the order pursued could be achieved just as well without specifically Christian foundations.

E. K. Francis wrote in his sociological description of Russian Mennonite life:

Amidst all this rapid progress and worldly success the role of religion, once the raison d’être of the group, almost recedes into the background. It seems that at the moment when a Mennonite utopia, the community of the saints and saved, lay within reach of realization, it became secularized and void of its spiritual content, a commonwealth of ordinary people with the ambitions and motivations of sinners and the fallen nature of man. Religious convictions and interests now were one aspect of everyday life, perhaps still a central but by no means the only aspect. Many concessions had to be made to other conflicting interests which frequently dominated and determined action. Religion, at one time a spiritual power permeating all personal hopes and desires, was institutionalized, and religious institutions were but one factor among many other institutions, often more in the foreground of attention.


105 For example, during WWI when Canadian Mennonites from the prairies presented their case for exemption in person to Prime Minister Borden, they reminded him of what Lord Dufferin had told them back in 1877 when they first came to Canada: “the battle to which we invite you [the Mennonites] is the battle against the wilderness…. [Y]ou will not be required to shed human blood.” Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920*, 370.

106 Taylor describes this aspect in the section “The Turning Point.” *A Secular Age*, 221–98.

Francis perhaps understates the role that still remained for faith in Russian Mennonite life, but one can see how religion and the rule of the colony had not become Constantinian so much as secularized. The role of religion had shifted and while still “central”, had become partially dispensable for the well-being of the colony. Other more instrumental processes assumed vital roles within the well-being of this church-based group. And all this time Mennonite ministers continued to read Menno Simons and the *Martyrs Mirror*. Here we see the way in which Mennonite pacifist ethics could be established and maintained as a union with Christ, but could subtly slide into more of a civility, a good and decent way of living in harmony that fit well with religion but was not utterly dependent on it. The two could co-exist.

The twentieth-century shift, documented thoroughly by Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill in *Mennonite Peacemaking: from Quietism to Activism* and by Perry Bush in *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties*, is in keeping with this historic kinship between secularity and the Mennonite peace position. Both activist peacemaking and the now increasing secular conscientious objection stem from the belief that ordinary people can be reformed, made over into civilized, cooperating agents in community. Both flower with new urgency as “lay” individuals are constantly enjoined to “do their part” for the creation of just societies.\(^\text{108}\) Restorative justice, conflict mediation, poverty reduction, and many other elements of the new peacemaking are at home in a society that seeks civility—the orderly, egalitarian, disciplined, society of authentic individuals that Taylor describes.

\(^{108}\) Anecdotally, “We Day” festivities in Canada gather tens of thousands of children into arenas and stadiums to hear high-octane exhortations to work for social justice and peace from celebrity activists like the Kielburger brothers.
Prior to the twentieth century, because Mennonites had recused themselves from much direct involvement, this kinship may not have come into plain view. It was also the case that pre-WWI societies had not ripened to embrace instrumental peacemaking as a broad goal. Mennonite social action discovers that there is in fact a genuine cooperation possible between those who question violence from a dogmatic background, and those who have no religious foundation at all.

But are the values and beliefs of the secular mind conducive to peace in the long run? Or will the present-day overlap between religious and non-religious peacemaking prove to be illusory or even fatal to profound Christian engagement with social activism? This is an important question since much Mennonite rhetoric about peacemaking still trades on the assumption that “the world” is an inherently violent place, and that in fact “the world” can only function through violence. We do not have the leisure here to investigate the question of whether secularity in fact turns out to be violent or nonviolent, though we will address it in later chapters. But our task can set off with a more modest claim, which is that many people in a secular age assume secular methods are the path to nonviolence. Steven Pinker, a cognitive scientist and psychologist, has argued that humans are living in the most peaceful era in human history. Using a wide array of data, he makes the claim that war, crime, abuse and all forms of killing are at a historical low and are decreasing. This is not obvious to everyone and there are those who think his optimism is illusory. What is important for our


purposes here is his interpretation of the cause of the decline, which to most people in a secular age will seem to be common sense. Pinker is correct in asserting that today, even devout religious believers do not look first to the church or another religious institution to solve the problem of violence.  We may claim violence is a spiritual problem but when we set about to do something about it we assert instrumental means. Through the increase of social justice, fair government, and access to trade people become less inclined to kill each other. As one example, he argues the modern novel has created an unprecedented ability for empathy in modern people. For individuals who are inclined to be violent, psychotherapy, education and employment are the solution. Instrumentalist action rather than penance, virtue-formation or church discipline is the path of choice. Whether or not secularity ultimately is as successful as Pinker claims it is, our approach to solving violence in our communities belies our assumption that something like his description is correct.

And this creates temptations for a Mennonite non-resistance that has traditionally rooted the answer to human violence in the believer’s unity with the manner of Christ through believer’s baptism. Not only does a theological under-carriage for nonviolence seem unnecessary, it seems beside the point. In Pinker’s account, it is the state and its monopoly on

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112 Pinker, The Better Angels. Though Pinker deals with declines that began much earlier, his chief “angel” in reducing violence is the Enlightenment with its rationalization of human society. Charles Taylor describes the secular trajectory as one in which an instrumentalist view of the world becomes axiomatic; the good life comes not through conforming to the telos or nature of a thing, but by using things with effective techniques and strategies extrinsic to the thing in itself. Taylor, A Secular Age, 97–99.

violence, as well as its resourcing and control of a panoply of social educational programs, that now engages in and perhaps reduces violence.\footnote{One could also point out that traditional Mennonite nonresistance was not about “reducing violence.” It simply rejected it for the church member.}

What this secular concern for order has done is change the manner in which pacifism has come to be practiced. As secularization becomes more explicitly persuasive through Mennonite assimilation, it becomes more possible for pacifists to get involved in advocacy, legislation, international mediation and restorative justice because these practices go with the grain of a developing secularity to begin with. These are characteristic ways in which people in the west get things done. These practices are made possible by constitutionally-guided democratic governments presiding over societies in which, at least in theory, but partially in practice, victims are granted the individual human rights necessary for justice, and individuals are permitted to advocate before governments. Secularity provides at least the illusion of achievability for those interested in reducing violence as a human problem. This is not to say that individuals or churches do not get involved in these causes for deeply spiritual, Christian reasons. It is to say that these reasons are not seen to be of the essence. This is a source of dissonance in the Mennonite witness.

Going further, not only is there affinity between a civilized order and gospel nonviolence, but sometimes the tables turn. The quest for human flourishing has turned the criticism of violence back against the very churches that raised the banner against violence in the first place. A secular age, even if originally schooled to peace by the church, may not thank the church when society takes up the affirmation of ordinary life that is its outcome. In fact, some of the very core elements of nonviolence within the church’s witness, such as
Christ giving himself utterly for the other to the point of his own demise, come to be seen as dangerous and unhealthy. Taylor describes this vividly:

And hence what was for a long time and remains for many the heart of Christian piety and devotion: love and gratitude at the suffering and sacrifice of Christ, seems incomprehensible, or even repellant and frightening to many. To celebrate such a terrible act of violence as a crucifixion, to make this the centre of your religion, you have to be sick; you have to be perversely attached to self-mutilation, because it assuages your self-hatred, or calms your fears of healthy self-affirmation. You are elevating self-punishment, which liberating humanism wants to banish as a pathology, to the rank of the numinous. This you frequently hear today.115

A central motif behind the move toward the secular age which Taylor demonstrates is the drive toward exclusive humanism,116 that is, abiding regard for the flourishing of ordinary people in this life, without asking them to sacrifice their well-being for the next life, or for a transcendent God. This finds new emphasis in the new cult of personal authenticity articulated with greater cultural consensus since the 1960’s. What has come under withering attack is the way Christian calls for suffering, self-giving, and commitment have compromised the ability of people to experience the kind of wellness in life that is presumed to be the duty of all to pursue.

Mennonites, with their martyr’s tradition have not been excepted from this response from the wider world. At first, Gelassenheit was criticized by Mennonites because it ran counter to the self-confidence one needed to get out and do mission-work.117 With time,
Mennonites have become more sensitized to the way this tradition of *Gelassenheit* was implicated in a sinister form of violence against women and other people within the community who did not have the power to assert their voices. As Mennonite theologian Ted Koontz writes,

> our commitment to and understanding of nonresistance has permitted other evils to thrive as well—evils connected more to the piety or spirit or personality of nonresistance than to its social ethics. For example, teaching on nonresistance can easily perpetuate a “doormat” view of the self and create feelings of being unvalued, uncared for. It can lead people, particularly women who are socialized to “give of themselves,” to accept being devalued or abused in ways which are not “gospel” or “good news.”

Thus the nonresistant tradition of suffering, humility and self-abnegation which began in the sixteenth century as an opportunity for the commoner to get in on the path towards holiness and access to God began to be suspected in the twentieth century as a tool for elite, white males to exercise control over the church and imprison the weak in their victimhood.

And so secularity challenges the possibility and location of nonresistance for Mennonites. It separates the sphere of church and state, calling into question the vocation of the church to be the place where the sword is removed from human affairs. It sets aside religious sanctification and claims to reduce violence dramatically through human instrumental means. And it criticizes the humility and yieldedness to suffering earlier the culturally self-confident, sometimes almost cocky, ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’ mood of the modern Protestant missionary movement that had become so strong in the nineteenth century. And that was apparently quite different from the *Gelassenheit* and *Nachfolge* (yieldedness and discipleship) of which sixteenth-century Anabaptists spoke so often. Borrowing from the modern missionary movement enabled aggressive Mennonites to be religious and still not want to be ‘nobody,’ still want to ‘make something of oneself.’” *Reveille for Die Stillen Im Lande,* 221.

demanded by a mindset that locates ultimate human meaning in the crucifixion. In these conditions it is hard to be a gospel pacifist. Unity in difference becomes a fraught relation.

1.5 Responses to Unity in Diversity of Mennonites in Secularity

Questions of unity in difference have always been important existential and theological questions for Mennonites. What does it mean to be “worldly” and is the appropriate difference from the world still being maintained by this or that practice? The awakening to mission within the twentieth century stirred these questions to new intensity. Difference from the world was no longer adequate. Now separation was to be combined with a responsibility to the world. Assimilated Mennonite churches still tried to maintain the language of being an “alternative story” to the world; the challenge was now to achieve an ethical difference, without the outer, geographical, linguistic, and sartorial distinctions that had earlier made uniqueness clear.

Much twentieth-century Mennonite theology written on the theme of peace and violence is seeking to secure a place for this ethic within the affinities and resistances of secularity that we have just outlined. Was pacifism to be an item of perpetual difference from the world, the reason for a withdrawal from efforts at human flourishing, the prophetic critique of society, and the reason why Christians could not become involved? Or was it to be the church’s very “selling point” and gift to those who otherwise rejected the church’s dogmatic and religious aspects? Was gospel pacifism “effective” in solving problems or was it a form of “faithfulness” that accepted martyrdom? Because the pacifist stance was now “in the world” in a way it had not been before, the necessity of broader articulation in a theological voice became evident if ethics was to be included in the new missional urgency
to incarnate this gospel to unbelievers and non-Mennonites.\textsuperscript{119} As a generalisation we can say that Mennonites have not navigated this delicate unity in difference by pointing deeper into an imitative union with Christ or a martyrlogical succession of the defenseless and adult-baptized Christians as did earlier traditions.

\textit{Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types} was an important publication that took an inventory of ten distinct varieties of pacifism advocated by Mennonites in contemporary North America.\textsuperscript{120} For our purposes here of indicating basic approaches to unity in difference over against the world of secularity, I have chosen three: historic nonresistance, Messianic-community pacifism, and progressive realist pacifism. My purpose is not to make a critique but only to offer a glimpse at how recent Mennonite theology has sought to navigate these issues of unity in difference within secularity. In my next chapter I will take up the assessment of A. James Reimer on the success of this exposure of gospel pacifism to secularity.

\textsuperscript{119} It can also be said that the possibility of a peace theology became evident now. Dogmatics such as Karl Barth’s and exegesis such as Oscar Cullman’s made it possible for Mennonites to imagine their earlier more implicit and in-house maintenance of the doctrine speaking within a larger, more respectable field.

\textsuperscript{120} John Richard Burkholder and Barbara Nelson Gingerich, \textit{Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types} (Akron: Mennonite Central Committee Peace Office, 1991). These are 1) historic nonresistance (Bender, Hershberger, Wenger), 2) culturally engaged pacifism (Dutch-Russian Mennonites), 3) social responsibility (Lawrence Burkholder), 4) apolitical nonresistance (\textit{The Sword and Trumpet}), 5) Messianic community pacifism (Yoder), 6) radical pacifism (Ronald Sider), 7) realist pacifism (Duane Friesen), 8) Canadian pacifism (John H. Redekop), 9) liberation pacifism (Arnold Snyder) and 10) neo-sectarian pacifism (Ted Koontz).
Historic nonresistance, is represented by Harold Bender and Guy Hershberger.\textsuperscript{121} J. R. Burkholder describes this position as the “baseline” North American Mennonite peace position. It includes an emphasis on the literal obedience to Matthew 5, is expressed in conscientious objection from military service, seeks alternatives to violence in other areas of life and largely assumes the church’s withdrawal from statecraft, though not from society otherwise.\textsuperscript{122}

What set this mid-century articulation apart from earlier Mennonite writing was its new claim to establish an historical link between early Anabaptism and normative Mennonite faith for the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{123} It was this historical argument that was to help calibrate Mennonite unity in difference. In fact no explication of Mennonite pacifism before or since has made itself so dependent upon a specific historical portrait of early Anabaptism. Rejecting centuries of negative dismissal by Lutheran and Calvinist historians, this generation sought to show that the Anabaptists were the “culmination of the Reformation”.\textsuperscript{124} Bender and his colleagues believed that in this way an identity for Mennonites could be created over against modernity and over against the whole modernist/fundamentalist polarity: a Mennonite identity that was nevertheless not dependent on separatism. According to


\textsuperscript{122} Burkholder and Gingerich, \textit{Mennonite Peace Theology}, 6. While these are theologians at work, a full theological basis for pacifism is still in the future. Bender and Hershberger make appeals to scriptures but make relatively little attempt to think through doctrines of ecclesiology, pneumatology, soteriology and the doctrine of God proper in their articulation of pacifism.

\textsuperscript{123} Sawatsky, \textit{History and Ideology} is the foundational text which examines Mennonites’ use of history within the twentieth century to shape their identity.

\textsuperscript{124} Bender, “The Anabaptist Vision,” 74.
biographer Albert Keim, Bender’s epoch-setting essay, “The Anabaptist Vision,” gave assimilating Mennonites a “useable past.”

Bender resisted the temptation to legitimize Anabaptists by making their chief contribution the gift of modern freedom and democracy. In his essay, Bender happily grants Rufus M. Jones his claim that Anabaptism,
is the first plain announcement in modern history of a programme for a new type of Christian society which the modern world, especially in America and England, has been slowly realizing—an absolutely free and independent religious society, and a State in which every man counts as a man, and has his share in shaping both Church and State.

Because of this sentence, writers such as Hans-Jürgen Goertz have over-emphasized Bender’s identification with these Anglo-American ideals. Goertz says that Bender’s “description exercised a pacifying, relaxing effect upon the Mennonites of North America and Europe…,” which alleviated their prophetic dissonance with modernity. Bender, according to Goertz, thought “Anabaptists must be restricted to figures presentable to the contemporary Western world.” However, Bender’s larger concern in this essay is to prevent any relegation of Anabaptism to the status of primal modernists. “[G]reat as is the

128 He was consciously resisting Roland Bainton’s current interpretation asserting that Anabaptists were the “left-wing” of the Reformation. Bainton had concluded that the regulative principle of the Anabaptists was their separation of church and state. This led to an interpretation of Anabaptism as proto-individualism. Bainton’s explicit motive in writing his essay was to demonstrate the cleavage (in 1941) between Germany and the “West”: Germany had rejected the liberal ideals of the Anabaptists while England and America had accepted them. The outcome in Nazi barbarity was the fruit of this rejection. Roland H. Bainton, “The Left Wing of the Reformation,” The Journal of Religion 21, no. 2 (1941): 124–34.
Anabaptist contribution to the development of religious liberty, this concept not only does not exhaust but actually fails to define the true essence of Anabaptism.” The true essence of Anabaptism was “a new conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship, second, a new conception of the church as a brotherhood; and third, a new ethic of love and nonresistance.”¹²⁹ He proceeded to demonstrate the intense commitment of the Anabaptists to order the holy life in communities separated from the world and patterned after the early church. Anabaptism was not reducible to proto-modernism.

Bender’s “Anabaptist Vision,” in my view, established as normative, via a selective reading of Anabaptist history, a Mennonitism that secured “discipleship” as the motif enabling them to live against the world.¹³⁰ This was a bracing moral agenda that distilled and ramped up the ideal of Christ-centred obedience as a bulwark against the world in order to restore the WWII-era Mennonite church to a position of being over-against its militaristic nation. Christians who followed the Anabaptists “must consequently withdraw from the worldly system and create a Christian social order within the fellowship of the church brotherhood.”¹³¹ Surely, Bender seemed to reason, this was more than could be expected of Protestant liberals.

Another key aspect of this view of discipleship was its acceptance of Robert Friedmann’s critical distinction between the spirit of Anabaptism and Pietism. Pietism, according to Friedmann was fixated on the sweet, inner well-being of the saint and lacked the


¹³⁰ It must be asked how the “Vision” changed in the translation of “Nachfolge Christi” as “discipleship.” In this writer’s judgment there is an abstracting that occurs in that translation, a loss of the relational aspect of earlier Anabaptist ethics.

gritty obedience by which the disciples provoked suffering. Some have seen within this Bender-school rejection of Pietism the unwitting loss of the spiritual tradition of Anabaptism, a tradition which made it amenable to Pietism, rather than contrasted from it. This inadvertently resulted in a pacifism loosed from the spiritual resources of the tradition.

Nonresistance, Bender claimed, “was thoroughly believed and resolutely practiced by all the original Anabaptist Brethren and their descendants throughout Europe from the beginning until the last century.” They held this view before Quakers emerged and in a time when “both Catholic and Protestant churches not only endorsed war as an instrument of state policy, but employed it in religious conflicts.” While Bender acknowledges a certain continuity between the Anabaptist free-church concept and modern secular notions of liberty and individualism, he sees no continuity there for pacifism. And yet, viewed now with the trajectory of secularity as a backdrop, it can be pointed out that the “Anabaptist Vision” prioritized that stream of Anabaptism that best fit with emerging sixteenth-century notions of order and civility. It left behind the holy war Anabaptism of Bernard Rothman, the apocalyptic pacifism of Hans Hut, and the spiritualistic pacifism of Hans Denk, Leonard Schiemer and Hans Schlaffer. It focused on the sober dualistic pacifism of the Swiss

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132 “The pietist ceased to lay the emphasis upon the outer life which was in any case unsatisfactory, but rather upon the pure inner perfecting of holiness, on the possession of Christ in prayer, song, sacrament, and fellowship.” Robert Friedmann, “Anabaptism and Pietism I,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 14, no. 2 (1940): 97.

133 See for example the essay by John D Roth, “Pietism and the Anabaptist Soul,” in *The Dilemma of Anabaptist Piety: Strengthening Or Straining the Bonds of Community?*, ed. Stephen L. Longenecker and Ronald C. Arnett (Bridgewater: Forum for Religious Studies, Bridgewater College, 1997). Roth argues that Friedmann has seriously underplayed key historical, theological and spiritual continuities between the traditions.


135 This is the argument of Bender, “The Pacifism of the Sixteenth Century Anabaptists.”
Anabaptists and the Hutterites as well as the moderate dualistic pacifism of Marpeck and Menno. Bender’s Anabaptist pacifists were those who held to a strict separation of church and state, and exercised due discipline to maintain ordnung in the fellowship.

Messianic-community pacifism is represented by John Howard Yoder. In many ways there is a seamless development between Bender and Yoder. Yoder continues the emphasis on discipleship and retains a strong instinct to direct the church against the world. He is deeply concerned about the way Mennonites have “sold out” and become mainstream denominations.⁷³ Yoder casts his vision in the second half of the century when the cultural non-involvement of Mennonites in society is being severely criticized, and new words such as social justice, nonviolent resistance, and peacemaking are naming a positive ambition to influence the direction of society toward peaceableness. Yoder extends Mennonite exposure to the broader ecumenical community where he is challenged to frame his pacifism vis-à-vis Protestant and Roman Catholic theological and ethical categories.

The literature by and about Yoder is vast. Here we will only lay out the tension between two poles which Yoder sought to keep taut in his argument for unity in difference throughout his life.⁷⁴ At the one pole, in his description of Jesus and the church, Yoder engages in a life-long drive to the historical, socio-ethical, human reality of God’s nonviolent, loving action in time. Yoder picks up on both the Anabaptist emphasis on

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⁷⁴ Yoder actually wrote relatively little devoted solely to arguing for pacifism. His argument for pacifism is almost always part of a larger argument for the kind of church he thought Jesus had in mind, and for the way such a church would interact with the world.
Nachfolge Christi as attentiveness to the human choices and actions of Christ and Bender’s location of gritty discipleship as the central motif of Anabaptism. He wields this concern for the concrete as an unrelenting insistence that God is to be understood and followed as the One acting in history to direct its flow. This emphasis on the historical, concrete actions of God in Christ is the hermeneutical key by which Yoder determines what is genuine faith and church. He seeks to get rid of all individualist, pietistic, spiritualist, or metaphysical moves that abstract or insulate the church from becoming the social polis that Jesus assembled over against the powers of his time and ours. For Yoder, pacifism is the name for a set of churchly but always-human practices lived out in the to and fro of history. He resists Reinhold Niebuhr’s assertion that pacifism such as Mennonites practiced was an irrelevant symbol that had no answer to the challenges of history. Pacifism is part of the new social dynamic actually created by the church’s embodiment of the eschatological breaking in of the Kingdom of God into the grind of history. As such, Yoder’s definition of Christian faithfulness is described in relentlessly ethical categories.138

And yet, and here is the second pole, the contours of this concrete, historically embedded social reality can never be arrived at through what he calls “the theology of the natural.”139 All forms of “the theology of the natural” seek “guidance from common sense and the nature of things” and erroneously believe that “it is by studying the realities around

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138 Yoder consistently advocated his claim “[t]hat the Christian life is defined most basically in ethical terms. While forgiveness, membership in a social order, participation on worship, or receiving a revelation may all be very relevant factors, they do not rob obedience in ethics (Nachfolge) of primary rank.” John Howard Yoder, “The Anabaptist Dissent: The Logic of the Place of the Disciple in Society,” Concern 1 (June 1954): 45. Emphasis original.

139 John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 20. Here Yoder gives several examples of how this “theology of the natural” is seen; the Reformation’s ethic of “vocation” or “station”; the “currently popular form of the “ethic of the situation” or in older catholic forms of natural law.
us, not by hearing a proclamation from God that we discern the right.” Yoder was not necessarily opposed to all formulations of natural law or of the created orders; what he was opposed to was any notion that these entities could arrive at the church already formed and demanding the church to recognize their epistemological sovereignty. The political community of Jesus must be re-built from the ground up in defiance of customary practice through a hearing of the scriptures. Here is Yoder’s campaign against “natural” notions of effectiveness, such as he felt Reinhold Niebuhr taught.

For Yoder the gospel was concrete, this-worldly and historical but rooted in the Lordly voice of Jesus as mediated by the scriptures and resisting reduction to “common sense”. In the tension between these poles Yoder was envisioning the church as a deeply human reality living its life within the world on the plain of time and space, but nevertheless not established by common human realities. Pietism/spiritualism was the slackening of the first pole and Constantinianism was the loss of the second pole.

Yoder’s mighty attempt to maintain the tension between these two poles led Mennonites (and many others) to “historicalize” traditional nonresistance into “secular” practices such as conflict mediation, restorative justice, community development and nonviolent protest. No longer was the pacifist’s exemption from the draft the main


141 To forecast the questions laid to Yoder in the second chapter of our argument, many question whether he was able to genuinely achieve the second pole; his description of the historical concreteness of the gospel community seemed, to some, rather modern and secular, and not actually needing Jesus in the end.

142 The most extensive exploration of “effective” nonviolent action in Yoder’s writings may be the section called “Effective Peacemaking Practices: The Case for Proactive Alternatives to
concern, but a new interest arose in the nonviolence of the church’s witness in a host of society-influencing practices. This can be seen as the outcome of the first pole. The fruit of the second concern is not as obvious, but Yoder has provoked a whole generation of ethicists to be more careful and attentive to whether their proposals are in fact Christian and scriptural in any determinative way.\textsuperscript{143} Whether Yoder’s pacifism is as dependent on the teaching of Jesus and the alternative community of the church as he claimed is a question we will return to in the next chapter.

But here again, as Bender’s pacifism was distanced from the spiritual heritage of Anabaptism by its allergy to Pietism, Yoder’s Jesus was not primarily accessed through prayer and the disciplines of Gelassenheit that earlier devotion seemed to assume. Historical critical exegesis rather than an experience of spiritual union was central. It would be difficult to write a book exploring the role of prayer in Yoder’s theology, since these practices play only a small role.\textsuperscript{144} He advocated for a communal-centric approach to discerning the scriptures that was open to historical-critical discoveries.

\textsuperscript{143} Stanley Hauerwas’s extolling of Yoder is key in mediating this influence. Richard Mouw speaks for many when he says, “My own wrestlings with [“The Politics of Jesus”]…have forever shaped the ways in which I think about questions of violence and the normativity of Jesus’ redemptive ministry for the patterns of our social-political witness.” As quoted in Mark Thiessen Nation, \textit{John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions} (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 126.

Another key question regarding Yoder is the extent to which he actually influences today’s peace and justice studies in Mennonite academics. His own moral failures have made this a charged issue. But even beyond this dilemma, Stephen Dintaman’s point needs to be heard:

Yoder’s *Politics of Jesus* became the bible of a new activism that took the concrete economic patterns of Jubilee and Jesus’ commitment to absolute nonviolence and made them a kind of canon within the canon for Anabaptist social activism. But having traveled across the bridge and moved from sectarian separatism to world engaging activism, it also became possible to burn the bridge. A strange reality of the current generation of Mennonite social thinkers and peace activists is that while Yoder’s significance is recognized and usually praised, his work, or at least his work beyond *The Politics of Jesus*, is not widely read and discussed. Current social thinking in Mennonite colleges and social service programs is focused primarily on social analysis, a commitment to working at social justice, and highly developed, pioneering programs for teaching and practicing “conflict transformation.”... Nonviolent action directed to increasing peace and justice has become a kind of self-authenticating program that hardly needs theological rationales beyond “that’s what Jesus called us to do.”\(^{145}\)

This confirms my earlier, rather brash statement that at this juncture assimilated Mennonites already know what ethics requires and do not need further revelation.

Historic nonresistance and Messianic-community pacifism could be described as pacifisms of difference, as they generally sought to resist the straight-forward continuities between traditional nonresistance and this-worldly nonviolence. Our third type, progressive realist pacifism, has sought to demonstrate similarity and compatibility rather than difference. Often associated with Dutch/Russian Mennonites as opposed to the Swiss Mennonites of the Bender/Yoder variety, these theologians draw on a tradition going back to nineteenth-century Russian Mennonite engagement with culture that was much more at home

in statecraft and other societal involvement. As a broad generalization this form of pacifism has been more at home in the Canadian context.

An early exemplar of this pacifism is H.P. Krehbiel, a Mennonite leader who, in 1909, served in the Kansas legislature. His book, *War, Peace, and Amity*, published in 1937, appeared while Mennonites were grappling with their dismal experience during WWI on the one hand, and on the other, the proliferation of “peace committees” across the Protestant churches calling for an end to war. Krehbiel took the side of embracing the new ecumenical optimism in condemning war. His theological basis for this was a conviction that “the cause of Christ cannot be defeated” and that Jesus will eventually disturb and teach the world to reject its warfare over time. He called for a decisive separation of the church and state, with the church attending to spiritual and ethical matters, and the state looking after the body in secular affairs. The state however depended on the church developing peace-loving “amitists”. In this way, Krehbiel expected the church to have a great impact on the future of the nation. He did not accept that the church itself needed a political agenda, but what we see in Krehbiel is an ambitious, positive anticipation that a church committed to the nonviolent love of Christ will eventually produce those kinds of citizens who, when they become involved in government, will gradually move the nation to the illegalization of war and private arms. “Christianity is a New Way of life, which revolutionizes the religious, spiritual, 


147 John H. Redekop describes Canadian pacifism as having a more positive view of the state, being more comfortable in joint ventures with the state, and having a deeper history of political involvement than its more Swiss-dominated American counterpart. Ibid., 60–61.


moral, social, economic and political life, not only that of the individual, but in spreading, also that of the community, and ultimately it is destined to transform all religious, ethical, social, political and governmental institutions, bringing them ever nearer the standards of Jesus Christ the Lord." In Krehbiel we see a Mennonite theology of culture that believes that its message of peace will be welcomed in society and that this can make real differences in how nations conduct their affairs. In Friesen we can see the anti-Niebuhrian reaction of Mennonites at its strongest. Friesen insists that the agape love of Jesus can and will work over time within groups and is not a merely personal principle. Following Gordon Kaufman (another Mennonite in this tradition), he considers theological ethics as the task of constructing God as a “symbol” that orients us toward wholesome

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150 Ibid.
151 Toews, “The Long Weekend or the Short Week,” 51.
creative and fruitful work within the world. Friesen sets out to describe a theology of culture that is both attuned to the alternative values and ideals which he sees embodied in Jesus, and the realities of life in the modern world. To this end his pacifism is at once decidedly mainstream Mennonite, sounding quite like Yoder at places, but also much more positive about the possibility of nonviolent witness actually cohering with the construction of a real society.

These then are three kinds of argument by Mennonite theologians to help their churches grapple with what it means to be gospel pacifists in a secular age that, while still violent, is providing more latitude for nonviolent methods to effect cultural change. What is noteworthy for our project is that in all three, the personal experience of mingling with the suffering presence of Christ in the world as we saw in early Anabaptism and the Martyrs Mirror, is no longer the dominant motif.

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154 Friesen, though adapting Kaufman’s starting point in crafting such a theology that yields creative nonviolence, nevertheless retains a stronger sense of the church as an alternative society which stands against prevailing norms.

155 Friesen, “Toward a Theology of Culture,” 61.

156 Which is not to say that any of these three groups would be inherently opposed to “spirituality” as an aspect of social ethics; quite the opposite. But in none of them is a real-time spiritual experience of union with the suffering Christ, as described in the Martyrs Mirror, the crucial issue.
1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have taken some time to lay out a tension that highlights the shifting ways in which Mennonite pacifism has navigated unity in difference over five centuries. We have shown that, as it developed in the sixteenth century and as it was transposed into a participation in a communion of saints by the *Martyrs Mirror*, nonresistance was the result of a determination to link oneself to the very actions and postures of the Incarnate Christ. Entailed in this was an understanding of the mystical union of the believer with Christ in which the attitudes of Christ toward his enemies and the power structures of his day, became the Christian’s. Via believer’s baptism, a Christian came to share in the communion of the defenseless Christians at which Jesus stood as head. This was an understanding in which the Christian shared in the sufferings of Christ as the extension of the incarnation, the body of Christ extended through time.

We have also shown how the move out into greater exposure to secular society in the twentieth century exposed greater continuities with longer trajectories of secularity, and raised doubts about whether pacifism and irresponsibility needed to be equated. The theology of suffering and yieldedness upon which traditional nonresistance was built was questioned. Strange allies appeared on the horizon, not all confessing faith in Christ. We have seen how this opened up a new awareness of the similarity that exists between Mennonite ideals of peace and secular ideals of civility and order.

In light of the need for greater clarity on the unity in difference between nonresistance in the Mennonite tradition and similar but not identical concerns in general society, North American Mennonites have neither turned to a recovery of the earlier spirituality of mystical
union with the human and divine Christ, nor to a re-discovery of the function of believer’s baptism in inducting the believer into a communion of defenseless Christians. Rather, in the three broad patterns we have surveyed, attempts have been made to redress the situation through the creation of a historical normative Anabaptism, through the creation of “discipleship” as the translation of this normative Anabaptism, and through the theological and exegetical work of demonstrating the political, socio-ethical relevance of a Messianic community. They have also turned to a more pragmatic confidence in immersing oneself in the culture and applying the lessons of the alternative community of Jesus to the problems at hand and gradually influencing directions.

However, by the end of the century, not all were satisfied with these options. Stephen F. Dintaman’s 1992 essay, “The Spiritual Poverty of the Anabaptist Vision,” described the way Bender’s “Anabaptist Vision”, as it had been taken up by Yoder, Friesen and company, ended up securing a peace ethic at the cost of losing the transformative aspects of grace. Bender assumed larger doctrines about the nature of Christ, the Trinity, and the Spirit’s work of sanctification but did not state them, leaving an arid description of ethics. The church cannot live by ethics alone, Dintaman said. The thunderous response to Dintaman from the Mennonite community, much of it positive, suggests that Mennonite academic attempts to transfer Mennonite pacifism into the secular age had now left many unsure how it was still a

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Christian ethic. We turn now to examine the life-long tussle that A. James Reimer engaged in to re-secure Mennonites ethics with Christian faith.

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158 The current schisms in the Mennonite churches over sexuality are still too close-up for objective historical analysis, but this may also be exposing a deep ambivalence over how, exactly, modern civility is related to Scriptural union with Christ.

Chapter 2. Recovering the Mystery of Creedal Ethics: A. James Reimer

We have seen the big picture of Mennonite pacifistic unity in difference as it emerged in recent times: a pacifism rooted traditionally in union with Christ with increasing temptations to settle rather for modern civility. A. James Reimer (1942-2010) cut a distinct swath in response to this large question and much of his writing revolves around this very issue. His extensive writings serve as an instructive figure in developing our understanding of God and his relation to the world, and to our ethics. In seeking to understand how a pacifist Anabaptist ethic could be transparent to the transcendence and immanence of God, Reimer must be accounted for. Both his successes and his failures are a stepping stone for us in coming to fresh perspectives.

Born in Altona, Manitoba, he was raised in a traditional evangelically-pietistic Mennonite village. After leaving home, he discovered a “liberation” by attending Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg, at that time known for its leadership in assimilating Mennonite theology into the historical-critical study of the Bible.¹ He received a B.A. in history and philosophy at the University of Manitoba and attended Union Theological Seminary for one year in 1971. His University of Toronto Master’s thesis was on Ludwig Feuerbach followed by a doctoral thesis on theology during the Nazi period in Germany at the University of St. Michaels. He spent his teaching career straddling Conrad Grebel College (a Mennonite college) and the larger ecumenical and secular context of the

¹ “A Confessional Reading of Scriptures,” in A. James Reimer, Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), 341. Hereafter, I will refer to this large compilation of Reimer’s essays as “MACT” and give the essay title.
University of Toronto.²

Reimer felt the constricted nature of his tradition, though he remained with his local Mennonite congregation where he taught a junior high boys’ Sunday School class. But he sensed the need for his church to be grounded in larger realms. He had several close Mennonite colleagues who became Roman Catholic and though he did not follow them, he understood their search.³ He believed “church” should name a spiritual, metaphysical, global, historical body across time that included the local congregation within its embrace. This quest for the “catholic” and the belief that Mennonites participated in it motivated much of his writing and teaching.

Why does a dissertation such as this one need to engage the work of Reimer? Reimer was a Christian theologian who intuited Mennonite ethics immersed by prayer, obedience and the sacraments in the “one, holy, catholic, apostolic church”. He believed that any attempt to follow Christ in nonviolence needed to spring from an engagement with the creedal commitments of the church. The argument of this thesis stands on his shoulders.

One is tempted to say that Reimer thought academic Mennonite theology was becoming boring. In its concern for retrieving Anabaptist identity it was losing its reverence before the majesty of God which Reimer felt was a necessary posture from which to begin and end the work of ethical reflection. Morals were no longer issuing from an encounter with the living Trinity. Ethics, including Mennonite pacifism, had become worldly in this sense.

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According to Reimer, Anabaptist theology had begun with a reverence before the Lord and a modesty in its scope. In his *Mennonite Encyclopedia* article on the Triune God, Reimer described the way sixteenth-century Anabaptism had assumed and taught the trinitarian God of the ancient church. What distinguished Anabaptism was not the flippancy of its connection to the ancient Christian doctrine of God, but the manner in which it interspersed moral teaching into this doctrine. He cited Peter Riedemann, whose 1545 Hutterite *Account of Our Religion, Doctrine and Faith* showed how “community of goods” had a trinitarian basis.

Riedemann had written,

> Community, however is naught else than that those who have fellowship have all things in common together, none having aught for himself, but each having all things with the others, even as the Father hath nothing for himself, but all that he hath, he hath with the Son, and again, the Son hath nothing for himself, but all that he hath, he hath with the Father and all who have fellowship with him.

Contrary to many modern assertions, Anabaptism had been “creedal” in this way in its approach to faith. Building from this conviction, Reimer found weaknesses within Mennonite theological ethics that our thesis is attempting to strengthen. We shall investigate both his use of Paul Tillich and his understanding of the Trinity to appreciate his contribution to the project of describing a Chalcedonian relation between God and the world in pacifism.

In the final end, we must also seek to understand the ways Reimer seemed to fall short of his own goals. While his vision was grand, for specific reasons, his project did not end up anchoring the Mennonite church and its ethic as securely as he wanted in the harbor of Nicene faith. We will suggest some tendencies in his theology that may have left his work

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2.1 Mennonite Theology Within Modernity

Our first task is to gain some nuance in Reimer’s perennial accusation of “reductionism” or, more commonly, simply “historicism” against Mennonite theology.⁶ In essence, according to Reimer, where Harold Bender celebrated Anabaptist proto-modern convictions, we should find these resonances most problematic. For few other Mennonite theologians have both the possibilities and the hazards of modernity formed such an existential challenge as for Reimer. Though Reimer began his education enthralled by the possibility of theology within the limits of Kantian categories, an encounter with Canadian philosopher George Grant during his Master’s degree gave him much pessimism for such a venture. Modernity offered a dismal paradox. On the one hand, the loss of a connection to the eternal ordering of the cosmos resulted in rampant fragmentation and chaotic pluralism. The holistic vision of pre-modernity had been disenchanted and fractured in favour of absolute human autonomy. On the other hand, within this fragmentation a sinister homogenization, a flattening of the world to a single tier of meaning emerged via the hegemony of technology.⁷ This hubris of technology created a tendency to boost voluntarist, unfettered human

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⁶ “Historicism” is an oft-repeated and rarely defined word in Reimer’s work. J Alexander Sider sums it well: “Historicism makes history the categorical matrix for all meaning and value. History becomes its own end. Or, to put it another way, historicism is reductionistic and relativistic in that it cultivates no room for events with transcendent causes or foundations.” “Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics,” Mennonite Quarterly Review 76, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 138.

autonomy to shape the world, with no felt need to consider how these choices related to eternal realities. And this quickly became violent.

Modernity, in this light, could hardly be trusted to help in stewarding a theological conviction such as pacifism, and drinking its draughts would only lead Anabaptists to their worst possible outcome:

The horrors of Hiroshima, Nagasaki [and] Auschwitz...are not mistakes that modern western civilization has made along the way toward a Utopian classless society; rather, they have grown out of and are intrinsically linked to our view of nature, science, and the human as creative agent with unlimited freedom as a historical being to shape his or her destiny without reference to some absolute realm of justice or limit.8

It was the ultimately violent nature of autonomous self-making that Reimer feared for his brothers and sisters.

Gayle Gerber Koontz, in her review of Reimer’s Mennonites and Classical Theology, helpfully distills his four criticisms of current Mennonite theology. Each of these uncover an angle to the reductionism Reimer resisted. First, he warned that contemporary Mennonites focused so much on history and ethics that they neglected the transcendent and sacramental.9 This is closely related to Reimer’s sense that the default in modernity is a constricted, technocratic life. Reimer had a strong mystical inclination. He sought a faith gazing over the edge that dropped off into mystery beyond the world. In their concern to recover Anabaptist


9 MACT (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), 393, 204, 197. J. Denny Weaver describes this as a Gnostic element in Reimer that seeks to finally leave the material world behind and seek after the eternal mind. This Reimer would strongly deny. J. Denny Weaver, “Perspectives on a Mennonite Theology,” Conrad Grebel Review 2, no. 3 (1984): 206.
discipleship, Mennonites had succumbed to modernity’s tendency to focus only on the here and now. A chief culprit in this neglect of the transcendent was John Howard Yoder:

My objection to Yoder’s interpretation of primitive Christianity is not ultimately an objection to his emphasis on the relevance and normativity of Jesus’ claims for Christians in the modern world…nor with his emphasis on the social-political-historical dimensions of the Christian message…but with his inadequate recognition of the ritualistic, cultic, mystical, and sacramental aspects of the religious experience, both in the corporate-communal sense and in the personal, existential, individual, and private-inward sense.10

This is closely aligned with my observation in the previous chapter that the spiritual tradition of Anabaptism which envisioned ethics to be cradled in a union with Christ was not emphasized by Yoder. Reimer’s emphasis, however, was not on recovering sixteenth-century spirituality, but on recovering the acknowledgement of the transcendent mystery of God beyond arid rationalism.

Reimer’s interest in the mystical helps explain his lifelong fascination with Gordon Kaufman’s theology.11 Reimer appreciated Kaufman’s reverence. On the surface, Kaufman’s radically historicist theology which had no need of a transcendent, personal God, is the polar

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10 A. James Reimer, “The Nature and Possibility of a Mennonite Theology,” in MACT (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), 172. Thomas Finger, who does a careful study of the question of whether Yoder reduced theology to ethics agrees with Reimer. I quote his conclusion: “To what extent were Yoder’s affirmations reducible to ethics, or perhaps other fields or conceptualities whose terms refer exclusively to human…characteristics, activities, relationships and potentialities? The great majority of his affirmations provide no intrinsic reason to refer to anything beyond these domains. Yoder often treated historicist categories as adequate. Yet he did not endorse historicism as a comprehensive metaphysic… I have discovered no clear affirmation of, or even clear implication concerning, any transcendent dimension of Christology—that is any reference specific enough that it cannot be sufficiently expressed in terms of human (and/or subhuman) realities. Finger, “Did Yoder Reduce Theology to Ethics,” 332–33.

opposite of Reimer’s emphasis. However, here is a historicism that recognizes “the need for piety…. [Kaufman] is profoundly aware that faith is not purely an intellectual exercise. It involves a reverent attitude to the mystery of life and a commitment to a world view which, if it is to orient our whole life, must evoke religious devotion.” In Reimer’s attempts to ground pacifism in trinitarian theology he was seeking an ethic with this openness to mystery.

Second, according to Koontz, Reimer believed Mennonite theology had become too historically and anthropologically optimistic. An excessive emphasis on the possibility of discipleship at the expense of other doctrines had reduced faith to a too-tidy moralistic perfectionism. With this stress on “the free possibility of human beings to act lovingly and non-violently in this fallen world of evil” Mennonites had “never quite gotten at the root, irrationality and tenacity of evil and violence.” Mennonites now needed to deal seriously with “these dark forces in the cosmos, in nature and in our own psyches and communities.”

This Reimer then connected to a loss of grace and forbearance in the Christian community which is the Mennonite legacy of excessive church discipline. It also resulted in a too-tidy, over-confident pacifism. Charles Taylor, we noted, identifies the malleability of the human subject as a key tenet of the secularizing trajectory.


13 Reimer planned a future volume in which he would “deal with the liturgical, sacramental and aesthetic resources of ethics, viewing it (ethics) as a form of praise and worship of God (doxology).” This he hoped would give a more holistic view of the religious life than Yoder had offered. Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology: Law, Order, and Civil Society, ed. Paul G. Doerksen (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 2. Also note that Reimer was critical of the Mennonite tendency to treat the Sermon on the Mount as a canon within the canon, leading to the priority of ethics over doctrine. See his essay in Burkholder, The Limits of Perfection, 102.

14 “God Is Love but Not a Pacifist,” in MACT (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), 489.
His third criticism was that Mennonites had an unwarranted prejudice against post-biblical doctrinal and ecclesial developments. Several factors in Reimer’s theology are important here. The first is Reimer’s belief that systematic, rational, doctrinal statements were a condition of discipleship and a necessary bulwark against one-sidedness. He was critical of Robert Friedman’s interpretation of Anabaptism as being essentially opposed to system. Mennonites, Reimer said, needed to articulate a theological system in order to engage it in ecumenical dialogue, to engage it with critical insights from other academic disciplines, and to do an adequate work of catechizing. Reimer believed that systematic theology could be done from a prophetic perspective that challenged rigidity and rationalism. But “[t]heology without dogmatic structure and form, without a confessional grammar of faith, becomes pure irrational dynamism at the mercy of demonic powers.”

This criticism of Mennonite’s aversion to post-biblical developments includes Reimer’s lifelong fascination with the ecumenical creeds. Reimer denied that the ecumenical creeds were merely exercises in regulating Christian language. He preferred to think of them

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17 His essay, “Anabaptist-Mennonite Systematic Theology,” was his argument that, in spite of Friedman’s assertion about early Anabaptism’s unsystematic theology, a Mennonite systematic theology would bring its prophetic discipleship to bear within “a significant emphasis on sacrament, liturgy, worship, and confession.” “Anabaptist-Mennonite Systematic Theology,” in MACT (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), 182–90.

18 Reimer, “Christian Theology Today,” 24. Here we can anticipate a Tillichian influence. “System” for Reimer, as for Tillich, does not entail the highly structured, propositionalist presentation of scholastic Protestantism, but rather theology consisting of an inner, organizing, limiting principle that holds consistent throughout.
as “metaphors of ultimacy”—symbols by which windows were opened to glimpse the transcendent abyss which is God.19 He opened a debate among Mennonite theologians in the early 1980’s with an incendiary essay arguing that four influential Mennonite theologians (Harold Bender, Robert Friedman, John Yoder and Gordon Kaufman) shared a debilitating historicism that could only be remedied by a reintegration with the creedal tradition of the larger church.20

But Reimer was as interested in re-capturing “the creedal era” as the creeds themselves. Reimer accepted the diagnosis of a “Constantinian fall” of the church, and he agreed that it involved the eclipse of the ethical teachings of Jesus. But this “fall” was nevertheless not the whole story of the church at that time. The church’s very obedience and success in carrying out the great commission of Matthew 28:18-20 resulted in a plethora of church-state relationships, not only one. With this “universal message, not a sectarian one” the world “including high culture and politics, was drawn into the church.”21 It was shortsighted of Mennonite theologians such as J. Denny Weaver to denounce the creedal era as irretrievably ensconced in Constantinianism against the Jesus of the gospels.22

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19 This again is something he learned from Tillich’s explanation of symbol. Peter Slater says of Tillich, “Theological concepts…are not representations of divine truth, certified by revelation, but symbolic expressions of the redemptive possibilities in historic challenges, despite the alienating thrust of human history.” Peter Slater, “Tillich on the Ambiguity of Spiritual Presence: More Protestant Principle Than Catholic Substance?” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 31, no. 1 (July 24, 2015): 110.


Reimer’s fourth criticism was closely related to the third: he thought Mennonite theology gave insufficient recognition to the universal church, focusing too exclusively on congregational dynamics. Like Reimer’s diagnosed historicism, this congregationalism was a reduction of the church to sociological processes. It also did not adequately recognize the work of Christ outside the church in God-ordained institutions by which “God preserves the world from total chaos and disintegration.” It was this neglect that too quickly excused Mennonites from offering theology for statecraft and judicial exercise.

In sum, Reimer remained steadfast in his belief that a greater emphasis on the transcendence of God, on the intractability of human sin, on the work of the church in the post-biblical era, and on the universal church beyond the local congregation would enable Mennonites to resist the constricting aspects of modernity. While we will not always take the path that Reimer chose, his diagnosis plays an important role in this thesis. His intuitions about the state of unity in difference within Mennonite theological ethics provides a launching point for our own constructive work with Balthasar. However, Reimer also had wisdom to offer to that end, and to this we turn.

2.2 Paul Tillich and a Form of Resistance within Modernity

Reimer’s constructive theological work took off with the writing of this paragraph in 1978 at the end of an essay on George Grant’s dismal view of modernity:

The dilemma of moderns, however, is precisely the following: while a more dualistic world view seems necessary—a more traditional belief in a transcendent God who

23 “Theology and the So-Called ‘Orders of Creation’: Nationality as an Instance,” in MACT (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), 456. His unfinished work on political theology was a response to this perception.
stands above history and judges, restricts and limits human *hubris*—such a world view is impossible in the modern age…. In short, we desperately need a more traditional concept of God, but we cannot believe in such a God. And to deliberately and self-consciously fashion such a concept for pragmatic and humanistic reasons begs the question. This is the dilemma confronting the modern theologian.  

Reimer sought to answer this Kantian dilemma for the next thirty-two years. How could the transcendent God still be a real limiting and transcending reality for modern people who sought to think theologically? This is deeply rooted in the issues of secularity that we introduced in the previous chapter. God seems peripheral to moderns—perhaps helpful but never determinative. Reimer discovered Tillich’s mediating way of answering modern questions by perceiving the “depths” of traditional formulations. Tillich’s Protestant principle of “emigration” provided a kind of inner system for imagining a faithful confession of God over-against but still within modernity. Reimer continued to think and write about Tillich all his life.

Tillich was not only against the world, and this was a pleasant surprise for Reimer. Reimer’s critique of Mennonites was that they seemed to have lost their Protestant principle, a “transcendent beyond” that could inspire them to emigrate from worldliness without losing their rootedness in the soil of earthly life. Historicism had now left them trapped in earthly realities, a

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24 Reimer, “Theological Method, Modernity and the Role of Tradition,” 35. Here we can see that behind Reimer’s work was the large Kantian dilemma of the possibility of knowing God in the age of enlightenment.

25 In this thesis I am dealing with Tillich only as Reimer interpreted and used him. I will not investigate potential debates within Tillich scholarship on the accuracy of Reimer’s reading. Reimer’s “take” on Tillich vis-à-vis Ronald Stone’s authoritative analysis is that Tillich had a more romanticist devotion to blood, soil and nation than Stone acknowledges. Cf. Ronald H. Stone, *Paul Tillich’s Radical Social Thought* (John Knox Press, 1980) and A. James Reimer, *The Emanuel Hirsch and Paul Tillich Debate: A Study in the Political Ramifications of Theology* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 107n165. As I argue below, it was this heightened awareness of Tillich’s romanticism that piqued Reimer’s interest in unity in difference questions.
region Tillich labeled the realm of “space” as opposed to the realm of “time”. But just to reject the world in favour of a transcendent God (or a transcendent all-demanding ethic) was also not the answer. The answer Reimer learned from Tillich was that Christians must live “on the boundary.”

Tillich opened this path with his nuanced approach to the “myths of origin”, which is the grounding of human life in blood, soil, ethnicity and nationality. The focus of Reimer’s doctoral dissertation was the friendship and quarrel between Emanuel Hirsch and Paul Tillich during the years leading up to Hitler’s achievement of power. Reimer was interested in the specifically theological convictions that led to their contrasting responses to nationalism in Germany:

The confrontation between Tillich and Hirsch is not simply one more casuistic squabble between two pedantic theologians. It deals on the deepest level with one of the more critical questions facing theology in the modern era, or for that matter, in any age: what is the relation of the divine to the human? Assuming that God acts within human history, even within political movements, what are the criteria by which divine presence in finite events can be identified?

Hirsch had thrown himself whole-heartedly into the German Christian movement with its concept of nationalism, while Tillich stood against it and eventually had to flee to America because of his views. But Reimer was surprised both by the theological depth of Hirsch in asserting nationalism and, on the other hand, by how deeply Tillich regarded the myths of origin. He had expected the debate to be a simple contest between God and nation, Tillich versus Hirsch, with Tillich obviously coming out on top. What gave Tillich the ability

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26 To use a metaphor Reimer picked up from Tillich’s book *On the Boundary*. It was existence “between native and alien land.” *The Emanuel Hirsch and Paul Tillich Debate*, 95.

27 Ibid., xiii.
to resist Nazi ideology, but still respect something about the “blood and soil” myths of origin? This intrigued Reimer as he looked for answers in Mennonites’ questions of unity in difference.

Tillich and Hirsch had a similar diagnosis of the illness Germany had been left with after Enlightenment liberalism. The myths of origin were broken, or at least moderns’ connection to them was broken. Both agreed that the rationalist trajectory of the Enlightenment had substituted a thin gruel of rampant individualism and mechanical, technocratic bureaucracy for the depths inherent in pre-modern family, blood, soil, nation and the like. German theology had not adequately addressed this brokenness. Both thinkers wanted to re-capture the rich loam of traditional life in which God, family, volk, and nation were in some sense integrated.28 Arid secularity must be pushed back. But both Tillich and Hirsch also rejected what they called the heteronomy of pre-modern religion, its dependence on an authoritarian God outside the world directing from afar, and on an authoritative, hierarchical church. The Enlightenment could not be ignored. However, they disagreed over how these myths could be retrieved and expressed within modernity. Tillich accused Hirsch and other National Socialists of using the Enlightenment’s autonomous human instrumentality to artificially force a pre-modern view of nation and blood. National Socialists (Tillich called them political romantics) sought to impose broken myths using the very thing that had broken them. But Enlightenment rationality alone left Hirsch and his kind with no ground from which to judge myths such as “nation” and “blood” and to move toward

a future of international justice. Myths stewarded by instrumental reason alone permitted these myths to become demonically idolatrous. This was Tillich’s diagnosis and it was an approach to the Enlightenment that Reimer adopted for himself.29

To his delight, Reimer, came to see that, in spite of this rejection of National Socialist idolatry regarding nationality, Tillich viewed “nation” ambiguously. This brings us to a key aspect of Reimer’s debt to Tillich. Tillich was also a Romantic who sought to retain and utilize “the irrational-mythic dimension” of these myths of origin. Without discarding these “myths”, Christians within modernity needed to subjugate them with a view of the Kingdom of God.

Tillich affirmed two poles in political thought, coinciding with the terms “space” and “time”. “Space” referred to the ground of human existence, being, the origin and “where-from.” This Tillich referred to as the “priestly-sacramental dimension of human existence.”30 “The power of origin expresses itself here as Boden (ground), blood, and social group.” These give us group identity and tie us to nature. Here “the presence of eternity is symbolized through myth and cult.”31 “Space” is the “Catholic substance” that many

29 “Somehow, traditional theological doctrines and creedal formulations concerning God and his creation must be recovered and reaffirmed, by taking them through the prism of the Enlightenment without simply accommodating them to the modern age and thus divesting them of their critical power over us.” “The Nature and Possibility of a Mennonite Theology,” 163.

30 Paul Tillich: Theologian of Nature, Culture and Politics (Münster: LIT Verlag Münster, 2004), 111. Those who are familiar with Reimer’s writings will recognize this as an oft-used term in his theology. Here Reimer is exegeting two early essays by Tillich, Protestantismus und politische Romantik (1932) and Das Wohnen, der Raum und die Zeit (1933).

commentators see as a key pole in Tillich’s thought. Though Tillich rejected Roman Catholicism for its heteronomous embodiment of authority, he was intrigued by its deep grounding in cult and in mysticism.

The second pole, “time”, was directed to the future, the “where-to” in which humans “perceive themselves as subject to demand, or an ‘ought’ as being directed toward a goal *(telos).*” This he called “the prophetic-eschatological dimension”. These tie us to “history, history-making and becoming (time)”. “Time” was an eschatological consciousness which drove forward the discontent needed for ethical change. It provided an ongoing restlessness within “space”. These two poles must always remain in tension, though “time” must ultimately take priority over “space” so that idolatrous mythical nature-worship does not erupt in violence. A political system must seek to retain and respect its origin in blood and soil but must do so by reaching forward. It must emigrate towards the future “now not as a return to the past but as the true origin, an origin which lies in the future society of justice, shaped by our understanding of the kingdom of God.” Here Tillich uses the example of Abram who was commanded to leave his home and go in search of a farther home.

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35 Reimer, *The Emanuel Hirsch and Paul Tillich Debate*, 249. Reimer defines Tillich’s view of the Kingdom of God as “an idealized, immanent universal human community that, while not ever fully realizable historically in a Utopian sense, remains a powerful theological resource for norms of love and social justice by which to structure and restructure social, political, and economic society.” Reimer, *Paul Tillich: Theologian of Nature*, 98.
According to Tillich, while society could thank Enlightenment secularity for breaking *heteronomy*, which was the old life under the external authority of God and church, it must move beyond Enlightenment *autonomy* to become *theonomy*. “Theonomy is the synthesis of prophetic form and sacramental content. Without the sacramental content, the prophetic becomes empty, formal, destructive autonomy; without the prophetic formal dimension, the sacramental content becomes idolatrous.”

This, in capsule, was Tillich’s theology of culture, according to Reimer. It was the basic principle behind Tillich’s Protestant principle and Catholic substance, a kind of inner system he perceived as the depths inherent in justification by faith that could be used even apart from its dogmatic clothing to guide political thought. He perceived behind the Protestant emphasis on the condemned sinner, nevertheless justified by God, a deep pattern or structure wherewith to understand the dynamics of the world’s pursuit of justice. There was within justification by faith a dialectical rejection and acceptance of the human simultaneously, both the breaking forth to the future, but not therewith the abandonment of the old.

How did Reimer relate this to questions in his own theological work? He explicitly applies this to questions of Mennonite ethnicity and homelessness, arguing that Tillich provides a way to both retain Mennonite village organicism and move beyond to further horizons of justice-seeking. But I would argue that this “Protestant principle” (but not without the “Catholic substance), which he saw so clearly in his Tillich/Hirsch work, came to

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form a larger underlying pattern in many of Reimer’s arguments. In his early writings, Reimer’s 1978 proposal for the posture of theology vis-à-vis the world had been to argue that “there needs to be a rigorous attempt to adhere to a negative theology, to assert a concept of God as limit, as unmasker, as absolute boundary, as standing over against the ideologies of any given age. Theology needed to stand against, rather than affirm modernity.” Here difference seemed total in Reimer’s thinking. However, I would argue (and Reimer suggests as much in his introduction to the essay) that while this prophetic, “over-againstness” of God to the world remained a consistent theme throughout his life, alone this soon became unsatisfactory. Tillich’s dialectical relation between the priestly-sacramental and the prophetic-eschatological became the form from which Reimer launched his vision of the classical imagination and the form he envisioned Mennonites to take with their pacifism vis-à-vis the world. This is how one might stand within the world of modernity: Listen to the world’s most difficult questions but then launch further, and heal the brokenness not by going back but, as it were, going forward into the classical imagination. This inner system could provide Mennonites with a unity in difference within secularity.

This, I would suggest, is why Reimer, though constantly speaking of the creeds rarely pushed the regular use of the creeds in worship or the detailed examination of the text of the creeds in theology. They were never artifacts to be re-inserted into the church’s life. They are rather windows into the infinite horizon by which the brokenness of the modern

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39 Reimer, “Theological Method, Modernity and the Role of Tradition,” 30. Emphasis original. This was written when Reimer was a graduate student in 1978.

40 In his Benjamin Eby lectures, near the end of his life he said, “However, I do not interpret the creeds in a literal, plenary infallible, verbally inerrant way. The doctrines constituting the creeds are fallible, human expressions of ineffable divine mysteries.” Reimer, “Christian Theology Today,” 14.
homogenization is overcome and one bows before the tremendous Otherness of God without leaving behind the reality of this world. They offer a form of unity and yet difference from the world as a kind of Protestant principle/Catholic substance by which the Christian is propelled dialectically forward while still retaining roots in the “priestly-sacramental” dimension. The project of retrieving of the creeds and the creedal era was structured by this dialectic between “space” and “time” that was Tillich’s “Protestant Principle.”

I also believe that Reimer saw similarities between the reductionist historicism afflicting Mennonite theology and Hirsch’s theology of culture, as interpreted by Tillich.41 Tillich accused Hirsch of using Enlightenment rationalism to overcome the Enlightenment destruction of the “myth of origin.” In his Lutheranism, Hirsch posited two completely separated realms of church and nation, preventing the prophetic instinct of the church from having its effect on the nation. This yielded the paradoxical result of sacramentalizing the nation. Mennonites, Reimer believed, were seeking to overcome modernity and its violence by using the modern tools of a historicist, human-centred religious method. This historicism had within it no place for a transcendent beyond. The two realms of modern scholarship and the church’s transcendence were kept radically separate, just as Hirsch separated the church from the nation. By succumbing to modern historicist methods, theologians such as Yoder, while seeking to be counter-cultural, were failing to radically offer the church a way to overcome the world’s limitations.42 For Mennonites, their founding “myth” was something

41 For example he compares Hirsch to Gordon Kaufmann’s relativist historicism which, according to Reimer, is unable to genuinely stand against a given cultural moment. “The Ethical Implications of Gordon Kaufman’s Theology,” 49.

42 “An autonomous, self-grounded ethic is capricious and ultimately vulnerable to the vagaries of human convention, political correctness and false anthropologies. Only an ethic that is
that, within secularity, easily slid over into historicist reductionism—the unfettered ability of
the human to be transformed. For Reimer, Mennonite theology which had accepted a
historicist limit on epistemology, could not retrieve the depths of meaning with which
traditional Mennonite village life had gone about its piety. The only way to retrieve this was
to go forward into the future of the classical imagination. Reimer used the form of the
Protestant Principle for the same reason Tillich did—to prevent the domestication of God
within any human structure, while residing within those structures.43 It is noteworthy that
Reimer suggests that the Protestant principle should really be called “the Anabaptist
principle” or the “anti-Constantinian principle”.44 It is the refusal to merge the kingdom of
the world with the Kingdom of God in an undifferentiated way.45 Mennonite historicism in
this view was a species of Constantinianism.

Thus “theology does not have the freedom to be or not to be ‘modern,’ or ‘non-
modern’ for that matter.”46 But “it is possible through imagining, remembering, desiring,
thinking and contemplating to experience, momentarily at least…the eternal verities which

grounded beyond itself in the very structure of reality (which I variously call theological ontology or
theological metaphysics) can give human action stability and durability in the face of temporary

43 “What I find questionable in Kaufman’s analysis is not his rejection of arbitrary and
destructive authoritarianism and heteronomy, but rather his increasing confidence in a modern
historical alternative to a traditional, classical understand of reality.” Here we see Reimer structuring
his criticism of Kaufman in terms exactly parallel to Tillich’s criticism of Hirsch. “The Nature and
Possibility of a Mennonite Theology,” 177.


45 Tillich of course did merge the two in his “Kairos” theology. However he felt that as long
as this principle was in place, the Kingdom of God would actively reach forward towards justice and
critique of earthly realities. But he was not interested in any sort of heteronomy.

46 A. James Reimer, “How Modern Should Theology Be? The Nature and Agenda of
Contemporary Theology,” in The Church as Theological Community: Essays in Honour of David
transcend our and every historical period.”

This formal pattern of unity in difference is seen again when Reimer examines Tillich’s understanding and use of the Chalcedonian definition. In his essay, “Tillich’s Christology in the Light of Chalcedon,” published in 1994, Reimer discusses how this view provides a structure for a certain kind of societal critique. Tillich had contrasted himself on this score with Karl Barth and Emanuel Hirsch. “Barth’s critique of the political and social life too radically separates the human-cultural sphere from the divine realm of the kingdom of God” while Hirsch “mixes the divine and the human by hallowing in an unbroken and unmediated way human-historical existence”, what Reimer elsewhere calls “a demonized sacramentalism.” Though Reimer does not necessarily agree with Tillich’s portrayal of Barth and Hirsch, he does grant Tillich’s claim that how one interprets Chalcedon has these historical and political implications.

For [Tillich] the indwelling of the two natures in Christ came to be paradigmatic for the dialectical relation of the finite and the infinite, the finite being within the infinite and the infinite within the finite. This mystical starting point was to determine his theology as well as his political ethics, in which the struggle against all forms of non-dialectical heteronomy and totalitarianism became an obsession.

According to Reimer, Tillich had a mystical understanding of Christology in which the relation of finitude and infinitude in Christ comes to inhere in all things and form the

47 Ibid., 172–73. Here he is affirmatively restating the expectations of George Grant.
49 Reimer, The Emanuel Hirsch and Paul Tillich Debate, 284.
50 Ibid., 19.
dialectical relation between the “is” of nature and the “ought” of the prophetic word.\footnote{Whether Tillich held to the union of human and divine in Christ in an objective way could be discussed, and it seems to be the form, rather than the content that mystically inheres in all things; but this form is nevertheless rooted in the Chalcedonian mystery. Tillich seems to assume (as many Protestant theologians of the more liberal variety have) that a retention of the form of a theological concept is sufficient, even though the content, in this case this incarnation, becomes less determinative. For a discussion of the tendency of liberal theology to use the form of dogma as a way to overcome the shallowness of modern, scientifically-determined life, see Stanley Hauerwas, \textit{With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology} (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), 105–11.} We might say that this became a Chalcedonian principle for Tillich that was formally similar to the Protestant principle. What Tillich saw in Chalcedon, according to Reimer was “this balance between divine transcendence and immanence, between monism and dualism within the context of a trinitarian doctrine of God” which is crucial in “guarding against the modern temptation toward monist nature-idolatry, on the one hand and gnostic-docetic depreciation of nature, on the other.”\footnote{Reimer, “The Two-Natures of Christ: Re-Considering Chalcedon,” 415.} Chalcedon provided a principle for the interpretation of history, through which Tillich was able to resist modern nature-idolatry in the German Christian movement. However, Tillich was wary of the language of “nature” and, according to Reimer, too readily associated the classical use of “nature” in the creed, with the conservative, static use of “nature” he found so un-historical and idolatrous in German theology in the 1930’s.

But was the Chalcedonian use of “nature” static in this sense? Reimer writes that in the debates of the patristic church around the trinitarian and christological description of God, a trajectory towards the modern concept of personhood was set in play. Drawing from Aloys Grillmeier, S.J., he writes that “modern historical consciousness is indebted to the notion of human autonomy and agency that took shape in the christological debates.”\footnote{Reimer, \textit{Paul Tillich: Theologian of Nature}, 195.}
questions Tillich’s strong polarization of Chalcedonian nature language and modern historical language. Because Chalcedon’s two natures are united in one personality, “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation,” they become the foundational “prototype for the relation of the two dimensions within us as human beings (anthropology).” Christ gives meaning to our history by being that element which breaks in from the transcendent, overcoming that which threatens being. In other words, Chalcedon was more Tillichian than Tillich realized. It identified Christ (in spite of its nature language) as the one in the middle of history who overcomes the cyclical stasis of nature and gives us the possibility of meaningful destiny and history. Christology is therefore concerned “with identifying the place, meaning and content of the middle of history as it applies to us.”

With Tillich’s influence on Reimer we have noted the repetition of “principle”—Protestant, Anabaptist, anti-Constantinian, summed up in Chalcedonian unity in difference. Reimer does not explicitly define what is meant by “principle” in this sense, but it seems to name a universal, animating structure within consciousness that defines a recurring dialectic appearing in multiple spheres. One could almost call it a kind of “natural law” within being. Theology asserts that its concepts are symbols where these animating structures are keenly felt and exposed to view. However, they are not to be confined by the church or by religion per se. This apologetic interest in the “Protestant principle” gained credibility in Reimer’s eyes because Tillich had preveniently raised it in opposition to the rising Nazi furor and it enabled him to resist the pressure at personal cost. Reimer saw this principle as foundational for how Mennonites could ground their ethical convictions in the transcendent.

54 Ibid.
The question remains whether Reimer was able to go beyond mere form and elaborate on the content of the gospel events—did content matter in the modern world? Our thesis here is going to argue that we need both form and content, both the dramatic establishment of a pattern within creation through divine revelation and the spiritual power to be conformed to it. But did Reimer see it this way? In order to more fully answer this question, it is helpful to examine Reimer’s ultimate principle.

2.3 Theological Ethics and the Trinity

In the 1980’s Reimer began to write what were to become his signature pieces in strengthening contemporary Mennonite theology against some of the homogenizing, utopian, world-making of twentieth-century theology. In the Christian doctrine of the trinitarian God lay the chastening of the hubristic, technocratic narrowing of modernity to autonomous human freedom. It was also the path by which modern Mennonites could retain their distinctive emphasis on discipleship without reducing faith to mere ethics. Reimer rejected a “heteronomous” understanding of the trinitarian confessions such as Nicaea that were “rigid, oppressive, and exclusionary”. “Doctrines are not literal pictures of divine realities, nor are they simple models or archetypes; they are symbols (they were in the classical period called symbols) in the Tillichian sense—they participate in the reality to which they point; that is, through them deeper levels of reality are opened up to us in a way that ordinary language is incapable of doing.”55 They were “dynamic metaphors and symbols of ultimacy” that “help

to mediate the divine reality to which they point and to shape moral behavior.” Reimer was no literalist when it came to the creeds. So, for example, “[i]f these divine images are going to maintain or recover symbolic power for us, they will need to be gender inclusive or genderless.”

What was Reimer’s distinctive articulation of trinitarian theology and how did this stoke his imagination for theological ethics? First it is helpful to see his broader definition of the “classical imagination” he referred to so often. J. Alexander Sider wonders whether Reimer is aware of the history of the concept of “the classical imagination” as a modern nineteenth-century notion devised to combat Enlightenment constructivism. “We have Hegel and Winckelmann, Harnack and Ritschl—more so than Plato, Plotinus or Augustine—to thank for the ‘classical imagination.’” I do not sense that Reimer believed that the “classical imagination” was a mere type that in itself could do the work of combatting reductive historicism. By “classical imagination” Reimer seemed to refer to pre-modern disciplines of articulating theology. For these Christians, the presence of the scriptures in the life of the church was not a way of closing an argument, but rather of beginning it. As the church went forward through history, it met questions and opportunities that demanded a response. Taking up its scriptural knowledge, it imaginatively ventured to reply within the thought forms of its moment.

57 Ibid.
58 Sider, “Mennonites and Classical Theology.”
59 He liked to say that theological work was more like Scrabble than jig-saw puzzles because it had rules and boundaries but still depended on the creativity and skill of the players. The Dogmatic Imagination: The Dynamics of Christian Belief (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2003), 3–4; “God Is Love but Not a Pacifist,” 488–89.
Theological language is univocal (literal) only in a very limited sense. Of far more critical importance are allegorical (mystical), tropological (moral), anagogical (futuristic), symbolic, metaphorical, analogical, parabolic, and dialectical forms of speech.... To enter the classical imagination is to enter this dynamic, creative process of thinking “dogmatically” in ever new and changing circumstances with the basic framework of a Christian doctrine of the triune God.\(^{60}\)

This was a missionary imagination whereby the church met the existential demands of a Judaistic sect moving out into engagement with the Greek world. What Reimer seemed to be pointing to here is an improvisation whereby the church took up the historical events of Jesus of Nazareth, the scriptural meditation on those events, and further, the credal formulations of the proceeding centuries, and the church maintained the original revelatory nature of the events through the imaginative missionary extrapolation into new territory, both geographic and conceptual.\(^{61}\) Reimer used somewhat woolly language to describe this improvisation\(^{62}\) but he was ultimately describing a disciplined process by which the church through time and in various places appropriated methodologies from culture to arrive at its distinctive understanding of God through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. And the Christian understanding of the Trinity is one such missionary accomplishment.

“Trinitarian Orthodoxy, Constantinianism and Radical Protestant Theology” is an essay that is worth examining as a central piece on Reimer’s doctrine of the Trinity and its relation to ethics. Reimer argued that contrary to what J. Denny Weaver asserted and Yoder

\(^{60}\) “Conclusion: The Dynamic of the Classical Imagination,” in MACT (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), 554.

\(^{61}\) See a full description of the classical imagination in “Lost Horizon: Whatever Happened to Classical Theology,” 332.

\(^{62}\) “Theological imagination as understood here is...a kind of spiritual day-dreaming where the usual categories of fixed space and sequential time are transcended, thereby opening up new worlds of possibility.” “Conclusion: The Dynamic of the Classical Imagination,” 553.
suggested, Nicene trinitarianism could not be subsumed under the designate “Constantinianism” nor was it a Greek corrosion of an original Messianic, Hebrew faith. The Nicene tradition is the best defense against all Constantinianisms, both of the left and the right.\textsuperscript{63} He proposes a “trinitarian orthodoxy without Constantinianism.” This is a trinitarianism which is continuous with the teaching of the New Testament which presents God in “triadic form” and answers a question which the New Testament left the church: how could Christians remain faithful to the one God of Israel, acknowledge that this one God had appeared in the Incarnate Son, and account for the presence and reality of the Spirit as God who gives birth and unity to the church.\textsuperscript{64}

Questions of how the church was to be saved and holy in Christ are answered in the doctrine of God which developed in the classical era, and these are concerns which should be of particular interest to Anabaptists and their concern for a regenerate life. This Christian understanding of God had a unique ethical persuasion in antiquity. In this essay Reimer offered three ways in which the doctrine of the Trinity is necessary for Christian ethics. First, it stands against a “Eusebian-type of political theology in which Constantine takes on divine status, becomes a Logos-figure, an Arian-like demigod”.\textsuperscript{65} The elevation of Christ above the status of “demigod” to ontological unity with God “provides us with the best conceptual critique of all political theology that legitimates a civil religion—that is, one in which religion or theology functions primarily as a conservative force in society.”\textsuperscript{66} This was a

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textsuperscript{63} “Trinitarian Orthodoxy, Constantinianism, and Radical Protestant Theology,” 248. \\
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 262. \\
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 269. \\
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 270. 
\end{tabular}
trinitarianism in which the one God,

believed to be genuinely transcendent (Yahweh, of whom no graven images can be made, alongside whom there are no other gods), historically uniquely present in Jesus Christ (who is not one more demi-god who can be incarnated in numerous forms, political figures, historical movements, but is truly God with us), and immanently present within the cosmos, nature, history, and particularly the church as the Holy Spirit (not as the human spirit, but as the Spirit that proceeds from God the “Father” and God the “Son”), is the surest way of guarding against all forms of political and national idolatry (Constantinianism).  

Secondly, the mystery of the Trinity has throughout history inspired mystical thought and spiritual formation among those seeking justice in the world. If “the contemporary ethical agenda is not to be reduced to human action pure and simple, and if the struggle is to have staying power, it will need to be rooted in spirituality.” It will need to attend to the way the Trinity “is concerned precisely with what God is doing in the world in and through Christ and the Holy Spirit.” Especially for Mennonites with their emphasis on discipleship and ethics, the moral claims of Jesus need to be grounded in the regenerative, life-giving nature and person of God.

The Anabaptists repeatedly spoke of regeneration as not only becoming Christ-like but actually taking on or participating in the divine nature itself. In this they have something in common with the Eastern theological tradition. It was, they believed, through the Holy Spirit that we become Christ-like; and through being Christ-like that we partake of the divine nature itself.  

Thirdly, for Reimer, trinitarian thinking about God is necessary in the face of the environmental crisis. A loss of moral accountability to a transcendent reality beyond the world has contributed to the belief that nature is “dead stuff” which free humans can

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67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., 264. Reimer intended to yet write a book on the relation of liturgy, spirituality and ethics. His sickness and death prevented that from happening.
manipulate at will. Here again is the metaphysical depth dimension that Reimer is seeking for ethics. Reimer believes that when theology loses its confession of the Trinity, the world is no longer seen as creation and it becomes inviolable as only naked matter.

On these three points we need to return to the question of whether Reimer has succeeded in going beyond the formalism at work in his use of Tillich’s principles. Does the Trinity function here as a bulwark against reductionism and, most importantly, does it do any more than that? The first point above fits as a principle; the doctrine “is the surest way of guarding against all forms of political and national idolatry”. In the second, the Trinity ensures that a kind of spiritual mysticism or openness to mystery remains present in the church. But here Reimer begins to witness to the work of the Persons in their operations of salvation and opens the door beyond the doctrine as form. Here trinitarian doctrine begins to be seen as the promise of a divinely-trodden path to the kind of regeneration Anabaptists envisioned in their confession. In the third point we are back again to the Trinity as little more than an assertion needed to ensure a proper posture towards the created world. This illustrates a larger pattern in his trinitarian theology. He offers glimpses of content, of the divine Persons actually at work in scripture, church or history, but in most cases the Trinity can be explained as no more than a human doctrinal, formal assertion tasked to police a unity in difference between God and the world. A common manner of speaking is seen in the last sentence of “Trinitarian Orthodoxy”:

A trinitarian doctrine of God provides us with three necessary ways of perceiving divine reality in relation to this world and our moral responsibility: as transcendent creator to whom we are accountable and who is ultimately in charge of the cosmos despite what we do; as historically self-disclosed in the being and nature of Christ
(therein giving us a quite specific moral and ethical agenda); and as Spirit immediately present to us in the church but also in all of creation.69

Here trinitarian doctrine, rather than describing the operations of the Trinity, are “three necessary ways of perceiving divine reality in relation to this world and our moral responsibility.” It becomes a buttress the church establishes in keeping with its three-fold experience of God, and this structure forms the posture of its presence in the world and before transcendence. In itself this is not worrying, because the church has always held that doctrine truthfully confessed is a doorway to the good life. But what Reimer’s common manner of speaking tends to imply is that the Trinity as a doctrine is merely a construction the patristic church, in its encounter with the (Hellenist) world, designed to maintain the transcendence of God and the meaningfulness of human action.70

What such formulations tend to leave out is any attesting to the perichoresis of the Persons in their actions. One finds in Reimer’s discussion of the Trinity very little reflection on the scriptural testimony of the relationship within Christ’s life to his Father, or Christ’s relation to the Holy Spirit. This results in an ethic in which the specifically theological content has mostly to do with limiting hubris and encouraging modesty and reverence. It is less able to read other specific ethical content from divine revelation. Ironically, it also tends to a reductiveness of its own in which the apologetic for doctrine resides in its function

69 Ibid., 271.

70 In 2007 Reimer said, “Doctrines, creeds, and dogmas are earthly, human, churchly signs of faithfulness to spiritual encounter, personal ethics, and social justice. In order to remain true to the essential realities to which they point, they need to develop over time, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit…. These doctrines include within them both a ‘Yes’ and a ‘No.’ A Yes to divine reality and a No to literal portrayals of that reality. Without this Yes-No character they can become idolatrous, as when we worship human words rather than what they mediate and point to,” “Christian Theology Today,” 14. Here a Tillichian dialectical “principle” is clearly at work.
within a system.\textsuperscript{71} Here it seems to me that Tillich’s “principle” as an inner, organizing system was insufficient in itself to account for, or even to mediate the riches of Christian sanctity which contemplation of trinitarian relations in the life of Christ could have yielded. However we can also see from the references to deification in the above quotes that Reimer was interested in yet going beyond the understanding of Trinity as a “principle”. In my observation, he never followed this hunch.

2.4 Is God a Mennonite Pacifist?

Did Reimer remain limited throughout his life by the dilemma he wrote about in 1978 where he said that a God who stands above and outside history seems necessary to rebuke hubristic modernity, but that we ultimately cannot seem to really believe in such a God?\textsuperscript{72} This seems particularly the case with the first Person of the Trinity. An eye-opening essay is “God is Love but Not a Pacifist” written in 1999 in which he sought to ground pacifism in the doctrine of the Trinity as he conceived it. One way to describe Reimer’s concern in this essay is to say that he saw that pacifism had become a self-standing principle within Mennonite thought, an axiom that stood above the tangle of scriptures on the matter, that easily sorted through human action to impose an obvious standard of behaviour. This essay was a plea to recognize the limitations of our ethical discernments and to recognize the difficulty with which nonviolence fits both the world and the biblical revelation of God. This “mis-fit”, Reimer believed, could only be reconciled within a trinitarian doctrine of God. He tried to disturb pacifism—conceived by Mennonites too reductively as a closed system—by

\textsuperscript{71} Sider, “Mennonites and Classical Theology,” 139.

\textsuperscript{72} Reimer, “Theological Method, Modernity and the Role of Tradition,” 35.
stating more ruthlessly the tenacious, vexing and often violent “nature” that human’s struggle with. He also tried to disturb Mennonite pacifism by exposing it to a broader biblical interrogation, pestering what he feared is “our hermeneutical avoidance of some biblical texts.”73 The Hebrew scriptures “are full of stories where God ordains holy slaughter against the wicked…” while New Testament apocalyptic literature “falls into this same genre of thinking about God.”74 Marcionites, of course, rejected such texts because of this portrayal of God, and the development of the canon as well as the development of the doctrine of the Trinity “was an unqualified confession by the Christian church that the God of the Jews and the God of the Christians was one and the same God.”75 Mennonites, Reimer says, in their argument for a neat and tidy pacifism, have been tempted by Marcionism. And yet (as is evident by their excesses in church discipline) they themselves have not been able to live non-violently.76

Thus we have need, Reimer argues, of a trinitarian understanding of ethics which will help us encompass the diversity present in the scriptures and in nature on the question of violence. Reimer rejects the conclusion of some Mennonite theologians that since Jesus is the revelation of God, and since Jesus totally rejected violence, then it follows simply that God must be nonviolent.77 Rather, Reimer argues for much more distinguished operations in the economic Trinity. God the Creator (Reimer tends to avoid “Father”) is the “invisible, absolutely transcendent, unknowable, mysterious source of all that is…. This is the unknown

74 Ibid., 490.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 491.
77 Ibid.
God who destroyed all life in the flood…spoke to Moses in the burning bush, drowned the Egyptians in the Red Sea…and the God to whom Jesus cried on the cross.”

“This God is no Mennonite pacifist. This God is beyond all human ethical systems, beyond our rules of good and bad. This is the God one meets not in the living room but on the boundary, at the abyss, at the point where one is faced with the threat of non-being.”

Distinguishing the operations of the Persons within the doctrine of the Trinity is a key moment in Reimer’s theological ethics. What is perplexing about Reimer’s description of the Creator is his repeated emphasis on the unknowability of this Creator God, while still claiming that this is the God revealed in scripture and that Jesus somehow reveals this God. Reimer does not explain how this God could be so closely associated with the work of Jesus in the gospels, nor how even in the Old Testament this God is not some arbitrary voluntaristic deity. In the editorial commentary to the essay written two years after it was originally published, Reimer confesses that in retrospect he felt his portrayal of the Creator God “as absolute freedom…seems now to be too voluntaristic a notion.” However Reimer continued to express this view of the Trinity until his death. It is not clear that he ever

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78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 492. This concept of meeting God at the boundary is Tillichian, and a sign of a recurring existentialism in Reimer’s thought. “Christian Theology Today,” 10.
82 In his posthumously published Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology, 5–6, he wrote, “God in this first way of being…is the inexhaustible mystery of all that is and transcends our understanding of good and evil, and thus also our ethical systems, including our views on peace and violence. God in this first sense is wholly free, preceding all legal and ethical systems, and has the
expressed another view than that the first Person of the Trinity served as a transcendence marker limiting our notions of right and wrong, even as these notions are informed by Jesus. We might conclude in Tillichian terms that the second and third Persons of the Trinity constitute “space” while the first Person constitutes “time.”

Yet, “the Son in Jesus Christ” is a revelation of the mystery “that despite the reality of violence and evil in this world there is a movement of divine redemption and reconciliation in the cosmos.” The “nonviolent way of the cross, mediated to us in Jesus the Christ, reveals the hidden purposes of God.”83 Without taking back his earlier statement that the hidden purposes of God are beyond all ethical systems, and are in fact unknowable, Reimer wants to say that in Christ, the hiddenness of God is revealed as suffering love, and that this aspect of God revealed is what Christians are to follow through the “dynamic power of the Spirit.”84 We have thus an apparent difficulty in Reimer’s trinitarian doctrine. He wants the Trinity to do the work of maintaining unity in difference (as a principle-like structure), thus accounting for divine killing in spite of Jesus, but he also wants the “historical” Jesus to be the revealed truth about this hidden God. In this sense it seems to me that Reimer’s intended function for the Trinity as a unity in difference principle fails. We could say that he replaces a pacifism principle with a trinitarian principle.

2.5 Does Yoder’s Critique of H. Richard Niebuhr Apply to Reimer?

In order to better understand the dilemma of the function of the Trinity in Reimer’s

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84 Ibid.
ethics, I would like to raise John H. Yoder’s criticism of H. Richard Niebuhr’s use of the Trinity. I want to suggest that Niebuhr in this case bears some resemblance to Reimer. \(^{85}\)

According to Yoder, in Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*, “the reference to the Trinity seems rather to be a slogan, symbolizing in a superficial way our author’s urbane, pluralistic concern for a balance between Christ and other moral authorities.” Niebuhr used the doctrine as a way of broadening the sources for ethics beyond the teaching and example of Christ.

“Christ-against-culture” sects such as the Anabaptists fail to be trinitarian, and this is why they attempt to live only in opposition to culture. In another essay, “The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church”, Niebuhr argues likewise that these sects are confined to a “Unitarianism of the Son”, whereas what is needed is Christianity as a religion loosely held together as three Unitarian religions. \(^{86}\)

Niebuhr understands Jesus in *Christ and Culture* to be someone who rejects all culture and worldly affairs and points away from earth to the Father, thus making Jesus impossible to follow in life and needing compensation from other sources. Radicals such as Tertullian, Tolstoy and the Mennonites follow Jesus only, and thus do not have a view of culture that is sufficient in a pluralist, context-sensitive way. What is needed, Niebuhr believes, is to “complement” Jesus with sources from creation and nature that are, for him,

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\(^{85}\) Based on John Howard Yoder, “How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture,” in *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, ed. Glen H. Stassen, D.M. Yeager, and John H. Yoder (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 31–89. In this essay Yoder acknowledges that he is not engaging what might be Niebuhr’s final and most considered understanding of the Trinity. For our purposes, we are not as interested in whether Yoder was accurate about Niebuhr as whether his concerns could also apply to Reimer. For a discussion of Yoder’s interpretation see the introduction in Jon Diefenthaler, ed., *The Paradox of Church and World: Selected Writings of H. Richard Niebuhr* (Fortress Press, 2015).

associated with either the Father or the Spirit. From these sources one is able to derive an ethic that is possible in a vexing world where force is sometimes needed. In this way, Niebuhr might confirm J. Denny Weaver’s assertion that the doctrine of the Trinity as developed by the later church is a diversion from the concrete demands of following Jesus. It literally brings in other sources from nature, culture or history to supplement and perhaps contradict what it deems to be the impossibly other-worldly focus of Jesus. For Niebuhr this is a good thing and for Weaver, of course, this is the church’s compromise.

Now, there are some key differences between Reimer and Niebuhr as interpreted by Yoder. Reimer would have no truck with Christianity as a religion of three Unitarianisms. Niebuhr does not think a Christian can follow Jesus’ nonviolence in daily human life, whereas Reimer does, although this morality will by necessity be fragmentary. Reimer holds to the Anabaptist conviction that the nonviolent life Jesus modelled is the Christian life. Another difference is that Niebuhr thought that the Spirit enabled the church to navigate the dialectic between ethics revealed in the Father and the Son. The Spirit could thus be a name for all the ways the church has had to temper or qualify the teachings of Jesus in order to get on with life as it nevertheless needed to be here on earth. For Reimer, however, the Spirit is the power given to the church to live out “the possibility of living the new life under the fallen and estranged conditions of time and history.”

But the similarities between Niebuhr and Reimer are nevertheless instructive. Both are using the differentiation of the Persons of the Trinity to order and structure conflicting

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88 “Christians, Policing and the Civil Order,” in *MACT* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), 497.
and vexing ethical questions. They use the Trinity as a structure to reconcile the tensions, and even contradictions, between the teaching of Jesus and other sources, such as history, nature or the Old Testament. For both, the Trinity is a way of reconciling the variant messages on violence across the canon. Both use the “Father” in order to complicate the (apparently straightforward) pacifist ethic of Jesus. Neither would say that these “extra-Jesus” sources are autonomous over against God, but they are independent of Jesus. They qualify the ethical instruction of Jesus. Both use the doctrine of the first Person of the Trinity to shape the violence of humans. Reimer suggests that some of humans’ duty to reluctantly engage in coercion, beyond the nonviolent ethic of the Sermon on the Mount, comes as a human representation of the divine transcendent freedom of the Creator God. However, Reimer does call this an “enigma” and does not make any system of just or holy war out of it. The Creator God seems more like a ground or warrant for such coercion than a guide to it. Both Niebuhr and Reimer use the doctrine of the Trinity to ensure that the ethic of Jesus, as interpreted by the church, does not get away from itself and become too universal and absolute. Both are seeking a kind of humility for Christian ethicists that is fitting for ecumenical work and they find this by differentiating an “ethic” of the Father from the Son. For Reimer, the “Father” is used to go beyond, or at least complicate a straightforward reading of the nonviolence of the Sermon on the Mount. Both seem to assume the

89 In Thomistic terms, both are using trinitarian doctrine to resolve conflicts between eternal, natural, divine and new law.


91 Reimer, Toward an Anabaptist Political Theology, 6.

92 “Toward a Christian Theology from a Diversity of Mennonite Perspectives,” 243.
revelation of Jesus in his teachings, if not balanced by the abyss of the Creator God, lacks the sophisticated theology of culture, and becomes naive moralism.

Yoder points to both scripture and the Christian tradition to show that this use of the doctrine is an error. “Is it the teaching of the New Testament that Jesus and the Father are distinguishable from one another as regards moral obligations?”93 Citing Colossians 1:16, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Hebrews 1:10 and John 1:3, the work of the Son and the work of the Father are “uniformly affirmed to be identical.” The Son for example is confessed as the agent of creation. The Father as God is identified “precisely as the one whose will the Son did, as the Father of Jesus.” Likewise, the Holy Spirit is never identified as another source or even conflicting source of insight but is always only a confirmation of the meaning of Jesus.94 Scripturally, there can be no suggestion that Jesus did not intend his life to represent the operations of God in creation and history.

Yoder argues that in later developments of the Christian tradition, the concern of the church was always to show that “in the Incarnation and in the continuing life of the church under the Spirit there is but one God.” Niebuhr’s use of the doctrine of the Trinity flirts with modalism, or Sabellianism which was a “heresy which centered its attention on the differences between the Father, Son, and Spirit, with the idea that each was revealed at a different time and in a different place saying different things” and thus offering different

94 Ibid., 62.
moral insights. Rather, within orthodoxy the intent of the doctrine was to “reaffirm the centrality and the normative uniqueness of the revelation in Jesus Christ.”

As for Niebuhr’s use of the transcendence of the Father to strike modesty into the ethical claims of the church, Yoder’s response is clear:

In the New Testament…and in most classical Christian theology, the concrete import of the appeal to the sovereign majesty of God is more or less the opposite [of this urbane relativism posing as ecumenical maturity]. God’s transcendence is namely the ground of the assurance that our knowledge of God’s call, and to some extent of his nature, is reliable and binding because, even though partial, it comes from God when it encounters us in Christ.… [For Niebuhr] the transcendence of God is a code term to reinforce our uncertainty about the normativity of the incarnation.

Does Yoder’s critique of Niebuhr apply also to Reimer? As we have noted, there are significant differences between Reimer and Niebuhr’s use of trinitarian doctrine, but in so far as the use of the doctrine allows Reimer to posit a disjunction between the operations of the first and second Persons, and to utilize such a disjunction for the purpose of alleviating ethical tensions within revelation, Yoder’s criticism applies here too. Reimer, though expressing clearly the desire to found ethics on the doctrine of the Trinity, tends to upload ethical conundrums and tensions (like that between the New and the Old Testament) into the Trinity, making it unclear how the Persons remain united in will. It is unclear how this undergirds a coherent sanctified life, though analogous and not univocally related to God. The first Person of the Trinity remains for Reimer an enigmatic, dark and fierce freedom that

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95 Ibid. J Alexander Sider accuses Reimer of Sabellianism in his use of “Creator”, “Christ” and “Spirit” as names for the Persons, thus implying a heretical distinction in the operations of the Trinity. “Mennonites and Classical Theology,” 139.


places a limit on our ethical knowledge. We have difficulty imagining this Being as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This transcendence, Reimer hopes, will serve to eliminate reductionism in ethics that looks only to this-worldly calculations and to the idolizing of human choice. But does a God described in voluntarist, almost nihilist fashion serve to undergird anything other than that same arbitrariness of choice now in the modern world assigned to humans, endowed with infinite freedom to impose their will on the world? Reimer, it seems, applies the “principle” of the Trinity to solve the problem of the “principle” of pacifism within Mennonite thought.

Here one could wish that Reimer would engage with scriptural narratives such as the account of Jesus evading the grasping villagers to slip away from Capernaum into the night to be with his Father (Mark 1:35-39). Jesus reveals the transcendent sovereignty of God. Jesus himself reveals the fierce freedom of God from human idolatry. To address the tensions and apparent contradictions within revelation about the relation of God to violence we must begin with the Scripturally narrated covenant between the Father and the Son in the Spirit; this is what we will argue in subsequent chapters.

To this we can also add the manner of speech which Reimer displays in his use of the divine names. His trinitarian description of God existing in three “dimensions”\(^98\) or three “modes of being”\(^99\) or the Trinity as “three necessary ways of perceiving divine reality”\(^100\) or


\(^99\) Reimer, “Trinitarian Orthodoxy, Constantinianism, and Radical Protestant Theology,” 263.

\(^100\) Ibid., 271.
as “the three-fold encounter early Jewish-Christians had with divine reality”\textsuperscript{101} does not seem to do justice to the relation between Christ and the Father demonstrated in the Gospels. Though all of these phrases can have an orthodox use, their repetition alerts the reader to a certain abstractness in how Reimer views the Trinity. Rather Reimer tends to speak as though the church’s discernment in the development of the doctrine was “an attempt to express in imaginative terms an answer to the question raised but left unanswered by the experience of the first Christians.”\textsuperscript{102} He calls both trinitarian and christological doctrine “metaphors of ultimacy” which suggests that the divine names were the church distinguishing “persons” in order to reconcile various aspects of their experience of God and reading of scripture in new missionary contexts. One could almost gather from Reimer that the early church had experiences in life and scripture of God’s fierce transcendence, of God’s historical redemption, and of God’s immanent power, and the Trinity became a way of preserving these elements of how God pressed into their life.

2.6 Conclusion

We return now to the question of whether the Trinity as doctrine, for Reimer, is ultimately only a human concept for guarding against failures in our ideas of unity in difference with God. I would argue that Reimer’s articulation of the doctrine does often sound constructivist. He uses the Niebuhr-like assignment of the Persons to solve the diversity of the ethical guidance from multiple sources in the two covenants, in nature and in history. He uses modalist-sounding language in which the names of God describe various

\textsuperscript{101} Reimer, “Confessions, Doctrines and Creeds: Symbols and Metaphors of Ultimacy,” 368.

forms of human experience of God in various places and times, and he does this in a tone which suggests that these are constructs devised to prevent historicism.

And yet, though I believe this is what he communicates, it may not be what he meant. It is difficult to believe, given many of his comments, that Reimer would rest in the realization that his doctrine of the Trinity came across as modalist or constructed. Reimer had no interest finally in constructing a theology that would suit his purposes. That is what he accused Kaufman of doing. He believed that Christian theology should be the acceptance of “the historical events of Jesus of Nazareth, the historical response to those events, and the theological interpretation of those events by the biblical writers and the early church, including the early Church Fathers.” But these historical events and actors tend to elide into “principles” in Reimer’s thinking. What can be seen, I argue, is that a Tillichian concept of principle weighed heavily in his thinking and never quite allowed him to work out an understanding of the Trinity as a Scriptural way of describing the work of God in saving (and sanctifying) the human community, a work that confession enabled one to participate in.

Reimer’s thought in developing a creedal grounding for ethics is perhaps best described as unfinished. Realizing the modern difficulty of believing in a traditionally conceived, personal deity beyond the world, and noting the reductionist tendency of Mennonite theology and its inability to resist the reductionist tendencies in historicism, he looked first to Paul Tillich. Tillich’s method of correlation, of translating ancient convictions into modern-day existential principles that dialectically balanced “time” and “space”, set patterns that Reimer latched onto. He sought a kind of “Anabaptist Principle” in the classic tradition of the church that would restore a “lost horizon”. Herewith he argued persuasively for the development of Mennonite systematic theology that would doctrinally secure the
transcendence of the Creator. He argued for openness to ecumenical engagement. He effectively critiqued too-simple dismissals which rejected the patristic church as “Constantinian.” He argued that, like the early Anabaptists, we too could disperse our ethical teaching within, rather than against the creeds. He sought to ground pacifism and ethics generally in the Trinity.

And yet in order to establish a creedal basis for ethics, one must move from formal structures to material content. It is not enough to secure a structure portable enough to be erected wherever one needs to establish a “preserving but ultimately going beyond” principle. One must return ultimately to the contours of the relations between the Persons described in the scriptures and ask how the church joins in with these operations unto salvation. It was Tillich’s “principle” approach that in the end ran aground in Reimer’s theology. He seemed never to completely finish talking about “the nature and function of theological language” in order to move into proclamatory, confessional, scripturally formed speech about the triune action of God in scripture and history.

What has Reimer contributed to our quest to discover a unity in difference for gospel pacifism within the world? First, Reimer with his rich experience in the Mennonite theological community has helped us diagnose the kinds of difficulties Mennonite ethics encountered with unity in difference in the secular world. In his reading, there was a genetic similarity between Anabaptist emphasis on personal freedom and choice, and unfettered secular individualism that sought to form the world according to its own devices. Mennonite theology had capitulated to this hazard and had therewith lost its sense of reverence before God and had been trapped in a stifling historicism. Second, Reimer is helpful for our project by raising in sharp terms the intractable difficulty with which a nonviolent ethic comes to be
practiced in this world. In a secular age, Mennonites have been tempted to think that their nonviolent ethic, erstwhile only practiced by the committed in the church, could now be translated into humane and civilized societal practices without great difficulty. That sounds too easy. Reimer reminds us in frank terms that this neglects the deep alienation and darkness that humans face due to the fall. Third, he helps us by pointing out the importance of doctrine in recovering the unity between ethics, worship and a reverence for mystery, indeed for God. He also helps us by insisting, repeatedly, that for Mennonites to recover an appropriate unity in difference, they need to retrieve the “creedal era” and its metaphysics. In the ancient confessions of the church there is an understanding of the world and of God that rises beyond the serial, chronology of human happenings. Here earthly life is set within a larger mystery. And, finally, as far as it goes, Reimer’s wielding of the Tillichian “principle” to understand the function of trinitarian doctrine in our lives is also useful. As we will see in the following chapter, in the church’s confession of the Logos’s descent into the world, a cosmic synthesis is revealed by which we can understand the unity in difference of God and the world. This certainly does prevent any human project, whether political, ecclesial or social, from ever finally grasping the mystery in which it is suspended.

But, as we have seen, “principle” does not sufficiently account for what the confessional tradition of the church has in mind when it sees deep connections between doctrine and ethics. It is too susceptible to the perennial habit of a secular mindset to orphan dogmatically grounded convictions (such as gospel pacifism) outside of a theological context. “Principle” is too handily portable, too quick to assume that what is really intended in, say, the doctrine of the Trinity, is an intraworldly dialectic of mystery and immanence. This fails to adequately contemplate the ongoing, unpredictable action of God in worldly
What is needed, we will argue, is just what Reimer may yet have landed on in the future book on spirituality, liturgy and ethics that he proposed. We need to understand the way in which the church’s confession (Nicene and Chalcedonian) witnesses to an abiding relation of love and sanctity between the Persons of the Trinity, and the way confession is part of the church’s larger work of prayer, contemplation and worship before God. It is through a confession within contemplation that doctrines move from being “principles” to being divinely given, scripturally-founded pathways to sanctified communities. As the church prays in harmony with the confession’s witness of Trinitarian salvation, it becomes a holy, courageous and peaceful agent of God in the world. It is my intent in the following chapters to show that there are profoundly nonresistant, and nonviolent aspects to that process of deification that form a dogmatic momentum for a gospel pacifism.

To move from “principle” to “pathway” in a way that undergirds a gospel pacifism we need the help of Hans urs Von Balthasar.
Chapter 3. A Bi-Directional Nonresistance from Maximus to Balthasar

3.1 Back to Nonresistance

We turn now to the constructive, prescriptive work of excavating Hans Urs Von Balthasar’s Christology for help in achieving Reimer’s vision. In the next three chapters I want to describe a descending arc that Balthasar articulated in his theology that can be captured by three words, incarnation, provocation and convocation. It is this trajectory that I hold to be the divine action faith contemplates and links up with as a dogmatic momentum in ethics. Christ enters the world, and then provokes two responses, either violence or ecclesial love. In this chapter, we will begin in incarnation. In this arc I want to complete, as it were, something of Reimer’s vision of a creedal pacifism by describing a gospel pacifism immersed in the unity in difference opened for the church by the incarnation.

Here I want to make the claim that the traditional Mennonite practice and spirituality of nonresistance (Wehrlosigkeit) should assume its theological form and chart its spiritual path as participation in Christ’s bi-directional nonresistance, both to his Father and to the human condition. This bi-directional nonresistance is a Chalcedonian theological ethic.¹ The definition of Chalcedon witnesses to a path of union with God in which the Christian comes to participate in Christ’s defenselessness before the Father and the world. Union in Christ’s bi-directional defenselessness or nonresistance exposes the confessing church to the ethical

¹ Chalcedon was the council in 451 that addressed “how the confession of the ‘one Christ’ may be reconciled with belief in the ‘true God and true man,’ ‘perfect in Godhead, perfect in manhood’.” Alois Grillmeier, Christ in Christian Tradition, vol.1 (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 482.
momentum of Jesus captured in his concrete actions in the gospels. It does this without permitting the church’s ethics to fade into a reductive, this-worldly moralism; rather the very actions and life-choices of Christ are seen here to induct the church into inner-trinitarian love.

In order to secure this claim I want to look at the achievements of Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662 AD) as they are interpreted and taken up in Balthasar’s work. Here is a Chalcedonian way of understanding the relation of God to the world that is open to the infinite transcendence of God and to the concrete reality of the world. I want to show here that nonresistance can be the theologically thick, ethically evocative posture of a disciple, in the world but not of it, fixed on that north star which is Jesus, Son of God and human for us. As such, this ethic is grounded in a confession of faith within which one contemplates the texture of Christ’s life in the gospels.

Balthasar’s Christology was always deeply Chalcedonian. As Mark McIntosh says,

On the one side, he is unvarying in describing the personal identity of Christ as the eternal Son of God; for Balthasar, that is who Jesus of Nazareth is. On the other side, he takes Chalcedon’s assertion that Christ is recognized “in two natures” as far more than a simple negation of the Eutychian extreme opposed at the council. This means that the existence of the Person of the Word, is a definitively complete human existence whose every human characteristic, including a human mind and will, is actually preserved and perfected, not circumvented or supplanted, by coming into existence in the eternal Person of the Son.²

A Chalcedonian basis for nonresistance, as I will describe it, may challenge Mennonite gospel pacifism in three ways. First, as Reimer lamented, Mennonite theologians have not found the creedal era to be morally interesting, and the Chalcedonian definition has offered even less hope for biblical ethics than the Nicene creed. Perhaps they have followed Adolf Harnack’s assessment that at Chalcedon the church “was robbed of its faith” and was calcified into Hellenic philosophical categories. What we need to show is that in Balthasar’s hands, Chalcedon exposes the confessing church to the choreography of the divine economy and moves it into gospel-driven action.

But second, the term “nonresistance” has been all but discarded in Mennonite discourse on pacifism. The disdain for “nonresistance” associates the word with a merely passive, “door mat” approach to evil that is too reminiscent of Mennonites recused in villages blissfully allowing others to create such justice as the world is satisfied with. It lacks any

3 It is difficult to find serious Mennonite engagement with Chalcedonian Christology in any length. But see Thomas N. Finger, “Post-Chalcedonian Christology: Some Reflections on Oriental Orthodox Christology from a Mennonite Perspective,” in Christ in East and West (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), 155–69, as well as Thomas N. Finger, “The Way to Nicea: Some Reflections from a Mennonite Perspective,” Journal of Ecumenical Studies, March 1, 1987. John H. Yoder concludes about Chalcedon’s aftermath: “Hosts of technical terms were developed in order to safeguard the things which the council had compromised, but the life of the popular church went on being Monophysitic, that is, affirming such a swallowing up of humanity in deity that it did not really matter what kind of man Jesus was.” Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002), 218. Yet, Yoder claimed that his reading of Jesus was a more “Chalcedonian” reading than ones that circumvented the ethical teachings of Jesus because he took seriously the claim that in his expectations of an alternative human community, Jesus spoke with full divine authority. Yoder, The Politics of Jesus, 102. See also Weaver, The Nonviolent Atonement, 121–22. Also J. Denny Weaver, “Christology in Historical Perspective,” in Jesus Christ and the Mission of the Church: Contemporary Anabaptist Perspectives, ed. Erland Waltner (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1990), 83–105.

4 Dogmengeschichte 2, Tübingen 1931, 395-396, as quoted in Grillmeier, Christ in Christian Tradition, 483n.

5 In short, that Mennonites are who Reinhold Niebuhr said they were; useful symbols of an unachievable and impracticable ethic.
regard for the missional nature of the faith. We trust that it will become obvious that our incarnational use of the term envisions an active service to God in the world. But we must also show that simple “activity” or involvement is not the answer. There is an activity and a passivity included in Chalcedonian nonresistance, a making happen and a letting be. These must be proportioned by participation in Christ’s mission.

Related to this accusation of passivity, other critics have criticized “nonresistance” for its association with patriarchalism. As we discussed in the first chapter, the term nonresistance is associated with an older spirituality that failed to provide resources for women and other abused people to resist their oppressors. Carol Penner, in her dissertation on feminism and Mennonite peace theology argues that suffering, obedience and forgiveness have been used within peace theology to silence abused women. For example, regarding Guy Hershberger’s classic work, War, Peace and Nonresistance, she concludes, “Thus Hershberger’s message for people who suffer injustice within the divine order is clear. Christians should follow the way of the cross and never demand justice for themselves. The way of the cross means total nonresistance to evil.”

Penner’s project involves examining traditional “nonresistant” rhetoric against involvement in “redemptive” violence, such as war or capital punishment, and asking how this might sound to those experiencing “un-redeemptive” violence, such as woman abuse.

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6 Carol Penner, “Mennonite Silences and Feminist Voices, Peace Theology and Violence against Women” (PhD diss., University of St. Michaels, 1999), 34. See also Lydia Marlene Harder, Obedience, Suspicion and the Gospel of Mark: A Mennonite-Feminist Exploration of Biblical Authority (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1998), 38–39, 52. Critiquing Yoder’s writings on “revolutionary subordination” she says, “The notion of cross and self-sacrifice has indirectly supported male control, as women followed teachings of the church. This kind of obedience arises out of a lack of strength and power and a loss of any sort of personal autonomy.” Ibid., 54.
Heeding this warning, we will need to ask whether a Chalcedonian bi-directional nonresistance offers a challenge to these abuses. Is a pacifism whose actions are calibrated by Christ’s nonresistant response to evil necessarily bad news for oppressed people? But a lingering hunch behind this thesis is that the disdain for “nonresistance”, though understandable at one level, has contributed to the loss of the Mennonite spirituality surrounding this peace ethic. When “nonresistance” becomes “pacifism” or “peacemaking” it tends to leave behind a posture before God which opens the person to the mystery of God’s involvement in daily life. This is one of the reasons why I am going back to this abandoned word and asking Balthasar to re-describe it for us.

Third, “nonresistance” in the Mennonite tradition has almost exclusively been used to refer to the Christian’s response to evil or harm: “resist not evil (Matt. 5:39 KJV). I am not intending to turn from that usage but to broaden it to show that this response to evil is encompassed within a broader trinitarian and incarnational “nonresistance” into which the believer is initiated through salvation. In Balthasar’s terms it refers to an encompassing “letting be” that forms the soul of sanctity. With this larger drama in view it will become evident that gospel pacifism is not only a form of politics but a form of spirituality, prayer and adoration.

3.2 Balthasar and Maximus the Confessor

Our resources for this project are complex. As Mark L. Yenson and Mark A. McIntosh have argued, to talk about Balthasar's Chalcedonian Christology is to describe the
inheritance he received from Maximus the Confessor. Our task therefore is to understand Maximus through the eyes of Balthasar in that which pertains to our thesis. Balthasar’s book on Maximus the Confessor, *Cosmic Liturgy*, originally published in 1941, spearheaded the twentieth-century revival of interest in this saint. At the time, according to Balthasar, “it had the stage to itself.” To enter the thickets of Balthasarian discourse and seventh-century Christology at the same time requires some courage. However, I believe the payoff is considerable: the discovery of a spiritual nonresistance for a secular setting. In Balthasar’s hands the incarnation is seen again as a transforming, dramatizing act of God in which the saints mingle, and become “defenseless,” with exactly that paradoxical power by which God overcomes the world’s enmity. Balthasar took the achievement of Maximus and accented its personal, spiritual and missional fruit.

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8 *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian E. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 23. Though a pioneer, Balthasar’s treatment of Maximus has not been without its critics. Dom Polycarp Sherwood for example, believes Balthasar is too concerned about Maximus’s confrontation with Hegel and Idealism to adequately comprehend Maximus. He writes, “[Balthasar] sees the task of the theologian [to be] audaciously creative…. More than any lack of detailed investigations, more than any want of confidence in his interpretations of Maximus on the basis of texts, is such a procedure disconcerting to many competent students of Byzantine theology, as transgressing the bounds which are habitually set to their studies.” Polycarp Sherwood, “Survey of Recent Work on St. Maximus the Confessor,” *Traditio* 20 (1964): 434. Because we are focusing on Maximian strains within Balthasar, we will recognize but not investigate his unique method of presenting Maximus in his own right, and will not concern ourselves with whether he adequately presented the church father. See the essay by Brian Daley, “Balthasar’s Reading of the Church Fathers,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 187–206, for a discussion of this matter.
Obviously, we cannot even begin to do justice to Balthasar's work as a whole on this saint, but we do aim to glean insights from it to shape a christological form of nonresistance. What we are interested in here is the way in which Maximus provided Balthasar with a neo-Chalcedonian Christology that moved beyond the patristic use of Greek philosophical concerns with fixed essences and natures to a vision for the historical, missional and dramatic occurrence of the Incarnation. It is this entrapment in Greek static philosophical categories which some Mennonite theologians believe neglects the humanity of Christ and obscures the call to discipleship in the life of Jesus.\(^9\) We want to demonstrate that this need not be the case and that a dramatic Chalcedonian spirituality is possible.

This missional element in Christology comes into view by ascending from the lower peak of Chalcedon to the summit of patristic Christology in Maximus two centuries later. It is now increasingly recognized that the council of Chalcedon was not the final climax of patristic christological development.\(^10\) As interpreted by Maximus two centuries after the

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\(^9\) C. Norman Kraus, *God Our Savior: Theology in a Christological Mode* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 27–28. Kraus holds that the tendency of Chalcedon “in spite of its precision” has made it “virtually impossible to formulate a logically consistent theological definition of the unity of Jesus’ self-consciousness and activity.” Thus the missional aspect of Christ’s life is lost. C. Norman Kraus, *Jesus Christ Our Lord: Christology from a Disciple’s Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 48. Kraus maintains that because of its inability to describe the unity of Christ a “docetic tendency had been almost universally present in orthodoxy theologies, and one cannot but suspect that it is in some major part inherent in the metaphysical conceptualization itself, based upon an analogy of a physical being.” Ibid. These are the kinds of statements that in my view fail to reckon with neo-Chalcedonianism.

council, Balthasar perceived that Chalcedon opened new vistas in the engagement of theology with the manner of life unveiled in Jesus. Neo-Chalcedonians, of whom Maximus emerged as the great champion, re-directed the christological problem from one in which inquiring minds asked how two natures, infinitely different, could be united, to one asking who this Person was, Christ the son of God, who so effortlessly assumed the human condition and elicited from this nature such beautiful human and divine love. How did Christ do this without doing violence to human nature? How did Christ do this without leaving human nature un-salved by grace? Neo-Chalcedonianism moved from the simple assertion of two natures to a deeper understanding of how in the event of the incarnation those two natures came to be united *hypostatically*. Neo-Chalcedonian Christology regained the drama of the descent of the one Logos. It was this turn to the order of *hypostasis* that enabled the church to regain its dogmatic footing in the details of the gospel events.¹¹ This understanding of a missional, dramatic incarnation provides the inner momentum for the gospel nonresistance I am envisioning.¹²

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¹¹ For a good description of the evolution of Chalcedonianism to neo-Chalcedonianism see Yeago, “Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption,” 166–68. These two are not opposed. Neo-Chalcedonianism is the completion of some aspects opened at Chalcedon but not fully resolved. As by *Nicene* we normally mean the Niceno-Constantinopolitan completion of Nicaea, so by Chalcedonian we should understand that Christology which was finally endorsed in the third Council of Constantinople in 680/681.

¹² Mark McIntosh argues that the Balthasarian development of Maximus in more missional intensity is properly seen as an Ignatian fulfillment of the neo-Chalcedonian Christology. McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, 7, 42–44.
3.3 The Un-Guessable Improvisation on a Nature

Maximus received the Greek philosophic tradition of thinking about *essence* and its relation to *existence* and re-ordered it to the soteriological concerns of the church. Here is how John Meyendorff explains Maximus’s emphasis:

Following Leontius of Byzantium, Maximus formally opposes the concept of essence as it exists “with the philosophers”, where it is “a reality in itself necessitating nothing else in order to exist”…to that of the Fathers who recognize in it “a natural entity”…proper to numerous and different hypostases. This conception of hypostasis as the concrete source of existence is not a simple return to Aristotelianism, nor even less a reduction of the notion to a simple relationship, as in Leontius; the context shows clearly that Maximus has a *personalistic* concept of the hypostasis: “the hypostasis” he writes, “is, according to the philosophers, an essence with characteristics; for the Fathers, it is each man in particular as distinct from other men.”

For Maximus, the hypostasis emerges as “the center of every concrete reality that determines and qualifies the ‘mode of existence’…or ‘movement’ of the nature.” A shift is occurring from an interest in nature as such, to an interest in the specific way nature is exercised by *this* hypostasis. In other words, a shift to an interest in the way this nature takes up occurrence here, in this concrete substantiation of the nature. As Balthasar explains, within Maximian Christology, the term hypostasis can mean an essence’s “being-for-itself”, that which distinguishes a concrete being from others of the same genus. As such, hypostasis answered the question “Who?” “It is the indicator and affirmation of a subject, an ‘I’.” But going further, hypostasis came to add the idea of *possession*, or perhaps better self-possession.

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14 Ibid., 111.
15 Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 223. As Balthasar warns though, we should not attribute consciousness to hypostasis. A rock or a tree is also a hypostasis. Ibid.
“Here…the concentration is tied to a ‘having’, to a way of being the possessor of essential being.”¹⁶ Though this may seem formal, seeing hypostasis in the register of possessor of essential being, gives Maximus the tool he needs to return Christology to a concern for the events of the gospel, the actions of the Son of God creating flesh for himself and living human existence as God. In this we can see that Maximus is seeking to retain the essential Cyrilline character of Chalcedon, the emphasis on the fact that the subject of the Incarnation is always the one Logos, who never changes but who in his lordly descent takes to himself human nature and possesses it for his own purpose.¹⁷ We will see in the next section how Maximus preserved this single-subject Christology without compromising the humanity of Christ as had been the hazard of Alexandrian thinkers.

Greek philosophy had been most concerned about the general, the essential, the natural, rather than the particular, or that which distinguishes a hypostasis from others of the same nature. As long as theologians remained at the essential level, Christology remained an insoluble dilemma. Maximus insisted that the reconciliation between God and the world could not have occurred at an essential level. He thought this much should have already been seen as the fruit of Nicaea: if the Incarnation was an essential union between God and humanity, Jesus could not be consubstantial to the Father since a divine/human mixture at the level of essence could not be divine. Neither could it be fully human. An essential union between two natures must be violent. One nature would subsume the other. In the christological debates, it was this rock that stumbled both the Eutychians who posited a

¹⁶ Cosmic Liturgy, 223.
“natural union” or mixture, and the Nestorians who posited an “accidental, extrinsic, moral union of an intellectual relationship (σχέσις) between the natures”.\(^{18}\) It was not that the Eutychians united Christ too much and the Nestorians too little, but that they both developed their union at the level of nature or essence.\(^ {19}\) It was only under the stern eye of the Chalcedonian four adverbs (unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably), combined with Cyril’s victory on the Logos as the single subject of the Incarnation, that a new ground in historical, evangelical existence became possible by ruling out an essential union and discovering the possibility of union at the level of hypostasis.

The reconciliation of God and world happened thus, not in the realm of essences or natures, but in the realm of history, in the event of this Person’s appearance within earthly time, in his lordly possession of human nature, and in the un-predictable ways he gave concrete existence to his divine and human natures. It happened through what Balthasar would call theo-dramatic mission—the Son descending into the world and making his own those characteristics of humanity in such as way as to become this person, making these choices, in this time and place. In Maximus this emphasis on the hypostatic union becomes a diachronic understanding of Chalcedon, an account tuned to see the Incarnation as a particular, an event, a mission and a narrative in the life of God.\(^ {20}\)

Here the incarnation becomes un-guessable, un-predictable because it is hypostatic, that is, determined by the free “I” that takes this human nature to itself in a way not

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\(^ {18}\) Cosmic Liturgy, 210.

\(^ {19}\) Ibid.

contradicting the natures, but also not determined by the natures. Christology with this hypostatic centre can no longer be grasped simply by thinking philosophical thoughts about essences etc. It can only be understood contemplatively, by attending to the free, lordly way in which Christ, in fact, makes choices and lives his life in the gospels. The very texture of his actions, the hypostatic doing *this* and not *that*, in this and not that unique manner, is the expression of God in human flesh. As Brian Daly SJ says, Christology was now “primarily to be defined not by nouns and verbs, but by adverbs.”\(^{21}\) Its weight fell not in describing essences (nouns) or uniquely divine actions (verbs) but in the divine manner in which Christ lived his human life. Theological ethics finds its fount in this realization of Christology as hypostatic intentionality and choice.

Going back to the concerns of our previous chapter, a Christology that retains this unguessable hypostatic centre will not be content with a “principle” in the Tillichian sense. This “principle” seems too much like a stable, predictable structure within the world, like an essence. While never violating nature, as we will see in the next section, the Person cannot be deduced from the natures. Alternatively, we could say that its only “principle” will be the free missional choices of the Person assuming human nature. Christology must retain its contemplative gaze on the events of the incarnate life of Christ.

Balthasar is attracted to this neo-Chalcedonian re-direction of Greek philosophical achievements because this retrieval gives new depth for a modern Christology turned to the subject and the missional engagement of infinite freedom with finite freedom. This is also a

Christology that begins to open the door to understanding how Christ’s brothers and sisters come to participate in his hypostatic existence. In the Eutychian manner, Christ was a hybrid that did not share human nature with us and so was not imitable. It also represented a violation of the human nature, subsumed into the divine. The Nestorian view ended up with a Savior who left human nature untouched and unaided in its ascent to union with God. From a Maximian perspective, Christ’s hypostatic existence is both divine action within the world, and an archetype for our sanctification. It is a divine pattern of making choices that humans need to make as a part of daily life. To speak to the concerns of this thesis, Eutychian Christology resulted in a human nature “violated” or “dominated” by the divine, and the Nestorian concept resulted in a human nature “secularized”, untouched by the divine. We are seeking a Christology that non-violently preserves human nature, but does not leave it secularized. This is the fount of Christic nonviolence.

3.4 The Transposition of Eternal Sonship

The unveiling of hypostasis as the theological centre of the Incarnation prepares us for a more detailed look at the hypostatic unity that Maximus envisioned and at how Balthasar translated this form into his own words. What Maximus intends here as a formal description of the relation between the eternal Trinity and the hypostatic union lived by Christ on earth, becomes, in Balthasar, a highly dramatic description of Christ’s utter submission to the Father in his mission to the world. With this we begin to see that this missional hypostatic descent and union not only unveils Christology as an ethical momentum within the church, but as a specifically nonresistant momentum.
The hypostatic unity of the Incarnate, Maximus came to see, was a unity created by the Logos between two natures that united the very characteristics that separated the person from other hypostases who shared in the respective natures. This sentence requires some unpacking. In the trinitarian debates around Nicaea, Amphilochius and the Cappadocians had honed the phrase “mode of being” or existence (τροπός τῆς ὑπάρξεως) to describe the unique distinction of the three Persons vis-à-vis the one common nature of the Trinity.22 The three Persons share one common nature but each expresses or gives existence to that nature in a unique τροπός that distinguishes them from the other two Persons. This was their hypostatic existence as Persons. What distinguished the Persons (their mode of being) was each Person’s unique origin vis-à-vis the other two Persons.23 Difference was secured in the unique manner in which each Person was established relationally with the other Persons.24 What distinguished the eternal Son, his particular mode of being, was his being begotten from the Father. This eternal relationship of begottenness or dependence as the mode of being of the Son to the Father is picked up by Maximus and is massively important for Balthasar's

22 Cosmic Liturgy, 214. In his “38th Letter” Gregory of Nyssa formulated, in terms that would remain the standard, the relation between nature and person in trinitarian theology. See Christoph Schönborn, God’s Human Face: The Christ-Icon (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 103.

23 Maximus wrote in PG 91, 549D-552A, “[F]or we recognize the one and only essence and nature in the divinity, unfolding in three hypostases distinct from one another by their properties…in particular by being unbegotten (the Father), by being begotten (the Son), and by emanating (the Holy Spirit): these properties…denote the Persons in whom the one divinity resides, and who are themselves this one divinity.” Quoted in Schönborn, God’s Human Face, 105.

24 This simple sentence has massive implications for Balthasar’s theology of unity in difference. The distance between Persons is a distance of love.
Christology. The incarnation is not the appearance of mere “divinity” in human flesh, but the appearance of this kind of Sonship: complete dependence on the Father.25

It was Maximus’s insight to see that this trinitarian understanding of Person, could be put to work in the christological question as well.26 In the incarnation, of course, we are not referring to a unity of Persons within one common nature, but to the unity of two utterly different natures within one Person. However, Maximus was confident that the resolution of the christological problem would build on the work of Amphilochius and the Cappadocian’s following Nicaea. Unity, here now between two radically unequal and asymmetrical natures could also occur hypostatically. As Mark McIntosh aptly summarizes, “the divine and human [natures] in Christ are united in enacting together that particular pattern of self-surrender, obedience, and love which is the mode of existence of the eternal Son, i.e., the pattern which distinguishes the Son from the Father and the Spirit.”27

But we must go one step further. The Logos was not only differentiated from the Father and the Spirit, but Jesus was also differentiated from other humans as a fellow human. He shared in a common nature with them as well—but he gave expression to that nature in a way utterly unique. Just as the Logos gave unique expression to the divine nature, he also gave unique expression to human nature. He lived a unique instantiation of human nature (he was in every respect a person in the modern sense of that term) by transposing his divine

25 “Insofar as he is God, he is eternal, infinite freedom; insofar as he is the Son of the Father, he is this freedom in the mode (’tropos’) of readiness, receptivity, obedience and hence the appropriate response: that is, he is the Father’s Word, image and expression.” Balthasar, Theo-Drama, 1993, 2:267. See also Balthasar, Theo-Drama, 1994, 4:325–26.


27 McIntosh, Christology from Within, 40.
filiality into human terms. What set Jesus apart from other people was his human expression
of divine Sonship, the transposition of trinitarian Sonship into human terms of obedience,
willingness to suffer, and utter love to the end, out of submission to the Father.\textsuperscript{28}

The incarnation then is not merely the unity of two disparate natures, but of two
unique takes, or expressions of the natures united by the Logos. In the union, what
differentiated the Son from the Father was united with what differentiated Jesus from other
humans.\textsuperscript{29} The Logos is the unique expression of Sonship in the Trinity, and the incarnate
One is the unique expression of trinitarian Sonship in humanity. The Son, in his very
distinction from the Father embraced human nature and united himself with a manner of
being human that differentiated Jesus from other people. The distinctives of Christ’s life are
the revelation of the distinctive relationship Christ has with the Father. Here are Maximus’s
words:

In those qualities through which the flesh of Christ distinguishes itself from other
human beings [Jesus’ manner of life], it did not distinguish itself further from the
Logos; on the other hand, in those qualities through which it distinguished itself from
the Logos, [being human nature] it did not distinguish itself from the rest of us. In
those, however, through which it distinguished itself from us [Jesus’ manner of life] it
preserved the union, or, better, the identity, with the Logos in the hypostasis.\textsuperscript{30}

Balthasar comments on Maximus’s formulation, “the same is true in the nature of God: what
distinguishes the Logos from the Father is, in the state of the union, no longer distinguishable

\textsuperscript{28} Here I am relying on the exposition of Schönborn, \textit{God’s Human Face}, 102ff.

\textsuperscript{29} In his own \textit{A Theology of History} where he makes use of this conception of the hypostatic
unity between God and the world, Balthasar distinguishes between the \textit{absolute} uniqueness of God
and the \textit{relative} uniqueness of Jesus as a man among other humans. The human uniqueness of the
individual, which Jesus partook of, is analogous to the divine uniqueness of the Persons of the Trinity

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Cosmic Liturgy}, 247. From Maximus, \textit{Epistles}, PG 91, 557A.
from what distinguishes the incarnate Logos from other human beings.”

The Son’s eternal hypostatic relation in the Trinity is united with Jesus’ manner of life. It is given a human mode of existence, performed in every aspect of Jesus’ human life. With this Maximian description, Balthasar says, formal Christology reaches its apex. What Maximus has done here finally is show that the consubstantiality of the Son to the Father is in no way threatened but is rather revealed by the very depths of humanity that Jesus plumbs within his life and death. What he has also shown here is that the very existence at every step and choice of Jesus as the Logos incarnate reveals the Father’s will. His entire existence is tuned to give expression in a human key to the will of God. This we are calling Christ’s defenselessness, yieldedness or nonresistance to the Father.

“We see in [Christ] a being whose whole bearing—down to the least word and gesture—reveals a human nature, but one that has been translated into a wholly different manner of existing…. Everything that is truly human can be found in this new manner of existing, yet none of it is any longer “simply human”…or “only human”…but it appears as strangely “inhabited”…by another. This “indwelling” is perceived at once as the most interior and intimate relationship possible in which God is tenderly concerned to preserve all that is human and natural and to heal it…. Thus is this “new manner” of being, this “divine mode”, this “way of existing thus and no other way”…this new quality that has no effect on quantity, that promises to show us the way to the unity we are looking for.

Brian Daly SJ summarizes this newly emerging dogmatic engagement with the texture of Christ’s life thus:

[J]ust as who Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are is grounded in how they take their origin from each other and are related to each other, so it is the ‘how’ of Jesus—how he came to be, how he acted—that revealed and even grounded the reality of who he

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 215. Here Balthasar is exegeting Maximus’s Opuscula; PG 91, 77AB, 108B, and Ambigua, PG 91, 1048B, 1048A, 1044D-1045A, 1052A, 1053CD, 1053B and 1057A. Later we will pick up the thought given here that the nonresistance of the Son to the Father shows that “God is tenderly concerned to preserve all that is human and natural and to heal it”, a nonresistance of God to the human condition.
was and what he was, and serves for us as an efficacious model of how we are called to live and what we are called to be.\textsuperscript{33}

In his life-work Balthasar takes up this Maximian formal “summit” describing the unity of humanity and divinity in Christ in order to extend it into a spirituality of *Gelassenheit* and, we could say, nonresistance. Christ is the answer, given in utterly human terms, to the gift of the Father granting him eternal life within himself as the Son. His whole mode of human life, the submission, humility, gentleness and meekness as it differentiates him from other people, is an expression of an eternal reception of being from the Father. Christ has been eternally yielded to the Father as the source of his being; he now gives that eternal letting-be to the Father a human mode of expression in his long-suffering love. The nonresistance that distinguishes him from the Father becomes the very thing that distinguishes Jesus from other humans—his utter love to the end.

This is the first aspect of Christ’s bi-directional nonresistance, his intra-trinitarian yieldedness to the Father lived as a human life. In this Chalcedonian definition, as interpreted by Balthasar, the eternal begotteness of the Son in his trinitarian distinction from the Father, becomes united with those aspects of Christ’s life traditionally associated with nonresistant ethics—his suffering in the face of evil, and his willingness to love in the face of great debasement. Here in these nonresistant actions there is no dichotomy to be found between utter transcendence in divine origin and full humanity.

This is the dogmatic font of theological ethics for Balthasar. As Mark Yenson says:

For Balthasar the shift toward a personalist ontology in Maximus, grounded in a diachronic Christology, means that Christology is henceforth more explicitly

\textsuperscript{33} Davis, Kendall, and O’Collins, *The Incarnation*, 165–66.
correlated on the one hand to Trinitarian relationality and on the other to historical particularity and finite freedom: in Christ, over and beyond the two natures, we encounter the Son of God entering and assuming human history.  

Christ’s explicit teachings about nonresistance, such as we see in Luke 6:32-35, are given by Jesus so that “you will be children of the Most High.” In Matthew 5:43 the same pattern of nonresistance is urged “so that you may be children of your Father in heaven” making you “perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Christ lives a unique human life, distinguished by his authoritative meekness and gentleness, receiving at every turn his existence and mission from the Father. This is the nonresistance of Christ to the Father which moved Christ into the crosshairs of the evil which curses the human race. When we turn now to look at the Dyothelite/Monothelite debate, we can see more clearly that in this nonresistance to the Father Christ was also nonresistant to the human condition.

### 3.5 The Dyothelite Nonresistance of Christ to the Human Condition

Having seen that within Maximian neo-Chalcedonian Christology, Christ’s eternal relation of begotteness is transposed hypostatically into human readiness to suffer, we now turn to the second move, which is to show how a fully human assent to suffering love is transposed into a trinitarian expression of Sonship. This is a key move in our quest for a gospel-formed ethic of pacifism. It points into the mystery in which costly human love is elicited by a sharing in divinity.

In the Dyothelite vision, the hypostatic centre in Christology opens our eyes to the preservation of the human nature, and through that the deification offered in the

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incarnation.\footnote{Did “will” reside at the personal, hypostatic level in Christ (Monothelitism) or at the level of nature (Dyothelitism)? This was the question around which the debate of the wills of Christ turned. All agreed that Christ had a divine will, but Maximus insisted that if Christ did not also have a human will, his humanity was violated.} This we will show is a divine nonresistance (a “letting be”) to the human condition in all its aspects, the second direction in which Christ’s yieldedness extended.

These two nonresistances are deeply united. Christoph Schönborn says of the Dyothelite achievement of Maximus:

The fight against Monothelitism constitutes a certain return to the realism of Christ’s humanity, to this humanity’s lowliest and humblest manifestations; it also brings a new and sharpened awareness that the reality of the eternal Word transpires foremost in his ultimate self-abasement…. In the dramatic events of Gethsemane and Golgotha, the faith-filled meditation discovers anew the heart of our salvation; in the despised countenance of the Lord, it finds the true icon of God’s love.\footnote{Schönborn, \textit{God’s Human Face}, 117.}

Balthasar was keenly interested in the way a Maximian Dyothelite Christology resisted the Alexandrian (Balthasar would also say Asian, or Buddhist) tendency to see the world absorbed into God, and gave expression to the affirmation that God shows to the world he has made.

For this reason, Chalcedon’s great word was ‘save’ (σωζειν): the preservation of the peculiar character of both natures…. For Maximus this word becomes the most central concept in the whole order of redemption, for it unites in itself both aspects of Christ’s saving work: healing and rescue, on the one hand, and preservation and confirmation on the other.\footnote{Balthasar, \textit{Cosmic Liturgy}, 257.}

It is this tendency of dissolution into, or for the sake of, the divine for which spiritualties of \textit{Gelassenheit}, nonresistance and yieldedness to the enemy in love are critiqued. It is difficult to resist this “dissolving” tendency without succumbing to secularity. This divine distance from, preservation and affirmation of the non-divine is a core dynamic within Balthasar’s theology of worldly beauty and it is what he believes prevents his rather uncompromising
theology of Gelassenheit from descending into anti-humanism. Here is an understanding of self-donation that preserves first, in order to give itself in love. Maximus, says Balthasar, gives all “‘empty vessel’ Christologies their correct interpretation as describing an active cooperation of the man Jesus that remains full-bodied in his kenosis.”

Maximus perceived the mistake lurking in the Monothelite assertion that, as there is only one Person who wills in the incarnation, so there must only be one will, and that divine. Monothelites worried that in Chalcedon’s “without confusion” of natures a compromise of Cyril of Alexandria’s “single-subject” Christology had occurred. Two wills must equal two persons, they reasoned. According to Maximus, however, while the Monothelites determined correctly that unity of the natures/wills was a hypostatic, personal event, they drew from this the errant assumption that envisioning a natural human will distinct (even free) within the Person smuggled in a Nestorian division into two persons. As Christoph Schönborn notes, there was still something in Cyril of Alexandria that saw the divine as superior in power to the human, which achieved its way because of its superior power, thus compromising a genuine human will. This “could easily lead to viewing Christ’s human nature as entirely passive, and only his divinity as active.” It is only with Maximus’s Dyothelitism that the dignity of the human nature receives its fullest expression and single-subject Christology is able to resist the tendency to view the divine Logos as “wielding” humanity like a passive instrument.

39 Schönborn, God’s Human Face, 119. Balthasar notes something similar about Cyril in Cosmic Liturgy, 228.
Balthasar is mightily impressed by this Maximian preservation and it remains a distinct feature of his theology all his life. It enabled him to see that unity occurs more deeply through love and across difference than it does through a divine domination yielding a mixture of natures. Maximus sensed that if the divine in any way overpowered the human in Christ, the two must be on some sort of univocal plane—thus compromising divine gracious free transcendence as much as the human authenticity. “The Logos does not exert some kind of extrinsic causality upon his human nature, the way Eusebius thought, but he operates in both of his natures.”

The occasion for this achievement came through Maximus’s reading of the long-debated Scriptural account of Gethsemane. Balthasar wrote later in life about Maximus’s discovery:

[M]ore than two hundred years after Chalcedon! —that we cannot read the Agony in the Garden as if Jesus’ human will had first balked at the imminent Passion and had then been overpowered and brought back into line with the divine will, but that on the contrary, it was none other than this human will that had to give its free consent to the Father’s plan. Only thus is Chalcedon brought to its logical conclusion.

Here again we see that Chalcedon is brought to a confessional whole in the neo-Chalcedonian work of Maximus.

We can see this human consent to the Father’s plan in several layers. First, at the most basic level, what is the “natural” will of this child of Adam that Maximus held to be distinct from the Person and which he was determined to preserve in his Christology? According to

40 Schönborn, God’s Human Face, 119.
42 This was given assent at the third Council of Constantinople (680-681). For a good exploration of the entire controversy see Riches, “After Chalcedon.”
Maximus, the will is natural, not personal. The natural will of humans which the Logos assumed, is a created set of desires and movements built into the structure of what it means to be human, by which humans become what God intended them to become. Ian McFarland explains Maximus helpfully: “In short, because they are agents, human beings are willing creatures, which is to say, their movements are characterized by agency rather than being unconscious or automatic. In short, motion is not just something that happens to me; I move.” Or as Balthasar put it, “an intellectual nature is defined by its self-determination (συνεξουσία) and its freedom (προαίρεσις).” For Christ to affirm his human will inviolate in Gethsemane therefore, is to determine that it is only by the authentic exercise of this human agency that the will of the Father will be carried out. For Maximus, the Person, “is the realization, the concrete living out, of a rational nature.” The Person brings a unique mode of action to the natural, created will. This Balthasar calls “the dynamic, actualizing aspect of being” that works within the created structures of the nature. The work of the Person is the “concrete realization, its ‘liberation’ by appropriation of the nature.” A person takes the movements and desires inherent in the will and enacts them in unique ways. To have freedom in this view, is not the ability to do good or evil indifferently, but to be a rational agent who wills according to a created nature towards the end which God has given

43 Ian A. McFarland, “The Theology of the Will,” in The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor, ed. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 520. He translates Maximus’s συνεξουσία as agency. It literally means ‘power over oneself.’ However, this should not be taken in a Nestorian direction to imply that Christ had two acting centres co-existing within himself.

44 Cosmic Liturgy, 260.


46 Ibid., 263.

47 Ibid., 227.
as the natural end of the creature. What Maximus saw occurring in the Garden was Adam making his offering, at last. This offering was the perfect transposition, into human terms, of what eternal Sonship had always meant for the Logos.

According to Maximus, a person cannot be reduced to her nature/will, but neither can the person exist in absolute spontaneity above the nature/will.\textsuperscript{48} Here Balthasar makes an interesting observation that gives us a clue as to how he sees Monothelitism operating in the modern context. Between Pyrrhus (a Monothelite) and Maximus,

\[\text{[t]wo ultimate conceptions of the person are on a collision course. For Pyrrhus, person can represent only an irrational dimension, beyond everything natural. He wants to preserve its absolute spontaneity and self-affirmation through negations. Thus, in many respects, Monothelitism is a precursor of the personalistic nominalism of the late Middle Ages and modern culture.}\textsuperscript{49}\]

By insisting that theology see the active, free human will “saved” at Gethsemane, Maximus was resisting the possibility that the hypostatic union of the natures would devolve into a voluntarist “I” lording it over the now-assumed humanity of Christ. In other words, by diminishing the rationality of the nature which the hypostasis assumed, the assumption of human nature no longer had any meaning. “Nature, robbed of the inner dynamic of its own purposefulness for the sake of the [freedom of the] person, descends to become a marionette. The consistent conclusion of this subtle, intelligent heresy is a new kind of docetism and, so, the denial of the ultimate basis of the Christian message.”\textsuperscript{50}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{48} Maximus’s scholiast correlates the traditional distinction between ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ with the nature/hypostasis distinction. “Nature is that which is created according to the image, the plan of being (\(\lambda\delta\gamma\phi\varsigma\)). The hypostasis is that which was created according to the likeness, historical life (\(\beta\iota\omicron\varsigma\)).” Ibid., 226.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Balthasar, \textit{Cosmic Liturgy}, 263.
\end{itemize}
I call this a divine nonresistance to Adam. Maximus argued that the Logos had empowered the fullest human life possible by entering into human existence, preserving the agential capacity of humans, and empowering human nature to its grandest and most natural expression—the willing of what God wills. This basic structure of the natural human is important for our linking of preservation with nonresistance, because it shows first that what Jesus did in allowing himself to be taken was a *natural* action, with the grain of basic creational humanity, as it unfolds in a sinful climate. His love was not some divine detour around human instincts.

Going to the next layer, Maximus was also determined that the Logos’ action to preserve the depths of the human condition assumed not only a pre-lapsarian human nature, but the condition of that nature under the duress of the curse. How was this “preservation” of humanity in Christ to be done while maintaining the Scriptural witness that Christ remained without sin until the end? That is, the preservation should not envision the importation of guilt into the Person. This question was important for Balthasar. We know from Balthasar's personal work later in life that he, of all people, wanted his readers to grapple with the depths of the darkness, fear, and horror that descended upon the Saviour in Gethsemane and on into the holy triduum, and to see this not as destroying but rather fully expressing Sonship. So in what sense can we say that Christ was “made sin” for us?

At first glance, Maximus’s view of the human will seems unlikely to include that kind of existential struggle. In conceiving of this natural freedom embraced by Christ, Maximus would have us remove all *gnomic* qualities. The *gnomic* will is not a separate will, but a mode of willing exercised under the conditions of sinful existence. It may envision the proper end of human life but it waffles, apathetic and unsure of how to get there. It dithers between
good and evil. This Christ could not do, according to Maximus. As the divine Logos, according to scripture, Christ would have had a clear view of, and would have embodied the will of the Father. The drama in Gethsemane did not revolve around discerning the will of God in foggy moral conditions. It was not the modern freedom of looking to the left and to the right, choosing good or evil. In Ian McFarland’s words “Jesus is not struggling against the power of sin, but for the upward call of God.”\textsuperscript{51} Balthasar agrees in a later essay; “Jesus is not a man who happens to find himself on earth and from that point on gropes to find and do the will of God by reflecting on himself and asking about the purpose of his being here on earth. His existence is not a matter of chance. Rather his very existence itself is a result of his mission…and thus of his obedience.”\textsuperscript{52}

The struggle of Christ had to do not with ignorance, but with the limits of the natural will, up against the seemingly impossible demands of the Father. This was the incarnate Son of God, loaded with the limits of human weakness struggling to give a natural, human expression to the eternal filiality of the Logos of God. Jesus was struggling in the Garden with the apparent inability of his natural will to arrive at the destiny of his calling in God, within its own limits. He was being summoned to a task for which his natural desires were insufficient.


\textsuperscript{52} Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Explorations in Theology, Vol. 4: Spirit and Institution, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 141. Balthasar detects an ambiguity in Maximus on gnomic will. What Maximus ultimately wants to ensure is the hypostatic clarity with which the Father’s will is perceived. In some cases it appears that Maximus believed that Christ’s natural will included a perfectly healed gnomic will, that is a will that does deliberate but habitually chose the right path to achieve its desire. Balthasar, Cosmic Liturgy, 269–71.
Part of the struggle for Jesus was his natural human fear of death and his desire to extend life. This, Maximus insists, was not an evil desire. Earlier in *Cosmic Liturgy*, Balthasar had distinguished between Maximus’s understanding of physical sin and natural evil. “The judgment then on Adam’s voluntary sin was the transformation of his nature in the direction of passion, corruption and death…toward physical sin.”53 Maximus distinguishes between “the curse that is the immediate ethical effect of sin and the curse that is its natural punishment.”54 He also distinguishes between “temptation” as sensual desire, which gives rise to sin, and “temptation” as a trial, which punishes sin by causing suffering. “This distinction is made in the light of Maximus’s theology of the incarnation: The Redeemer was able to take the ‘physical’ side of our punishments on himself without any shadow of the voluntary sin and, so, became ‘sin’ and a ‘curse’ for us.”55 Christ’s terror of death in the Garden was a sign of this vulnerability to the punishment inflicted on human nature for sin and a natural desire for life rather than death. This too was preserved in the hypostatic union of the natures. It was not, however, a waffling, undetermined dithering about whether to do good or evil.

But this is not yet enough. “The healing of nature demands a descent to that tragic point in man, where sin, as opposition to God, has come into its own. For sin to be overcome from within, it had, in some way or other, to be found ‘within’ Christ.”56 Not only did Christ take on “physical sin” but in another Maximian distinction, he also took on voluntary sin,

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 263.
though only relatively, not naturally, or ontologically. In a “relative appropriation” Christ makes his own what is another’s through loving identification rather than through an “ontological appropriation” according to nature. “But since he could not make our sinful manner of willing his own ontologically, he assimilated it to himself through ‘relative appropriation’.”\(^{57}\) This higher assimilation Christ achieves in his role as head of the Mystical Body “by which he stands in a loving and therefore sympathetic relationship with the actions and sufferings of all his members.”\(^{58}\) As the head of the church, Christ takes to himself the voluntary guilt of the world in the sins of the members of the Body, now borne in Gethsemane and on the cross. Thus the depths of anguish in the Garden is seen as an ecclesial reality in which Christ is suffering the sin in his members. Christ is experiencing the effects of sin in love, while remaining fixed on the Father’s will.\(^{59}\)

The Son thus experiences the full human post-lapsarian flight-instinct from death, as well as the stifling anguish of sin-guilt, while remaining fixed in a clear-sighted way to the Father’s will to save the human race. The Logos, synchronized eternally with the Father’s will was calling the human forth in a venture of self-sacrifice, but a self-sacrifice that found no detour around natural desires, the fear of death, and the relative appropriation of guilt.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 267.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.

\(^{59}\) Balthasar seems to also use Maximus in his writings to show that a distance remains between my sin and Christ. For example in *Theo-Drama*, 1994, 4:252, Maximus is described as more reticent about seeing Christ assume sin than Balthasar describes him in *Cosmic Liturgy*. I think the point can be made that Balthasar is ambivalent about his reading of Maximus. In *Cosmic Liturgy* Maximus seems to have a view that is near to Balthasar’s, whereas in Balthasar’s later writings, Maximus still has too much of the Greek aversion to identification with human nature and all its malady. Balthasar seeks a full ontological identification of Christ with sinful humanity though the punishment Christ experiences for sin is “subjective” rather than “objective.” See Ibid., 4:335–38 for a discussion.
This was the weight of what was secured in the Dyothelite insistence that Christ’s human will not be violated, or subsumed into divine willing.  

At this point we can advert to the way these concerns match and are even intensified in Balthasar’s emphases. Balthasar’s extensive treatments of Christ’s Garden drama have a Dyothelite, Maximian form in that they depict the drama of the Garden as a human struggle to rise to the will of the Father. Balthasar is unstinting in his depiction of Gethsemane as an hour in which Christ donned the full human inheritance of a sin-laden humanity and gave himself as an offering to the Father using only that loathsome equipment. In this Balthasar has a unique perspective on the long Christian debate about how to understand the ascriptions of ignorance to Christ in the gospels. Did the human consciousness of Jesus genuinely lack knowledge of some things, or are these statements describing a “pretend” that Christ donned for our sake. Balthasar develops his answer to this within his theology of mission. For Balthasar, the mission of Christ is identical with his Person. Christ’s intention to do the will of the Father in his incarnate life is the incarnation of his eternal being as Son of the Father. This mission is not imposed on him externally, even if it is a mission in which “not my own” but the Father’s will is decisive. But “it must be carried out with the human energies of the

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60 Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 264.


62 “It is always in the Holy Spirit that the Son takes up the mission that comes from the Father. Thus the incarnate Son, in his freedom (which is now a human freedom too), does not embrace his own will as God but primarily the Father’s will, to which he has always consented. It is precisely in embracing his Father’s will that Jesus discovers his own, most profound identity as the eternal Son.” Ibid., 3:199–200.
one who is sent.” He emphasizes throughout his writing that Christ remained fixed on the mission of the Father, even when his vision of the larger salvific plan contracted gradually as he approached “the hour”. The consciousness which Christ had of the nature of his own Person, of the will of the Father, and of his place in the events of salvation were not set in stone a priori, but were calibrated according to the specific mission Christ had in being sent from the Father. Where the mission called for knowledge Christ was given knowledge—where the mission did not, Christ “gave up” his own grasping for knowledge and trusted that the times were in his Father’s hands. At Gethsemane, the shutter through which Christ could view the plan of the ages, the salvific outcome of the events unfolding around him, contracted to the point of despair. The wider context of the Father’s cause and its ground in love and eternal life was shrouded until all that was left in Christ was a naked surrender to the Father, unseeing. It was finally an utterly human obedience, stifled under the darkness of the human condition which Christ rendered, though always as the sent Logos. Christ never wavered in his determination to leave his life in the hands of the Father, he never began to deliberate about whether he would follow God or Satan, but his ability to see the path ahead diminished as he plunged into the gathering night of evil. “The implementation of this

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63 Ibid., 3:168.

64 For example, Christ did not suffer a heroic death according to ancient Jewish standards of martyrdom. The Jewish martyr displayed his extreme faith in Yahweh by his courageous death and expected a reward. Jesus however, was not given this kind of larger context by which to understand his hour in its deepest darkness. “All ‘meaning’ is inexorably reduced to the humble preference for the will of the Father, as loved for its own sake.” Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 106.

mission guarantees the final fulfillment, in God, of created freedom, thus demonstrating the latter’s sovereign and glorious quality.”

In this way, Balthasar has preserved the distinction between the natural and gnomic will, but has also found a way to highlight the towering act of “disponibilité”, or active receptiveness he offered to his Father. The eternal distance between Father and Son given in the *processio* is transposed into Jesus’ experience of this distance in the sinful key to which humans had transposed that freedom. This nonresistance is what intra-trinitarian procession looks like incarnated. Balthasar also ramps up the way in which salvation involves the utter self-donating love for the other, even when no visible reward is perceived. This he does by translating traditional categories of Christology into missional terms.

In looking back over this Dyothelite witness, in Maximus but also in Balthasar, one is struck by the paradox at work here. God “preserves” humanity in the incarnation, but only as a missional humanity willing to sacrifice itself for the other in costly love. The Logos


68 “If we think of the Incarnation of the Logos as the perfecting of human selfhood (that is, not as the overpowering and commandeering of human nature and human free will by a numinous divine will), we are bound to acknowledge the unity of both in Jesus Christ, providing Christians with a model: on the one hand, he displays perfect, free responsibility for his own deeds and attitudes; and, on the other hand, he is completely oriented to the absolute, divine freedom, which for Jesus, is represented by the Father’s will, mediated by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit does not force the Father’s will on him; he sets it before him, and then, as the Son’s own Spirit, he operates within his human freedom so that the Son may be resolutely open to the absolute will of God.” Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, 1994, 4:475–76.
preserves, and dignifies the full, rational ground of human nature as the creature bent on going to God, but does this by offering himself in self-sacrificial, self-abnegating gift for his enemies. What the Logos preserves, affirms, protects, of humanity, is not a neutral, secular human nature, but a human nature as it was created to find its deepest fulfillment in obedience to God. It preserves this obediential, creational response under the worst possible circumstances, and offers itself in yieldedness to God. Here, in the furnace of Gethsemane, where the Sonship (begotteness) of the Logos assumes a willful, human nature and offers himself for his enemies, we find the spiritual and dogmatic centre for a non-secular, gospel pacifism. This pacifism goes beyond the abuses associated with Gelassenheit, but also goes beyond the secular solution to those abuses which consist of autonomous self-assertion and preservation.

But this leads us to ask the question: how could human nature, punished by God with a horror of death, given freedom in the “without confusion” of the incarnation, nevertheless say, “not my will but thine be done”? If the human will of Christ was not some pre-lapsarian nature free of the effects of sin, if this will was not coerced or goaded into obedience by the divine will, and if Christ did offer a full human consent to the Father, what made this Gelassenheit possible?

This is the question of the communicatio idiomatum and its relation to deification and here we return again to the hypostasis now in its mysterious gospel-narrative form. Balthasar argues that Maximus is able to rescue the entire Logos/Sarx Alexandrian tradition of deification, which until that point had never quite been able to safely describe the union of the soul with God without falling into a dissolution of the creaturely, whether in Christ or in
us. The two are intimately related. Maximus of course did not originate the doctrine of the *communicatio* but he provided a way to understand it that preserved both Cyril of Alexandria’s single subject Christology, and the Chalcedonian retention of Nestorius’s concern for a genuine, free humanity. With the Dyothelite understanding of the preservation of the natural will, the deification of the humanity of Christ could be explained in a Christian way as an act of union that preserved the Creator/creature difference.

Maximus envisioned a mutual indwelling relationship between the hypostasis and the nature in the incarnation. Maximus saw the two as distinct, yet never imagined them apart, as some metaphysical composition. They formed a unity and passed over to one another in their unity the respective modes of their action. For the Son, divine nature involved certain patterns of relationship with the Father. Human nature also had certain distinctive ways of moving as we have already seen—by agential rationality. In its fallen condition it also had forms of wretchedness that it underwent by nature. In the en-hypostatisation of the natures, the Person shared in these distinctive movements without confusing the human and divine. Within the hypostatic event of union of the natures there was an exchange of these properties that nonetheless allowed the Logos to remain consubstantial with God and the human nature consubstantial with all humans.

What the hypostasis communicated to the human nature of Christ was the strength, first, to do what it was created to do according to its nature, but then secondly, to go beyond what could be naturally willed and to in fact give expression to eternal Sonship and what the Father willed in human terms. The Logos, far from overriding the human will, empowered it

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69 *Cosmic Liturgy*, 274.
to finally will according to its nature, to “become what you are”, as Balthasar says. The result of this is that “through man’s participation in God, mankind—man’s creatureliness— itself is perfected.” Further, “by bringing back human nature from the brink of destruction, by rescuing it…he reclaims it from the self-alienation of its sinful desire ‘to be as god’ and presents it to itself…returning each one of us to ourselves.” By being divinized, “the world is perfected as world.” “It is only then, when God and man come closest to each other and meet in a single person that it becomes obvious before our very eyes that God is eternally, irreducibly other than man and that man may therefore not seek his salvation in a direction that implies an abandonment of his own nature.”

What this exchange of properties also ensured was that a true nonresistance to evil on the part of the Logos remained in the picture. Without the hypostatic communicatio idiomatum, the Son of God would not have absorbed personally the barbs of human violence. God is not demanding us to pay the price for a kind of love from which he would be exempt if a Nestorian account were true. In Maximus’s terms God really was suffering the hatred of humanity. And yet on the other hand, resisting the Monothelite view, this suffering which God partook of hypostatically, was genuine love. That is, it was God sharing in our suffering; it was not God suffering in his own nature. God in his own nature remained untouched by pain. The analogia entis remains in play, the ever-greater dissimilarity between God and

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70 Ibid., 226.
71 Ibid., 257.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 256–57.
creature is true even in the Garden. In response to the Monothelists, Maximus insisted that
God remained free in his assumption of human weakness and in his absorption of human
hatred. Balthasar points out:

Death and suffering belong of necessity to human nature in the concrete, as an
expression of its weakness and abandonment. Through the Incarnation, however, they
become at the same time a kind of freedom, an expression of power. On the other
hand, the unity of God’s freedom and power with human suffering and death achieves
that divine annihilation which subjects God to what is not God. The result of both is
redemptive suffering. “He suffered, if one may put it this way, in a divine way,
because he suffered freely.”\(^\text{75}\)

This *communicatio idiomatum* envisioned by Maximus moved beyond the four
adverbs of Chalcedon and now began to feel out how a union could occur between two
natures that was unconfused and undivided. Chalcedon had mostly relied on negation and
had not described how the union of the two natures occurred. According to the inquiry of our
thesis we could say that the strategy for resisting the drift from *preservation* to *secularity* is
the *communicatio* leading to deification. Christ, though utterly human in all his life, did not
become secularized. His human nature, while preserved intact was not left untouched by the
eternal Sonship of Christ but was taken into union with the Logos and lived as active, human
nonresistance to the Father. Its very uniqueness as a human nature became the register, the
expression of the Logos in its giving back to the Father. Thus Balthasar can say that in the
figure of Christ we see one “who had the [natural human] ability to will…which in its
realization developed, not in the direction of becoming its own [human] hypostasis, but
toward that of God [the Son], without however ceasing to be a genuine human ability.”\(^\text{76}\)

\(^\text{75}\) Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 259. He is discussing and quoting *Ambigua*, *PG 91*, 1056A.
\(^\text{76}\) Ibid., 228.
We have explored now the two directions to which Christ offered his nonresistance, to the Father and to the wretchedness of the human condition. He lived the perfect transposition of Sonship in terms of human self-abasing love, and he consented to the full weight of the evil arrayed against him by preserving, and then deifying a natural will. In *Man in History* Balthasar sums up this neo-Chalcedonian faith and brings these two into unity:

God…uses man in all his [man’s] existential doubtfulness and fragility and imperfectability as the language in which he expresses the word of redemptive wholeness. God, therefore, uses existence extended in time as the script in which to write for man and the world the sign of a supra-temporal eternity. Hence, the man Jesus, whose existence is this sign and word of God to the world, had to live out simultaneously the temporal, tragic, separating distance [from his own origin, i.e. God] and…the conquest of [that distance] through…elective obedience to the choosing will of the eternal Father.77

### 3.6 Nonresistance as Patience in *A Theology of History*

I wish to complete our exploration of Balthasar in this chapter by looking at one of his writings, *A Theology of History*, to see how this neo-Chalcedonian dynamic was emphasized in Balthasar as *Gelassenheit*.78 It illustrates Mark McIntosh’s observation that Balthasar picks up Maximus’s Christology and renders it ever more concrete and personal in his development of a theology of mission.79 *A Theology of History* is an extended reflection on how Christ figures the unity in difference between God and the world not only at the

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78 As Kevin Mongrain realized, in tracing the pedigree of ideas in Balthasar one cannot always rely on Balthasar to point directly to sources. One must consider what he says directly in places where he engages a thinker and then note how these learnings emerge across the corpus. I am not arguing that Balthasar’s Christology is purely Maximian, only that some major features were set in place through his encounter. Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs Von Balthasar: An Irenaeian Retrieval* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 27–28.

79 McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, 42.
single point of his conception, but by his earthy acts of prayer, obedience, and waiting. To contemplate this cosmic work of reconciliation, according to Balthasar, the believer is led to gaze in wonder at the daily un-guessable choices of Christ. Balthasar does this by attending to Christ’s relation to time, which is God’s relationship to history as modulated by his descent into human existence in Christ. It shows how Christ’s human “mode of existence” was his “mode of time”, the manner in which he received time (and indeed all of nature) from the Father and returned it in obedience, surrender and self-gift for the world.

Balthasar transposes the Chalcedonian concern about Person and nature into the more modern concerns about singularity and universality in order to draw a theological ethic from the facts of Christ’s life. The reception and return of time within the Son’s earthly life forms a cosmic reconciliation between “the factual, singular, sensible, concrete and contingent; and the necessary and universal.” Because he represents the descent of the Absolute into the human register of a single, unique human being, he is both the universal norm of history and the absolutely unique occurrence within it. He reveals the will of God for the world in all his particular acts and words, but also in his very existence. “All existences, both before him and after him, receive their meaning from Christ’s existence.”80 As the norm of history he is “raised to a position of absolute dominance and hence, fundamentally…the centerpoint of all persons and their history”, something no other human can achieve.81 But he is also a single unique existence within history, living as a particular person in a particular time, something that God did not need to do for his own life (thus fundamentally un-guessable).

80 Balthasar, A Theology of History, 71.
81 Ibid., 9.
The resulting formula is both daunting and mysterious. Daunting because it subordinates all the norms of this world, their study and application, to the “particular law” of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the revelation, in the concrete, of the free will of God for the world. Mysterious because it bases this claim to total lordship (kýriotes) upon a mystery which cannot be surveyed or judged from any point of scientific observation: the mystery of the hypostatic union of the divine and the human in Christ, which casts its light and its shadow, directly or obliquely across all the values of this world.82

For this reason, if we really want to grasp the mystery and meaning of Christ as the revelation of the Father, “there is no place for abstraction, for disregarding particular cases, for bracketing off inessential accidentals at the historical level of his life.”83 The very texture of Christ’s earthly life in all its unique, existential variety, its being this and not that by the real-time choices of this Person in hypostatic union, is what reveals the eternal nature of the creator God and provides thus a universal norm. For theology has the task of preserving “the normative content shining out from the irreducible fact”84 Whenever it has to make use of general truths or propositions, it “must be careful that everything of this kind always subserves the contemplation and interpretation of the unique.”85 This unique Person is “a miracle undiscoverable and unguessable by philosophical thought”.86 One could not arrive at this universal truth by “exceptionally profound thought.”87 One can only contemplate it as it arises in history. Neo-Chalcedonian Christology thus serves to direct the theologian ever to the existent, to the unique occurrence within the historical life of Christ, and to draw from

82 Ibid., 14.
83 Ibid., 16.
84 Ibid., 17.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., 10.
87 Ibid., 16.
that contemplation a vision into universal norms that apply to life and faith. \(^88\) And so Balthasar picks from the tree of Chalcedonian Christology the fruit for theological ethics. Any theology, in order to be truly Christian, must be anchored in the real-time choices of Jesus of Nazareth. Union with Christ occurs through a contemplation of the postures and choices of Christ. \(^89\)

In a way familiar to those who read his work widely, Balthasar here demonstrates the peculiar “manner of existence” by which Christ reveals the eternal life of the triune Godhead. “It is the will of him who sent me, not my own will that I have come down from heaven to do” (Jn 6:38): this is an oft-repeated verse and motif within Balthasar’s Christology. The “form of Jesus’ existence”, was his mission to carry out to the furthest extremity, the will of the Father. This has first a negative aspect: not my will. But this negative aspect is set within a larger positive, whereby Christ is willing to carry out with every part of his being and life, the mission laid upon him by the Father. It was of his “essence” as Son to receive “life”, “insight”, “spirit”, “word”, “will”, “deed”, “doctrine”, “work”, and “glorification” from the Father in such a way that he has it “in himself” and in such a way that he disposes of it on his own accord, but never in any way that it denies his core existence as the sent one. \(^90\)

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\(^88\) Balthasar then notes that this Chalcedonian approach to history and meaning heightens “the historical pole of human existence” in a manner that lends credence or at least shows itself akin to existentialism in modern thought. Whether this theology is the basis for an existentialist philosophy or of existentialism as a secularized derailment of Christianity is of no concern to the theologian, Balthasar says; “the business of theology is not to keep one eye on philosophy, but, with its gaze obediently turned towards Jesus Christ, simply and directly to describe how he stands in time and in history as the heart and norm of all that is historical.” Ibid.

\(^89\) This is similar to what we described above (p. 39ff) with regard to the early Anabaptist understanding of nonresistance. Through a contemplation of Christ’s choices regarding power, the believer is made one mind with Christ.

\(^90\) Balthasar, A Theology of History, 26.
This is an earthly transposition of his eternal divine mode of existence within the Trinity. “It is indeed this receiving of himself which gives him his ‘I,’ his own inner dimension, his spontaneity, that sonship with which he can answer the Father in reciprocal giving.”\(^\text{91}\) This receiving is not the “reception of something eternally alien…, but the bestowal upon him of that which is most his own.”\(^\text{92}\) He receives that which is most his own in the eternal begetting of the Father, but that which is most uniquely his own is, in his earthly sojourn, precisely his submission unto death, his utter, human assent to the will of God in the face of evil, both human and demonic. “His mode of being here on earth will simply be the manifestation in the created sphere, the translation into creatureliness, of this heavenly form of existence: existence as receiving, as openness to the will of the Father, as subsistent fulfillment of that will in continuous mission.”\(^\text{93}\)

It is this very existence as a being-not-for-himself that makes Christ’s mode of existence available to his brothers and sisters. His “being as self never becomes a theme (and thus inevitably a problem) but only passes, down to its very roots into prayer.” His being as such is an availability to the human community and is always a prayer to the Father for his fellow humans. “But through grace even the rest of the children of God may participate in this trinitarian love and surrender….”\(^\text{94}\) Here we can begin to see that the hypostatic unity, what Balthasar earlier called the summit of formal Christology in Maximus, has been

\(^{91}\) Ibid.

\(^{92}\) Ibid., 26–27.

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 27. “All this manifests ‘the absolute positive aspect of differentiation’ in absolute Being, which implies that the hypostases do not possess the divine nature in common like an untouchable treasure; rather, the divine nature is defined through and through by the mode of divine being (\textit{tropos tes hyparxeos}).” Balthasar, \textit{Theo-Drama}, 1993, 2:258.

\(^{94}\) Balthasar, \textit{A Theology of History}, 28.
transformed into a path, a sojourn by which the children of God enter into that manner of existence demonstrated in the unique life of Christ. As Balthasar would say later in *Theo-Logic*,

This means that the Spirit will not simply interpret a teaching (let alone the mere letters of “Scripture”), but will guide us to the vital depths of what takes place between Father and Son, and introduce us into the hypostatic realm. Nor will this be a kind of guided tour for a group of tourists visiting an as yet unknown landscape or a fascinating underground grotto: we can only be introduced to the christological reality if we are prepared to be assimilated to it. This unveils the central Pauline aspect of this “guiding” by the Spirit: it makes us to be sons in the eternal Son, *filii in Filio.*95

Balthasar thus takes Maximus’s Chalcedonian Christology and demonstrates that this is the formal principle of Christ’s daily, missional, handing-over of himself for the Father’s disposal. In Reimer’s theology we worried that Chalcedon (and Nicaea) remains a mere principle, a structure inhering in the world that Christ pointed to. Here we have added that not only is this “principle” the “personal” earthly transposition of an eternal “letting be” by the Son, but that its very nature involves an openness and an availability to the human community to join it. This is a material path, a participation in the journey of Christ in the world that involves a spiritual union with Christ. In this way, nonresistance is intertwined again with the life of Christ as it was for the early Anabaptists.

Balthasar goes further to highlight the crucial aspect of Christ’s assumption of human existence in the mode of time: his unwillingness to “anticipate the will of the Father. He does not do that precise thing which we try to do when we sin, which is to break out of time….“96


Christ speaks of “the hour” that is coming but leaves its timing, nature and occurrence in the hands of the Father. In sin we arrogate to ourselves “the long view”, we try to gain a God’s-eye view of the world, rushing ahead in the presumption that we already know what is in store for us. “Hence the restoration of order by the Son of God had to be the annulment of that premature snatching at knowledge, the beating down of the hand outstretched towards eternity, the repentant return from a false, swift, transfer into eternity to a true, slow, confinement in time.”\textsuperscript{97} This, says Balthasar, explains the high priority of patience in the New Testament, “more central even than humility; the power to wait, to persevere, to hold out, to endure to the end, not to transcend one’s limitations, not to force issues by playing the hero or the titan, but to practice the virtue that lies beyond heroism, the meekness of the lamb which is \textit{led}.\textsuperscript{98} Patience as the virtue suitable to a contemplative attentiveness to the cadence of the Father becomes here the inner posture of nonresistance. It is also the mode in which nonresistance becomes visible in the world. Kenosis becomes, in Balthasar, the willingness of the all-knowing Logos to live as a human with what knowledge the mission of the Father demanded and no more.

In \textit{Theo-Drama IV}, Balthasar links Christ’s willingness to patiently leave “the hour” in God’s hands with the specific content of Jesus’ teachings on nonresistance. When Christ urges his hearers to “leave everything, not to resist, to love their enemies, to follow him unconditionally, to take up their cross daily, to give away even what is most necessary (the widow’s mite), to take the lowest place”, he is urging them to allow their lives to be formed

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 30–31.
by “the overwhelming demands of a supratemporal scale of values.” 99 Nonresistance in this view is the transposition, figured by the incarnation, by which Christians come to live the eternal begotteness of the Son as a refusal to anticipate or short-circuit the manner and cadence of God’s self-revelation. Secularity is the disenchanting of time, the stripping away of the sense that time is given to the Christian for God’s purposes. As the Christian learns like Christ to leave “the hour” in the hands of the Father, each moment is at once “our time” but also at the same time “God’s time.” In this sense there is a strong connection between the commands of nonresistance in Matthew 5:38-48 and the forbidding of worry and anxiety in Matthew 6:25-34. Both entail a yieldedness to the reality of the world out of yieldedness to the Father.

Christ has taken his Sonship and offered it in terms that we, through the Spirit, are able to imitate in our own lives. This is not the abandonment of the human, but rather the deification of Adam’s created nature, even under circumstances of wretchedness and duress, even under the curse. What I am suggesting is that this Maximian, Dyothelite, Balthasarian perspective on the drama of incarnation is, through sanctification, the dogmatic momentum of gospel pacifism. Gospel pacifism in this sense becomes the Marian consent to the mystery of the incarnation, God’s chosen way (un-guessable!) to overcome evil with good. It is a participation in his patient yielding to the Father’s rhythm of saving drama.

3.7 Conclusion

Nonresistance as developed in the Mennonite tradition is an unwillingness to use violence against evil. While this term has recently been criticized for resulting in an overly-passive pacifism, we have sought to re-form it by situating it within the defenselessness of Christ to his Father, and the resulting defenselessness of Christ to the world. This we are suggesting gives gospel pacifism an abiding unity in difference within the world. Jesus’ worldly nonresistance was an active embrace, in various modes, of the concrete existence of the world at a metaphysical, physical, and spiritual level, which placed Christ in a confrontation with the cursed condition of the world. It also set Christ apart from the world. Christ’s difference from his surroundings secured its place by his disponibilité to the Father. It was in these day-by-day (or night-by-night) encounters with the Father that Jesus received his mission to move on to the next village to announce the Kingdom there also (Mark 1:38). Balthasar emphasizes that by this daily Gelassenheit Christ sojourned to the Mount of Olives and faced the evil of a gathering night. This was a divine patience by which Christ allowed the times of his life to be cadenced by the Father’s will rather than the violent imposition of divinity on the world. As the church becomes conformed to Christ it finds its posture vis-à-vis the world within this unity in difference. Here the world is taken in and “preserved” but only in union with Christ.

This could be considered the source of a trinitarian pacifism. It is a posture towards the enemy that is lived out in union with the one whose nonresistance to the sin of the world gave perfect expression to the trinitarian procession of Sonship, received from the Father. It has its source in the transcendence of God in his trinitarian being; however we are not left on
our own to extrapolate what such trinitarian life might look like. Balthasar has shown us that we learn such trinitarian life, as is proper for humans, by attending to the events of revelation.

The pacifism of the church conformed to this pattern will be a missional nonresistance, in step with the objectives and modalities of the Son’s descent into the world. It takes its shape as a posture of the announcement of εὐαγγέλιον. Gospel pacifism is not a self-standing principle within the world, nor is it the sum total of the good news. Rather, it is but a disposal of oneself to the Father for his purposes and methods of sanctifying the world through Christ that is natural, offering Adam’s gift in Adam’s way to God. When God sets out to reconcile the world to himself, he did it in such a way that we could find an analogous participation in it.

As such nonresistance will have a non-guessable, non-predictable element, since it moves by obedience.\textsuperscript{100} This too, shows us that gospel pacifism cannot erect itself as a portable principle. The incarnational union at the level of hypostasis we have seen, includes but transcends nature. It is centred in a living, moving, deciding, even lordly “I”. This is an “I” that is rooted in the eternal trinity and that descends (surprisingly!) into the human community. To be a gospel ethic, pacifism must participate in this hypostatic lordliness, this transcendence via disponibilité by a day to day union with Christ as revealed in scripture. It must be tethered to the Scriptural descriptions of the manner and method of Jesus.

\textsuperscript{100} This non-guessable aspect does not need to look like an occasionalism in which every action is suspended pending a direct intervention by God. Virtue need not be the sequestering of human deliberation from the day-to day guidance of God.
But this does not mean pacifism cannot be creative and confident in its response to new situations. It is not merely imitation that we are after, but a deification patterned after the actions of Jesus. There is freedom for improvisation here. This too is part of a hypostatic basis for ethics, that each person, though connected by nature to Jesus is not simply a replica of Jesus, a cloned hypostasis as it were, of the incarnate. Christ demonstrates that, though salvation history is the presupposition of his existence in time, he lives in lordly freedom.

The bi-directional nonresistance of Christ leads us to believe that deification as understood by Maximus and arguably as understood by the earliest Anabaptists have strong congruences. In this view we become sanctified as we are drawn up into union with God and receive his divine energies for our benefit and his mission. As Alvin Beachy said about early Anabaptist views of grace, it brings about “a reversal of the incarnation in which the eternal Word becomes man in order that man may become God.” In bringing in this Maximian and Balthasarian understanding of deification we can say that Christ’s nonresistance is fundamentally open to his brothers and sisters. Because Christ did not assume a human nature inaccessible to us, but one consubstantial with ours, and even weighted with the punishment of sin, Christ’s defeat of evil with love is the sanctity of the church in its own encounter with evil. His difference from us was not in the condition of his humanity, but in the clarity with which he saw and affirmed the will of the Father, empowering his human nature to do infinitely more than it could within its own limits. What Christ accomplishes by incarnation we are offered by grace. Christ embodied this embrace of

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102 As quoted in ibid., 76.
the world as the head of the Mystical Body, the church, opening the door for his members to share in his unity in difference. This suggests that while our own nonresistance will be a peregrinating affair, it has as its final destiny the unity of humanity with God in heaven, where the infinite distance between our natures will finally be evident against the backdrop of love.

What can we say about this nonresistance in regard to the concerns of possible abuse raised by Carol Penner and others? Several points come to mind. First, as envisioned by Balthasar, Christ’s nonresistance to the human community around him was given shape by his nonresistance to his Father. If he set aside his own well-being, it was not out of deference to people around him clamouring to impose their agenda, nor out of some lack of self-regard, but out of a personal vocation from his Father. Christ’s nonresistance to the Father was precisely what gave him a resistance to beguiling human agendas. Disinterestedness, as Balthasar describes it in keeping with Ignatian discernment, is not compliance with the powers of the world, but a transparency to the Father’s choice and the steeling of the will to consent to and pursue it. It is this steeled will which enables the saint to follow her own vocation.

One might argue that this is merely a defense “in theory” and not a practicable solution for real people in abusive situations, but I think this is an important distinction nonetheless. *Gelassenheit* can only resist its abuses when it is a live, day to day, gift of the self to God. Under God’s direction the specific texture of a life lived for people is given shape. The more nonresistance is secularized into a merely human technique, the more it will lack this transcendent ability to stand against each individual’s context. While 1 Peter 2:13 says to “accept the authority of every human institution” and then goes on to name emperor,
slave-holder and husband as examples of human institutions, this is not enshrined for the believer as a general “principle” of nonresistance. Rather “for the Lord’s sake” and for “God’s approval” this submission is enjoined. It is only suffering “for doing what is right” that is approved by God. This suggests that what is in view is a nonresistance tethered first to a vocation to the Father that figures the submission to human institutions.  

Secondly, in *The Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar makes a distinction about *Gelassenheit* that is helpful and in keeping with the Christic pattern. For Ignatius of Loyola, abandonment of self to God occurs at the beginning of sanctity, rather than at the end, as it did for German mystics such as Meister Eckhart. Self-abandonment is the entry into a way that eventually produces a positive involvement in the mission of God. It is not the final culmination of spirituality but the means by which one is rid of other sinful vocations or self-identities in order to find one’s true identity and vocation in God.  

For Christ, “having” is not in any opposition to “receiving”. He receives his Person and his mission completely from the Father, but not in such a way that he does not in the end have it in himself. This is confirmed in the gift of resurrection. What this form of self-surrender also provides, besides an active, self-affirming fruit in the end, is a resistance against a radical, independent assertion of 

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oneself that could be the equal and opposite reaction of merely secular attempts to affirm the self.\textsuperscript{106}

But perhaps we can better perceive a nonresistance that is resistant to Mennonite “worm theology” if we apply what we have learned here to the possibility of self-defence. Natural law, with its instinct for self-preservation and self-defence, has been a key problem for gospel pacifists; if self-defence is an ingredient in natural law, does grace simply dissolve nature at this point, over-riding natural concern for tribe and self?\textsuperscript{107} Such a dissolving of human nature could lend itself to the abuses \textit{Gelassenheit} is accused of. Balthasar takes up the relation between Christ and natural law in \textit{A Theology of History} in a way that closely resembles Maximus. Maximus, he said, “presents the natural law and the scriptural law, revelation in nature and revelation in history, as a tension between poles of equal value that mutually complement each other. The third law, which Christ gives and embodies, brings both of them to fulfillment and final unity, in that it simultaneously removes the limitations of both.”\textsuperscript{108}

In line with this distinctly Maximian, Chalcedonian formulation we see a solution in the theological establishment of nonresistance vis-à-vis self-defence. The Logos, in assuming

\begin{footnotes}
\item[106] \textit{Ibid.}
\item[107] Here I am drawing on Paul Marten’s essay, “With the Grain of the Universe.” Cf. J. Daryl Charles, “Protestants and Natural Law,” \textit{First Things} 168 (December 2006): 36–37. The stance of pacifism, for Charles, demands that “redemption” triumph over the structures of the world. Aquinas defends killing in self defense as justified by natural law. “Therefore this act, since one’s intention is to save one’s own life, is not unlawful, seeing that it is natural to everything to keep itself in ‘being,’ as far as possible. And yet, though proceeding from a good intention, an act may be rendered unlawful, if it be out of proportion to the end. Wherefore if a man, in self-defense, uses more than necessary violence, it will be unlawful…” Aquinas, \textit{ST}, II–II, q. 64, art. 7.
\end{footnotes}
human nature and redeeming it did not abolish this aspect of nature but turned it towards the final end of created being, which is the union of all things with God and through that with each other. To this end, it is entirely conceivable, along lines similar to Paul Martens’s argument regarding the natural law of the equality of persons, that a natural desire for self-preservation could be transposed in the new law to extend to strangers and enemies. In Matthew 5:46 Jesus says, “if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?” Here Christ does not abolish care for one’s own but points to its limitations in the Kingdom of God—it has no reward. As natural law, this preservation of one’s own is not sufficient as the supernatural end of created life. In Christ’s incarnation, life, passion, resurrection and ascension this natural instinct to preserve one’s own is accepted by Christ, but in his mission, the first Adam is pried open and broken apart to become the second Adam. This “self” is broken and extended to include all his fellow humans—even as they exist in enmity to him. Even within natural law, self-defence includes the defence of one’s family and tribe. That family to be defended is extended in the Garden and becomes catholic as Christ takes his stand with the sinner. As we will see in our final chapter, within the great exchange, the enemy is found within a new solidarity as “the brother for whom Christ died”. Preservation within a Chalcedonian perspective is not merely the preservation of the self but the radical Christic preservation and inclusion of the enemy within the “self” to which self-defence refers. Christ turns this human will to secure life into a concern not only for himself, but to a

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109 “Drawing forward Christ as ‘the Lawgiver’—as the Word/Logos/Law made flesh—and demonstrating that the evangelical law entails external actions…open[s] the possibility, internal to Aquinas’s own argument, of appealing to Christ as the revelation of divine law that necessarily corrects the failures of human understandings of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in the first principle of natural law, corrects misguided secondary applications of the first principle of natural law, and attempts to define external relations by human law alone…. For Aquinas, life lived according to the divine law must look different from life lived apart from the divine law for good theological reasons.” Martens, “With the Grain of the Universe,” 122.
concern for his brothers and sisters as head of the Mystical body, even as these live as his enemies.\footnote{Maximus sees natural law as chiefly expressing the unity and solidarity which humans have with each other. \textit{Cosmic Liturgy}, 298.}

Within this view of natural law and self-defence, we can say that nonresistance, if it takes its form and substance from the incarnation, does not simply demand the extinguishing of the self for the sake of the other, but it requires that the “self” or “one’s own” which is preserved, empowered and defended, be defined incarnationally to embrace with its “self”, those whom Christ called his own. What is “defended” is not the self only in its individual sense, but the self as the “Body” of Christ defined in Gethsemane. What this suggests is that a bi-directional nonresistance does not demand the pure sacrifice of the self, but the inclusion of a naturally impossible family of humans in the self to be preserved.

We discussed in the first chapter the precarious position of gospel pacifism within a secular setting. As this ethic moves into the world and takes up positions intelligible within a given context, there is a constant temptation to permit a secular age’s differentiation of the spheres (church, state, public, private etc.) to occlude its origin and destiny in Christ. What we have seen in this chapter leads me to suggest that secularity, as life lived and ordered as though human flourishing were not dependent upon God, can be theologically positioned as a heresy within the Dyothelite nonresistance of the Logos to his human nature. This needs explanation. Within the “without confusion” of Maximus’s understanding of the two wills, space is opened for the freedom of the world to exist and perdure in its own given forms. Human nature and what becomes of it in history through the work of humans is given space, as well as freedom to be and to contribute as the means by which the world is redeemed in

\footnote{Maximus sees natural law as chiefly expressing the unity and solidarity which humans have with each other. \textit{Cosmic Liturgy}, 298.}
the incarnation. In Christ human nature is not coerced but given space to be a human obedience to the Father. But this human freedom and dignity in the incarnation can secularize; it can become an end in itself no longer needing the empowerment of God to reach its supernatural ends. Within Monothelitism there would be insufficient creaturely freedom for secularity to ever be a hazard; within Nestorianism there is no approach to including this freedom within the divine embrace of the world. Within Dyothelitism there is a freedom given to the human that risks sliding into a secularity. Only within the deification entailed in Maximian Christology do we see a human endeavor that does not become secular. It avoids this by the daily consent of Christ to the will of the Father.

In order for pacifism to be a non-secular ethic, we must see it as operating with this same assumption, preservation and acceptance of the human. It is not anti-human. However, this humanity is drawn in to offer its un-guessable assent to the Father’s will in bringing salvation to the world through the offering of the self for the enemy. Only by this spirituality of contemplation, disponibilité for the missional glory of God, a daily turning of one’s face to the Father, can such a human thing as pacifism find its richest fruit as “with the grain of the universe.” In this daily surrender of the self to the Father a farther, richer and deeper freedom is deified than is possible under a Nestorian secularity.

Within Dytholelitism we find a place for pacifism not only as a lived sanctity, but as an worldly ethic, susceptible to reason, deliberation, experimentation and argument. Balthasar says, “The Christian who lives by faith has the right to justify his moral actions on the basis of his faith. Since faith’s content—namely, Jesus Christ, the revealer of a love that is triune and divine—has adopted both the form and the guilt of the First Adam, as well as the constrictions, perplexities and crises of the latter’s existence, the Christian is in no danger of failing to
genuinely human endeavor within earthly affairs on how best to live out the created forms
given to it in creation. Humans are rational creatures and this rationality is taken up by Christ
and offered to the Father as a transposition of eternal Sonship. Pacifism in union with this
offering cannot be irrational, though it partakes of mysteries that elude its grasp. It ponders
cases, seeking to find ways to live out Christ’s nonresistance within a fallen world that has
forgotten this creational rationality.

In Maximus and in Balthasar, this inner furnace of Christic, incarnational
Gelassenheit is the white-hot forge in which the world is reconciled. The cosmic synthesis of
all things in heaven and earth is wrought in the mystery of Christ’s descent. There is the
source of peace, unity, harmony and perfection. We can conclude therefore that in spite of
the violent phenomena under which the world labours now in both natural and human realms,
its home existence, its most “natural” primal ontological reality leans in the direction of
harmony and peace. Violence is a surd irruption, the abolishing of beauty. The world as
creation is not fundamentally a violent place and thus can be entered into with a posture of
nonresistance. This is not a sentimental dream but the realization that God is utterly
transcendent to creation and that its existence depends on the gracious and unifying action
whereby all things live in God—the assumption of the human condition in Christ.

If the church should, in its own patterns of life and worship, also radiate some
measure of peace and love, it will surely be living not only in step with the future of the
Kingdom of God, but with the creation as it exists suspended in the hands of God. At its most
profound level, to live peaceably is to be creaturely when to be creaturely is to be rightly

find the First Adam, and hence his own ethical problems, in the Second.” Ratzinger, Balthasar, and
ordered towards the eternal rest of being united in God. Worldly being, in its wholeness at an ontological level, is a form of nonresistance (a letting-be) towards God, the Creator who bestows existence. It is an openness and malleability to the gracious Word of God’s creative will. The cosmos does not endure through violence but through a union with the love of God as this has been shown in the Christic synthesis of the incarnation, in the Garden of Gethsemane and the hill of Golgotha.

And this incarnation is a *provocation*, and to that word we now turn.
Chapter 4. The Lamb’s Provocation of Violence

We have glimpsed the reconciliation of the world in the forge of Christ’s bi-directional nonresistance. This is nonresistance following the form and path of the incarnation. But a temptation lurks. In contemplating the Word’s entrance into the human realm perfectly empowering a human response of praise to the Father even by a cursed tongue, we might naively be tempted to see everywhere a “peace” and “synthesis”, to think that presently all manner of things should be well. We must hasten then to view the provocation which the incarnation goads in the human community and to incorporate this dramatizing within our theology of peace as well.

The argument of this chapter is that for pacifism to remain a gospel pacifism within the conditions of secularity, it needs to be united to the incarnational descent of God into the world, even as that provokes violence. We are describing a christological arc within Balthasar’s theology—incarnation, provocation, convocation—that we believe offers a dynamic unity in difference by which pacifism can become a gospel pacifism. Here we say that Christ is not only nonresistant to violence in its general occurrence; he is nonresistant specifically to the recoil, the kicking against the goads that his own presence in the world provokes.

Within that must be some theological account of why people kill one another. Secularity has not only offered pacifists an option for a secular peace, but a way of de-theologizing violence as well. Puzzling over the perplexing fact of violence has a long history and no one said it more eloquently than Erasmus of Rotterdam in *The Complaint of Peace*. After noting that such diverse entities as the planets and stars, body and soul, vine and
stem, loadstone and iron, work together in harmony, and that furthermore “savage lions do not fight each other…and the concord between wolves is proverbial”, he marvels at the wretched human, lacking any natural equipment for war, seething to kill. Clearly the one creature who is born helpless and who has no personal weapons save his rationality and the ability to cooperate with other humans should be the most peaceful of all. But then:

What Fury appeared with such harmful powers, to scatter, demolish, and destroy them all and to sow an insatiable lust for fighting in the human heart? If custom did not blunt first our sense of amazement and then our awareness of evil, who would believe that men are endowed with human reason who thus fight, brawl, and rage against each other in perpetual discord, strife and war? Finally they confound everything, sacred and profane, with pillaging, bloodshed, disaster, and destruction; no bond is sufficiently sacred to check them in their frenzy for mutual extinction.1

With the rising disgust at barbarity on the European scene during Erasmus’s time, there is immediately the beginnings of a secularization of violence. Erasmus does not offer a theological account of killing beyond viewing it as a particularly wretched form of passion that Christians, inexplicably, partake in with more vengeance than the heathen. “Anger, ambition and folly” cause war and he begins to lay out the diplomacy, commerce and rationality which will lessen the rage for war over time.2 In Erasmus, the gospel emerges as a “how much more”; if a heathen can be convinced by his own self-interest to sue for peace, “how much more” the Christian who receives the Eucharist. As Charles Taylor showed, this revulsion at barbarity eventually learned to do without the “how much more”.

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1 Rummel, *The Erasmus Reader*, 292.
2 Ibid., 304.
Part of developing a response to violence that rises above secular explanations to become a gospel ethic, I believe, demands a christological account of violence.\(^3\) In this account we look expectantly not only for historical evidence of where humans are indeed this murderous, nor only for a psychological account of how a person finally rises to kill, nor only for a sociological description of how community dynamics conspire to elicit violence.\(^4\) All of these answers must be respected if our previous account of the incarnation as the preservation within difference of human nature is to be sustained. But here I am interested in the way the presence of Christ draws together these natural questions and leaps forward, giving an un-guessable account of the roots of violence.

It is our argument here, following Balthasar, that violence is more than only a particularly morbid example of the many ways humans sin. As Raymond Schwager points out, violence has a paradigmatic place within the biblical taxonomy of sins. This is exemplified in the description of the earth in Genesis 6:11: “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence.” Sin here “is characterized with one single word: violence (hamas)”.\(^5\) At the other end of scripture we read regarding the fallen

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3 Violence is, by now, an immensely broad term that has become not only a word for killing, pillage and rape, but also racism, abject poverty, psychological abuse, “micro-aggressions” and the whole catalogue of ways humans are bad to each other. My focus here is on violence as killing, but a fuller treatment of violence would go beyond to address “malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy and all slander” (1 Pet. 2:1). For a good discussion of the broad theme of violence in the New Testament see Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, Killing Enmity: Violence and the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

4 Among many authors, we can cite Grace Jantzen who fingers the roots of violence as a “cultural habitus” that has spread in western culture by a conspiracy of forces, theological, philosophical, scientific, psycho-analytic and political, and that has “normalized” violence, subsuming it underground as the natural, inevitable life of the human race. Cf. Grace M. Jantzen, “Roots of Violence, Seeds of Peace,” Conrad Grebel Review 20, no. 2 (2002): 4–19.

Babylonian harlot that “her sins are heaped high as the heavens”, for she traded in human lives and in her “was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on earth” (Rev. 18:5,24). Violence sacramentalizes humans’ rebellion and alienation from God.⁶

What we will try to see is Balthasar’s reading of violent history as occurring “in Christ.” All worldly history is revealed in its truest and ruthlessly real state when understood as writhing in an encounter with the ever-present Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples who by the Spirit become his body in the course of the world’s days. In various ways, Balthasar shows us that in his ascension, Jesus never “left” the world, but presses into it now with relentless universality, in and beyond the church. It is the vocation of the saints to live in the crushing pressure between Christ and the world.

That is why the message of Jesus as an eschatological message, cannot be surpassed even within the confines of world history, whether it is adopted or rejected by a majority of mankind or suppressed by eschatological counterdesigns, artificially imposed. On the basis of this eschatological provocation introduced by Christ, the drama enacted between God and mankind, and between men themselves as they put forward and defend their warring systems of meaning, is already a drama ‘in Christ’.⁷

Our ambition here must remain modest. We cannot offer anything like a full accounting of violence in its causes, forms and cures. This is not a full theological or biblical reckoning of murder and its place in the fall, atonement and discipleship. We must leave to a future essay the way this view of violence is taken up by Balthasar to solve vexing questions in atonement theology. We cannot even address all that Balthasar has to say about violence. Using Balthasar’s *Theo-Drama* IV as a prime text, I will show how Christ’s embrace of

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finite, human life becomes a kind of virus in the bowels of the rebellious world, eliciting a
gag reflex by which the world is both saved and destroyed.

Gospel pacifism responds to a violence Jesus himself provokes in his incarnation.
John H. Yoder said, “The good news is that the violence with which we heirs of Cain
respond to our brothers’ differentness is the occasion of our salvation. Were it not for that
primeval destructive reflex, there would have been no suffering servant, and no wisdom and
power of God in the cross.” To this Balthasar would respond: agreed; however, the reverse
must also be said. The suffering servant, the wisdom and the power of the cross have
provoked a “primeval destructive reflex.” A theme text in *Theo-Drama* IV is John 15:22
where Christ says, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin.” Or, as
he paraphrases, “it is only when heaven is wide open that hell too yawns at our feet.” It is
precisely the love (the nonresistance!) of Jesus that provokes violence and it is this violence
that nonresistance responds to.

Regaining a view of violence as *theo-dramatic*, will, I believe, energize the church to
pray, suffer, and love in the face of this violence with renewed vision for its role in the theo-
drama. To walk in this path is to know in one’s body that when the world descends to its
orgies of violence, it is roiling in a deeper, apocalyptic warfare encompassing the church in
her offering as she watches with her Master: “Then comes the end, when he hands over the
kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and
power” (1 Cor 15:24).

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The centrepiece of Balthasar’s trilogy is the *Theo-Drama* in which he describes the action whereby God enters the human story, thereby setting in motion a saving drama in which the human community has a real role to play. In *Theo-drama* I he set out his dramatic categories by gleaning the insights of great dramatists in history. This he followed with *Theo-drama* II and III, titled in German, “Die Personen des Spiels” or “dramatis personae,” in which he drew a picture of a human person strung with tension: “[O]n the one hand the creature is manifestly free before God…, and, on the other hand this freedom is a freedom ‘in Christ’—and it is only ‘in Christ’ that theological persons can exist at all.”

Balthasar’s *Theo-drama* IV is titled “The Action” and it is here that he reflects on the events of salvation history. The tension in this figure of the human, living a form of freedom as a creature, but finally denied true freedom except as it is ‘in Christ’, is an inherently unstable condition. In fact, Balthasar says, it is “so explosive that it [is] bound to burst into flame in the conflagration of the action; accordingly, we begin this volume ‘under the sign of the Apocalypse’.”

It is this startling assertion that we wish to elaborate in this exposition of violence. Balthasar structures *Theo-Drama* IV around an interpretation of the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation unveils the larger cosmic drama in which infinite freedom (God) saves the world by entering finite freedom and spurring an apocalyptic drama.

### 4.1 Mennonite Interpretation of Revelation

Balthasar sets up our view of the “action” between God and the world in *Theo-Drama* IV by framing his soteriology in a reflection on the book of Revelation. As such it can be

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10 Ibid.

11 Ibid. *Theo-Drama* is five volumes in the English translation we are using, but is four volumes in the German edition. The English volumes 2 and 3 are volume 2 in German.
placed beside Mennonite works on Revelation that have ventured into this territory. In the previous chapter on Chalcedon, it was safe to declare that we were bringing something relatively new to Mennonite discourse over pacifism. Here, on the other hand, we are adding nuance and depth to considerable work already done. It is perhaps not surprising that a tradition that counts Hans Hüt, Melchior Hoffmann and Bernard Rothman as its forefathers would take an interest in apocalyptic theology. Balthasar could lead Mennonite exegesis back to its dramatic roots in the Anabaptist apocalyptic fervor, to a time when the Word of God was understood to be a working, live, dramatic stirring of world-events. Recent works, however, rather than focusing on the urgency of an age on the brink of Parousia, turn the rhetoric of apocalyptic theology to shape discipleship in an age of militarism, destructive capitalism and the ruin of creation. That is, rather than focusing on the Apocalypse as a window to divine action in history, the focus is on the kind of endurance and faithfulness saints need to exhibit as disciples.

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12 In addition to the main works mentioned below, see J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Brazos Press, 2010), who sees the emphasis in Revelation on empire-resistance through the church’s worship. Thomas N. Finger’s two-volume systematic theology used eschatology as its formal structure; *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach*, vol. 2 (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1989). He reverses the normal order and begins with eschatology and ends with a discussion of the nature of God. See also Loren L. Johns, ed., *Apocalypticism and Millennialism: Shaping a Believers Church Eschatology for the Twenty-First Century* (Pandora Press, 2000); and Yeatts, *Revelation*. Though not only the work of Anabaptist writers, Ted Grimsrud’s *Compassionate Eschatology: The Future as Friend* (Eugene, Or: Wipf & Stock, 2011) contains a now-familiar interest in rehabilitating apocalyptic rhetoric from the violence for which it has often been harnessed. Nathan Kerr in his discourse-framing work *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 131., applauds John H. Yoder as the paradigmatic apocalyptic theologian for holding that “Jesus lives, concretely and in history, a life-story that is entirely free from and irreducible to any pre-given ‘historical’ coordinates, and general or ‘meta’ principle that might serve to range the complexities and contingencies of his history within any universalizable scope or logic.”

13 Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981), 317–18. Which is not to say that our aim is to re-kindled the chiliastic excesses of 1525, or 1534, in our time; only the lived awareness and expectation of knowing the world to live and move within the providential hand of the Word.
Among Mennonite commentators on Revelation, the exegetical work of Loren Johns’s *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John* is significant and has opened a door for pacifist interpretations of Revelation. After an extensive description of the place of the lamb and lamb symbolism in the Ancient Near East, early Judaism, and the Old Testament, Johns describes the way the lamb imagery of Revelation is wielded by the writer as a rhetorical strategy to form his congregations in faithful nonviolent resistance. He argues “that the images of the lion and the lamb were created specifically to address competing visions of how the Messiah wields power”. The rhetoric of the Lamb’s triumph “unmasks the power of violence.” Johns moves interpretation of the Lamb away from a dependence on cultic Old Testament ritual sacrifice to a rhetorical device used by John to incite the church to suffer non-violently, to “follow the Lamb wherever he goes.”

J. Denny Weaver is keenly interested in the Lamb of Revelation in the development of his *Nonviolent Atonement*. Following Loren Johns, he argues that “the confrontation of church and empire depicted symbolically throughout Revelation is a nonviolent confrontation” dependent on the death and resurrection of Christ. Christians participate in this victory through their testimony of death and witness and are never called there to fight violently. Further, “the supposed battle scenes are not really battles at all”; they are over before they begin. Weaver seeks to demonstrate (with Johns) that expiation, particularly as

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15 Ibid., 38–39. Johns discerns that as a general rule, the scriptures use ἀρνίον for “lamb” in a sacrificial sense, and ἄρνιον to indicate vulnerability. Revelation uses ἄρνιον exclusively.


interpreted by Anselm, cannot be supported by the Lamb Christology of Revelation. Rather, the Lamb is used in Revelation as an image of defenseless resistance, or rather, as a symbol of the nonviolent victory Christ won on Golgotha.

What should be noted in these authors is a unified interest in locating the text of Revelation within the first-century confrontation between the church and the empire. This language empowered the relatively powerless early church to hold up a resistance to the onslaught of the empire’s idolatry. So, it is argued, contemporary Christians living the way of Jesus can believe that their costly obedience is in imitation of the Lamb’s mode of conquest. What is emphasized, though, is the nonviolent ethic that the Lamb rhetoric elicits. Revelation for these writers is not so much a christological account of violence as a persuasion to Christian nonviolence. This is summarized well by John R. Yeatts, author of the Believers Church Commentary on Revelation: “The message of Revelation is developed around the primary symbol of Christ the Lamb, who overcame persecution, not by military force and political violence, but by suffering love and exemplary martyrdom.”

Regarding the seven seals depicted in Revelation 6, Yeatts observes that they are “a series of six seal judgments portraying the inevitable progression in a world that trusts in military solutions to problems. The point is that war leads to civil strife, which in turn leads to material deprivation and finally to death.”

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18 Yeatts, Revelation, 26.
19 Ibid., 27. Later in a discussion of the evil associated with the seals, Yeatts asks, “In what sense is Christ responsible for the evil in the world?” He replies that all power, though it comes from God is misused by humans with free will and this results in “war, civil strife, famine and death. Nevertheless, in the process, God turns this misuse of power into righteous judgement for breaking the laws of justice built into the created universe.” Ibid., 136. What is lacking here is what Balthasar would call a genuine drama in which evil is both dependent and respondent to God’s prior gifting of creation with freedom in Christ.
Each of the Mennonite writers noted here is concerned that salvation be kept ethical and worries that any divine intention or sacrificial meanings to “the slain Lamb” will fund the belief that violence can redeem the world after all, if not by inflicting it, then by suffering its abuse. It may be the case though that an overriding concern to separate God as far as possible from violence leaves violence with only secular explanations. Balthasar, I will argue, adds a vital dramatic description of the clash between the church and the world and enables gospel pacifists to see their ethics as participating in God’s relationship with violence.

4.2 The Apocalypse as Divine and Human Rhetoric

This can be seen clearer, when we note a difference of posture between Balthasar’s treatment of the Apocalypse and Loren Johns’s *The Lamb Christology*. This concerns the nature of images such as the “Lamb” used in Revelation. Johns’s approach is to see the Lamb as a rhetorical strategy that John adapted from his historical-religious context and turned for his purposes. “[T]he modern reader must determine whether the rhetorical force of a traditional image lies in John’s dependence upon or reiteration of that image, along with its traditional world view, or whether it lies in John’s particular use of and redefinition of that image—or even his repudiation of its traditional world view.” Johns adopts the second and

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22 I am highlighting Johns’s approach not because he is unique in it, but because he is a leading Mennonite exegete who seeks a reading of Revelation contributing to a theology of peace.

possibly the third option. The instructive thing to look out for, in this reading strategy, is the unique “spin” John places on stock rhetorical devices within his tradition. For modern readers the task is to be aware of these images’ rhetorical performance, both in the text and in our own discourse, and to thereby “keep it ethical” by utilizing the images in keeping with Revelation’s intent. The emphasis here is on the constructive role of the author John in wielding rhetorical material for his own purposes in his churches. Johns cites Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza as a guide for his own approach, who says the Apocalypse is a poetic-rhetorical work. It seeks to persuade and motivate by constructing a “symbolic universe” that invites imaginative participation. The strength of its persuasion for action lies...in the “evocative” power of its symbols as well as in its hortatory, imaginative, emotional language, and dramatic movement, which engage the hearer (reader) by eliciting reactions, emotions, convictions, and identifications. 

Balthasar would be worried about an approach stated this way and the perspective he adopts instead forms an aspect in how he offers us a theology of human violence. Though he would not deny that John had a role in shaping the text, this approach would simply not be dramatic enough for him. For example, he is pleased by the title of Austin Farrar’s book, A Re-Birth of Images, but is critical of the subtitle, The Making of St. John’s Apocalypse.

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25 According to Kevin Mongrain’s exquisite overview of Balthasar’s dramatic theology, Balthasar saw a “Gnosticism” in biblical critics’ desire to detach themselves from the drama of the divine event which these texts are, and narrate the texts from above. “The idea that revelation can be narrated objectively is post-Christian in that it assumes God’s interactions with humanity can be surveyed from a higher, neutral perspective.” Mongrain, The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs Von Balthasar, 44. For Balthasar’s understanding of Scripture see Oakes, Pattern of Redemption, 183–208.
“Making” sounds too subjective. According to Balthasar, John received a vision from God and the text needs to be interpreted as such. Balthasar, in his trilogy, makes much of the fact that drama (and discipleship we could say here), comes from contemplation, from beholding the glory of God beyond our own constructions, as it enters the world. Accordingly, for Balthasar, John “is not a dramatist, but someone commissioned to write down objectively the events shown to him.” The book unveils that God is the subject of such disclosure (apocalypse). The book functions within divine providence, and the seer’s human contribution is enveloped within that larger divine action. “An objective world of images exists in God; excerpts from it are communicated now to this prophet, now to that, until in the Apocalypse of John a kind of summa is distilled from it.” The truth of the revealed images is “guaranteed by the fact that he is their Revealer.” God is the One doing the revealing and the book needs to be interpreted by the Christian reader as such. “Ultimately the book of Revelation, coming after all the other books of the New Testament, remains what it is: a window into the ever-greater world of God, which defies all attempts at systematization on our part.” The Apocalypse is in itself an intrusion into the world by God that John receives and that ricochets to his readers down the centuries. It also witnesses to an intrusion into the world by God. Thus the bewildering use of past, present and future tense in the book. The book of Revelation is God bringing the eschatological victory of the Lamb into immediate encounter with the church and the world at every “present” it faces via this vision

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27 Ibid., 4:19.
28 Ibid., 4:16.
29 Ibid., 4:18.
granted to John. Joseph Mangina in his commentary on Revelation states what Balthasar also sees:

We can thus see Revelation as a kind of “apocalyptic haggadah,” a rehearsal, a narrative, a memory of an event that is past that is somehow not past, but our present reality, and that toward which all of history is headed. Time is not annulled but transformed. The Spirit traverses even to the end of time, but then returns, bringing the end itself with him. The one who stands at both the beginning and the end is Jesus Christ.

As the Spirit brings the reality of the Christ to bear on the world through a re-birth of images, the world encounters Christ in his most drama-inducing glory. The world is not permitted the stupor of denial; it can no longer claim that past events such as the crucifixion, ascension and Pentecost, nor the future coronation of the Lamb as the Lord of history for all to see, are not of the most immediate, pressing urgency. It unveils the victory of the Lamb in such a way as to inflict upon the dark powers the unimaginable assurance of their own demise as “the nations” arrayed against the body of Christ in the world.

It is for this reason that Balthasar is constantly downplaying scholarly interest in the discovery of precedents the book of Revelation may have had in ancient culture, politics or religion. He is constantly diminishing any possibility of reducing it to “coded” referrals to historical epochs in the church’s life, either ancient, modern or future. These interests fail to

30 Joseph L. Mangina, Revelation (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 31.
31 Balthasar, Theo-Drama, 1994, 4:15, 16–17, 20, 20n7, 31n3, 33, 37, 38, 42. In this Balthasar is going against the stream of considerable historical-critical opinion. Adela Yarbro Collins writes, “Perhaps the hardest won and most dearly held result of historical-critical scholarship on the Revelation to John is the theory that the work must be interpreted in terms of the historical context in which it was composed.” “Political Perspective of the Revelation to John,” Journal of Biblical Literature 96, no. 2 (June 1977): 241. Richard Hays says, though, that this approach has yielded “surprisingly slight results” since so little can be recreated of the historical setting. Also, much of the material seems to be set in heaven rather than on earth. Richard Hays, The Moral Vision of the New
grasp the freedom of the divine Orator in re-making and unleashing these images, and of the historical impact which the presence of the supernatural had in the life of John and in the lives of Revelation’s readers henceforth. The images of Revelation are Christ’s “modes of appearance”, his chosen manner of appearing within the world that are not any less “real” for being apocalyptic scripture. An important sentence describing what is happening in the book of Revelation vis-à-vis the churches, is that “the images are like a mysterious ‘dogmatics’ that stands, irreducible, over against the actualization of the Church’s life.”

This also points to a concern in Balthasar’s work that will recur in this chapter; the encounter between God and the world is an “un-guessable” event. It is genuine revelation. This is Balthasar’s understanding of the role of Revelation in divine providence and it is a crucial aspect of understanding theo-dramatic violence. Revelation’s images are the God-revealed depths of history as it exists in dramatic encounter with the Lamb.


32 “[V]on Balthasar is compelled to argue that historical-critical scholars are historically naïve when they bracket out the presence of the supernatural in the lives of the author’s who produced the canonical Scriptures. The historical critics betray their own ideals with their a priori bias that the supernatural was not a real historical presence for the authors of the canonical texts. Claiming to be a historical scholar while ignoring the real historical presence of the supernatural in a particular place, person, and time, von Balthasar would argue, is a contradiction.” Mongrain, The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs Von Balthasar, 123.


34 Ibid., 4:46.
4.3 Liturgy and Slaughter

What is unveiled in Revelation is a crescendo-ing rhythm of liturgy and slaughter, divine judgement which evokes praise from the lips of saints.\textsuperscript{35} The saints laud the judgments of God but are also on the receiving end of divinely-goaded violence. The victory of the Lamb is such that it seems to yield only more determined opposition, and so there is a deep irony in the laud of the saints because the event they are celebrating inevitably escalates a \textit{mega thlipsis}, intense pressure.

Balthasar goes through Revelation vision by vision to show that its function as scripture is to unveil this revolt, assert the divine wielding of the world’s most demonic acts, and unleash the liturgy of praise which this mystery reveals. The seven seals “open up the stage of the entire world action.” John is shown “the eschatological crisis toward which history is running, once it had been set in motion by the Lamb’s breaking the seal.”\textsuperscript{36} Here world history is unveiled as theo-dramatic, spurred to action by the Lamb. Balthasar calls the first four horsemen “timeless dimensions” of fallen existence (“life is a fierce wrestling for superiority”, “life is controlled by reward and retribution”, life is a “justice” which is given to the world, and finally “life is destined for death”)\textsuperscript{37} that are nonetheless attributable indirectly to the Lamb’s authoritative rule over time. These are aspects of the violent refusal of the world unleashed by the Lamb’s opening of the seals. The fifth and sixth seals are more

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 4:56.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 4:71.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 4:30–31.
concrete; “injustice rules, and the oppressed cry out urgently for right to be restored: they have to be patient.” The end is both impatiently and anxiously awaited.

The series of judgements that are unveiled in the seven trumpets “give a fantastic portrayal of the demonization of human history”. Balthasar sees Revelation 11:15 to be a decisive marker in the book: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will live for ever and ever.” With this enthronement we hear the third woe, which is “the immediate reality of God’s mighty power and wrath and his judgement upon the dead.” As the Messiah appears on earth in greater clarity in 11:15 and in the birth of the Child in 12:2, now “the devil comes forth in person (as opposed to the mere smoke from the abyss and his demonic offspring in 9:1-21); a further stage is reached when he assumes concrete shape in the two beasts…unmasking himself as the perverse mimic of the divine Trinity.”

A central conviction of Balthasar’s interpretation is that there is a trajectory within the book. As Christ becomes more “concrete” or incarnated in the world, so also does the evil power of Satan. With every revelation of the intense suffering love of the Lamb comes the revelation of more pointed, vicious and imitative violence against the Lamb. Each increase in the Lamb’s pressure on the world is met by a more knowledgeable, pointed, intent revolt. Revolt becomes more self-conscious, and free. But in this heightened self-awareness, the revolt comes to consume the sinner, it increasingly overwhelms his own life. In this increased

38 Ibid., 4:30.
39 Ibid., 4:33.
40 Ibid., 4:34.
41 Ibid., 4:34–35.
self-consciousness of revolt, is an increase in divine judgement. He describes how the judgments described in Revelation 16,

show symbolically how the divine anger penetrates the sinner’s whole interior and exterior milieu: it is a psycho-physical abscess…. Nor do these things lead to conversion but—as in the case of the Egyptian plagues, which in many ways serve as a “type” here—to an ever-greater hardening of the heart. The plagues are not institutions of mercy: they are judgement; they lay bare the presence, in souls, of the essence of evil.42

Judgement in Balthasar’s interpretation is the incursion of divine fire into the world that brings evil out into the open and pushes it onto the stage, where its secret intent can no longer be disguised. “[S]in becomes unbearable torment.”43 Each of these cross-sections “reveals the total theological situation of history with regard to the opposition of faith and unbelief.”44 Balthasar thus sees Revelation not as coded referrals to discrete world events, whether in John’s day or thereafter, but as the divine manner and occasion of “rubbing it in”, relentlessly pressing in the true reality of Christ to a world that violently refuses to accept it. This Apocalypse drives the world to paroxysms of self-destructive violence within which the divine judgement of sin can be perceived. Scripture plays an on-going role in theo-dramatic history by unveiling the Lamb whose presence provokes judgement.

Balthasar’s reading of Revelation offers a perspective on the question of whether God is “violent.” As noted earlier, Mennonite commentators have sought to show that the victory of the Lamb is a nonviolent one since it is by his cross that all the victories of Revelation unfold. As such Revelation has played a significant role in the discussion of whether “nonviolence” as it appears in Jesus’s teachings and death can be seen as the revelation of

42 Ibid., 4:37.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 4:40.
God’s nature.\textsuperscript{45} Does God kill people? J. Denny Weaver argues that as interpreted by Christ, God does not kill and he goes to some length to show that Revelation does not show God killing people but rather that the divine “violence” in Revelation is only sinful people bringing on themselves the consequences of their own sins.\textsuperscript{46}

Balthasar would not deny that the judgement of Revelation is something sinners, at one level, bring on themselves, but he tries to do more justice to the language of divine intention in the Apocalypse than Weaver. The liturgy that sings its praise to God in the wake of the destruction points to a deeper mystery than only the consequences of human deeds being unveiled: “Here alone in the New Testament, a resounding “Hallelujah” greets the most terrible ruination there portrayed (Rev 19:1, 3, 4, 6).”\textsuperscript{47} Whether the destruction is wrought by humans, demonic beasts or by the wrath of the Lamb itself, the response of the saints is to praise God and his judgements. This implies a divine intentionality and action behind the judgement. The slaughter is cause for divine adoration. And yet the description veils over the violence, often portraying it as already past.\textsuperscript{48}

In short we could say that for Balthasar, God is able to destroy his enemies by giving them more and more freedom, and that where there is no violation of freedom there is no violence. The divine responsibility without murderous guilt for the “ruination” depicted is explained by Balthasar in terms of the motif of “handing over”, a recurring “\textit{traditio}” that he sees in Revelation. This \textit{traditio} has its origins in the Trinity where in the \textit{processio} of the

\textsuperscript{45} See also the extended discussion with various authors in Various authors, “Is God Nonviolent?” \textit{The Conrad Grebel Review} 21, no. 1 (2003).

\textsuperscript{46} Cf. Weaver, \textit{The Nonviolent God}, 35–53.


\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 4:41.
Father he hands himself over to the Son gifting the Son with infinite freedom and glory. The Son uses this freedom (divinity) to reciprocate in gratitude. Within this primal “traditio” is included every subsequent handing over. As we will see in more detail in the next section, freedom, for Balthasar carries within it a weight, a demand of return, or reciprocity. There is no “neutral” way of having freedom. It has this hidden weight within it because of its analogy to the primal traditio of the Son’s generation in the Father. To give someone freedom is to weight them with the beckon to participate in divinity.

The Son is handed over to creation, given for the world. This revelation in the world gives a freedom to the world, and again the weight, the expectation of return in gratitude. In the world, “the Lamb has the same authority to hand on gifts (traditio) to others.”\textsuperscript{49} This Lamb “is God’s mode of involvement in, and commitment to, the world; the Lamb is both ‘worthy’ and ‘able’ not only to symbolize God’s involvement but to be it.”\textsuperscript{50} “This ‘handing over’ is repeated more than twenty times in the Book of Revelation: the horsemen are given their insignia and hence their power; the first beast is given the power to wage war against the saints; the second beast is allowed to give breath to the image of the first beast; the angels too are given bowls of wrath and the power to hurt the earth, and so forth.”\textsuperscript{51} All manner of agents are “given” freedom and power by the Lamb’s revelation on earth which dramatizes created existence. The freedom that God gives in his trinitarian pattern is always interlocked with mission, the calling to return an offering of thanks. But this mission when turned upside-down blasphemously by the sinner in the grip of beastly power, becomes an

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 4:52. Note that Balthasar considers the book of Revelation to be written by the same John who wrote the gospel of John. He sees continuity between the two writings.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 4:53.
empowering to destroy itself. God in this way is “powerless”, giving his power and freedom over to the world, both offering himself in self-less love for the salvation of the world and thereby also radically endowing the world with freedom—an endowment that issues out in both obedience and revolt. But within this “powerlessness” of granting weighted freedom we see the omnipotence of God, the refusal of God to countenance the refusal of his love. In this reciprocity of loving revelation, gifting freedom and sinful, grasping freedom leading to intensified revolt, we see what Balthasar calls the “the specifically theological law of proportionate polarization: the more God intervenes, the more he elicits opposition to him”.

“The suffering by which God’s wrath accomplishes his work is a divine suffering; vengeance and reconciliation are two sides of the same thing.” The Lamb handed over to the world brings fire which both destroys and cleanses, both reduces to ashes and purifies of sin.52

Here we see that the bi-directional nonresistance centred in the incarnation that we saw in the previous chapter, becomes an active force in the world, spurring historical action by the powers. In Balthasar’s hands, neo-Chalcedonian Christology points to a dramatic involvement of the Lamb in history, pressing in a trinitarian dynamic that sets the world on a tense edge.

Thus the argument of Weaver that in Revelation evil destroys itself, can be dramatized by showing a greater divine origin and destiny in the freedom that humans are given. Any debate about whether or not God is violent, needs to define violation. Balthasar

52 Ibid., 4:61. He does an extensive tour of the presence of fire in the Old and New Testament, showing how it both destroys and saves. The scene of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego serves as an example of this dual function of the same fire. Jesus is said to baptize with fire, bringing in one flame both the Spirit’s power and the stubble burning furnace into which all who bear no fruit are cast. Ibid., 4:59–63. See also Mangina, Revelation, 124.
tries to define violation theologically, as the failure to preserve the triune structure within human response. Where God preserves this triune structure within human life, even goading it relentlessly, he cannot be said to be violent. God judges the wicked without violating this primal trinitarian analogy in the heart of human rebellion. By “handing over” power, God is taking away neutrality and actively setting humans on the knife edge of decision; their very revolt is merely a perversion of the “reciprocity” with which freedom is weighted in the trinitarian processions and is thus Christic in its shape, though it becomes an upside-down mission. It is this inner mystery of the Lamb’s suffering gift of freedom empowering the world’s twisted mission that is lauded by the saints and angels. But of course, this judgement does result in much flowing blood, and giving even a hint of divine causality to it will raise a further question of theodicy.

And God will not stop. As the book of Revelation unfolds in succeeding “cross-sections” of divine judgement and human revolt, there is an increasing merging of God’s judgement and human’s violent resistance. This is more than God “permitting” human evil and suffering it. This is God revealing himself in the Lamb’s love, which at the same time gives a greater freedom to the creature to revolt back—in fact it goads the creature’s response. God is providentially wielding human’s evil response to the Lamb in such a way as to bring about the collapse of evil upon itself. In this way, there is a mysterious divine hand hidden within human violence, and this elicits the choruses of worship. God is not simply anti-violence.

53 This question Balthasar does not address here; namely, is this whole drama worth it, in the end? Was this whole theo-drama “necessary” for God in light of its apparent cost in the blood of his enemies? But see Theo-Drama, 1994, 4:191–95. Balthasar’s Dare We Hope: “That All Men Be Saved” is perhaps his attempt to ameliorate this question raised by our unease at the grand worship given to God in the wake of Revelation’s judgements.
Because these images have their source in the infinite God there is an ever-greater “raising of the stakes” in the divine-human encounter that escalates to a fever pitch.54 “Within God’s own self—for where else is the creature to be found?—and in the defenselessness of absolute love, God endures the refusal of this love; and, on the other hand, in the omnipotence of the same love, he cannot and will not suffer it.”55 On the one hand, it cannot be said that God only stands on the receiving end of violence, suffering in the Lamb. On the other it cannot be said that God’s ‘violence’ stands apart from its manifestation in the agency of humans, angels and beasts. In Revelation all violence is taken up into Theo-drama.

Violence then for Balthasar is revealed and understood “under the sign of the Apocalypse.” What Erasmus called a “Fury” that “appeared with such harmful powers, to scatter, demolish, and destroy them all and to sow an insatiable lust for fighting in the human heart” is humankind in the grip of the Lamb. Only there is its ferocity and persistence believable, and there is its mysterious relation to divine providence glimpsed. Balthasar is seeking to reclaim Revelation from a detached, historical-critical or rhetorical-critical place within the church and submit to its function as divine vision. As such Balthasar points Mennonite pacifism to understand violence as it is spoken of in the New Testament as a Messianic woe, something that must be endured in union with Christ. Pacifism becomes then the willingness to live theo-dramatic existence, the suffering of Christ’s presence in the world, the church’s assent to, and proclamation of the world’s violence as a non-secular reality. The assertion of secularity can here be understood as theo-dramatic, an idolatrous refusal of trinitarian procession, the apocalyptic imitation of the freedom of God in his tri-

54 Ibid., 4:56.
55 Ibid., 4:329.
personal distinction. But what exactly is it about the Lamb that the world seeks to smother? What’s to hate about outpoured love, victorious and crowned at last? To that we now turn.

4.4 The Pathos of Humankind in Its Incarnational Form

What makes the Lamb such a disturber of the peace is closely related to the dynamics of the incarnation which we discussed in the previous chapter. It is Christic unity in difference lived out as bi-directional nonresistance that, as the answer to a deep human dilemma, both scandalizes and attracts. In this section we will try to explain some of the psycho-spiritual realities that Balthasar sees as structuring human responses to infinite freedom revealed as love, and then we will show how these realities are synthesized or resolved in the incarnation—an action which has the theo-dramatic results we have seen in Revelation.

It is helpful to note that Balthasar lived and worked during a time in the Catholic church when the understanding of the relationship between nature and grace was deeply controverted. Karl Rahner is a constant presence in the background for these initial chapters of Theo-drama IV in which the apocalyptic backdrop to soteriology is being established. Rahner argued for a “supernatural existentiale” within humanity. This was an apologetic approach to theology based on the incarnation that said Christian revelation revealed to modern people new, fresh and fulfilling aspects of what had already been their experience.


57 Balthasar frequently contrasts his position here to the view that humankind is in some way prepared for God’s revelation and that “the incarnation of God is the unique and highest instance of the actualization of the essence of human reality.” Karl Rahner in Foundations of Christian Faith, quoted in Ibid., 4:283.
This led to the famous possibility of “anonymous Christians”, people who had not received notice of the gospel, but who, at some level, already lived and believed what it taught.\(^{58}\) Balthasar here uses the “Sign of the Apocalypse” to situate the religious posture of a post-Christian world differently. He worries that Rahner’s “supernatural existentiale” becomes something of a closed system lacking theo-drama.\(^{59}\) Revelation, Balthasar fears, then becomes only the revealing of what was always the case within the structure of the human, rather than the dramatic confrontation of God with humans’ refusal, and the unveiling of a rescue and healing that includes but goes beyond nature. For Balthasar, the incarnational likeness within humankind is not merely something already there, latent beneath the surface, but rather something that must be agonistically struggled for.\(^{60}\) As opposed to Rahner, Balthasar is tuned to the inability, frustration and hostility with which humans run up against the limits of their knowledge of God, and to the drama of spiritual union by which the incarnation comes to fruition in the saints. Balthasar believes that the liturgy and slaughter of Revelation reveals an agonistic psycho-spiritual dynamic within human existence.

Balthasar understands human life to be enmeshed in a deep pathos and miserable dilemma. This pathos is the source of great anxiety and it lies at the root of human rebellion against the Lamb. Nature and grace, though resolved at the archetypal level in the

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\(^{58}\) As Karen Kilby notes, the difference between Rahner and Balthasar on the issue of “anonymous Christians” is ambivalent. Balthasar accepted the possibility of salvation outside explicit Christianity and is even more emphatic than Rahner about universal salvation. According to Kilby, at the base of Balthasar’s criticisms of Rahner was the worry that he undercut the possibility of witness, of martyrdom and suffering for the sake of Christ. Karen Kilby, “Balthasar and Karl Rahner,” in The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 259.


incarnation, seem impossible to reconcile at an historical, existential level. Here is how this dilemma emerges: Humans can see that their lives are a fickle, relative affair. They live in the constantly shifting sands of time and their lives are but a moment in a stream. And yet, in spite of this ephemerality, humans show an unshakeable intent to write the absolute upon the relative. They seem endowed and determined to make claims and to desire fulfillment with much more freedom and gravitas than their immediate situation would seem to warrant. They make statements (“this is a true fact” or “I love you”) that they fully intend to be absolutely and not just relatively true, even though they are “aware of living in the medium of time (and time is ceaselessly changing everything).” Balthasar says, “This is the point at which man lifts himself above the animal, whose head does not rise above the water level of time. Man swims in the river with his head lifted clear, aware of Being’s unlimited horizon, its truth and goodness.”

But this intent to raise the head above the water level of time is the source of a pathos, a dilemma in post-lapsarian humans, because it is not at all obvious that these instinctive claims to permanence and truth rest on anything solid. “[M]an’s historical situation in this world is in a state of permanent tension: he is constantly on the lookout for a solution, a redemption [Erlösung], but can never anticipate or construct it from his own resources; nor does he have even an intimation of it.” Life bristles with unresolved tension. Though flashes of “absolute” meaning seem to sparkle everywhere, humans find no key to put the pieces

62 Ibid., 4:81.
63 Ibid., 4:82. For Balthasar this swimming with the head clear is something inherent in what it means to be human, but also something that is heightened in history as God reveals himself in human freedom. Secularity is a time of sharpened self-consciousness about many things.
together in a satisfactory way. This yields frustration as well as hubristic attempts to force the puzzle to resolution by sheer power. That is the pathos, anthropologically and phenomenologically speaking.

We can go one step deeper and see that this connects with something basic in Balthasar’s idea of freedom which he had described in great detail in *Theo-Drama II*. Balthasar’s philosophy of infinite/finite freedom is a vast complex, but for our purposes we need to see finite freedom only in its basic structure of two pillars which coinhere and create the unique situation that humans find themselves in. On the one hand is the pillar of self-determination, *autoexousion*, the freedom to choose and move. In this is self-possession, the unique “I” that situates the person in the world in distinction from others. We are humans who in and of ourselves as created beings have a measure of goodness, meaning and power available to us. It is our possession.

The first pillar of freedom as autonomous motion, however, only comes to be through a second pillar which is freedom as “consent” or indifference. The “I” receives its unique self-possessing autonomous motion not by shutting itself off to others but by recognizing that it is only one being of many, and that it depends for its existence on these others. My “I” is established in the recognition of others on whom I am dependent, such as my mother. Eventually this is the recognition that existence is a gift from others. My existence thus is a unique self-possession, but nevertheless a self-possession I receive from others. This pillar of consent is genuinely freedom, not just the limitation of freedom; it is the open path by which

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64 Ibid., 4:141–42, 149.

65 Ibid., 4:100. Balthasar’s oft-used description of the mother’s smile that awakens the child to consciousness, freedom and love is apt here. Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, Cf. 76.
the person moves out and achieves unity with the farthest destiny of the creature, full unity with God. By consenting to the other I become more free. This second pillar points beyond the self and is thus a “dynamism” a “setting forth for a yonder shore” that is meant to point finite freedom in the direction of its home within infinite freedom.66

Here is how this happens. As I recognize that I receive my existence from others, I soon also see that these others do not have existence in themselves either; they too have a derived, consensual existence. This becomes a never-ending regression since within mundane life no origin or destiny for my life or any other life can be traced. My finite existence, while undoubtedly a good I possess, is “groundless”—that is, nowhere can I find either its origins or its ultimate destiny within my mundane experience. I cannot see where I came from nor where I am ultimately headed—this is obscured by my finitude. Such freedom “is bound to affirm its indebtedness.”67 My life is derived and my existence as an “I” with autonomous, self-possessing motion comes into view when I recognize this dependence.68 Another way of saying this is that “man exists in two poles that cannot be torn asunder; he is always himself and his neighbour.”69

Now let us bring back this pathos that we discussed above, in which humans reach for solidity and a fulfilment that does not seem explainable in purely mundane terms. True fulfillment only comes in the unity of the two pillars of autoexousion or self-determination

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 4:139, 150. “What is consciousness? It is being [Sein] that is aware of its indebtedness to a source beyond itself; discerning being [Sein] and ‘letting be’ [Sein-Lassen], it affirms everything that is, or may yet be, in being.” Ibid., 4:139.
and consent to the other. But the pathos arises because of the “groundlessness” of freedom. After the fall, humans have refused to believe that freedom is “groundless”, and that, as such, existence is dependent on the goodness of a Creator. Humans have sought to be like God, having the ground of their being in themselves. Humans grasp hold of the *autoexousion*, the autonomous “I”, but lie to themselves about it, convincing themselves and others that this self-possession is self-originating and not dependent on consent to the other. In arrogating to themselves the “absolute” they inevitably diminish what in God is a unity of power and goodness (self-giving), shrinking it to pure power alone.\footnote{Ibid., 4:107.} In other words, when humans arrogate God to themselves they arrogate his power, but not the utter self-giving goodness which is the mode of operation for this power. This results in the violent “demonic” nature of humankind in rebellion against the Absolute. “Wherever in the world we find great, powerful symbols of the absolute, they either come from the field of war or are pressing in that direction.”\footnote{Ibid., 4:108.}

The two poles of *autoexousian*, self-determination and “not without the other” locate the instability, and often desperation—pathos—that pervades the human community.\footnote{Ibid., 4:108.} We quest, searching for our ground and destiny, but we also resist acknowledging the precariousness of such derived life. In this we can see that a refusal to recognize one’s dependence on God is of a cloth with one’s refusal to recognize one’s dependence on fellow humans. Modern dilemmas in reconciling the individual and the collective stem from this refusal to see the whole fulfillment of nature in grace.

\footnote{Balthasar discusses death, freedom power and evil as four “wounds of existence” that render the problem of existence unbearable. Ibid., 4:77.}
But now we must take a third step and show that the incarnation is the fulfillment of this two-pillared human freedom:

Having reached this stage, we can venture the Christian affirmation that man, the first Adam, was created with a view to the Second. Not only with a view to God; though true, this is an abbreviation that does not do justice to the creature’s authentic autonomy. Man was created with a view to the God-man; in him, the equipoise between the absolute and the relative, which man cannot discover, has been established. True, this equipoise comes from God, since it is his Word that becomes man, but not without the earth giving her noblest fruit to cooperate in the Incarnation.73

God, “in his freedom, has reserved to himself the gift of synthesis; he will present it to mankind and, in so doing, reveal both who he, God, is and who the authentic man is, the man who exists in the totality of his self”.74 In the incarnation God “solves” the pathos by showing that true human autoexouosian, or self-determination comes from full consent to God beyond the world. In order to appreciate what Balthasar is doing here regarding the “second Adam” we need to remind ourselves of some of the main features of neo-Chalcedonian Christology that we learned in the last chapter. There we learned that the incarnation was the perfect transposition into the humblest human terms of the Son’s eternal hypostatic “letting be” of the Father, his reception of Sonship as his differentiation within the Trinity. Within Christ’s nonresistance to the Father, eternal begotteness becomes in the human field the meek, loving, self-giving, non-resistance of Christ to the human community, even in its manifestation as an enemy. As this Person, Jesus was the fullest expression of divinity in human terms, and the fullest expression of humanity in divine terms. It is this understanding of the incarnation that is structuring Balthasar’s view here of pathos as the desperate attempt to achieve a synthesis apart from where it is revealed in Christ.

73 Ibid., 4:110.
74 Ibid., 4:78.
The Son in eternity, has his own Person through a consent to be begotten from the Father. This eternal letting be and being let be is the divine pattern for an analogous human freedom that also has these two poles. By this eternal hypostatic becoming of the “I” through consent to be begotten from the Father, Christ incarnates and lives in human receptivity, meekness, and self-giving love even the wretchedness of the human community. Christ lives a life of “consent” to the human community of which he is now a part and he therewith “consents” to the Father whose will he has come to fulfill. In this way, the incarnation provides a structure for the fulfillment of human freedom. This is the un-guessable synthesis to the pathos of human freedom that the incarnation unveils in history.

In the Garden desolation, he not only lives this perfect two-pillared freedom, but he does it from within the above-described pathos in which humanity can no longer see how its life has divine meaning. Christ shares in humankind’s anxiety and desperation in the veiling of his eyes from the Father. He lives the cursed refusal of humans to return thanks to God as the sight of his Father is obscured. His cry of alienation from the cross is the cry of all humans who no longer see the God-fulfilled meaning of their lives, who no longer see any solid and absolute truth beyond the chaotic events around them. But it is from the abyss of this pathos taken now into trinitarian relations between Father and Son, that Jesus nevertheless remains contemplative and fixed on the Father’s will. Here is the great exchange: the Son lives the repulsive corruption of the trinitarian procession which had been shrivelled in humanity to a revolt, but gives to that corroded nature his infinite freedom, his eternal Begotteness. Thus Jesus is both the revelation of the deepest pathos of human life played out on the trinitarian stage, and also the fullest revelation of the trinitarian mutuality played out on the human stage. As such he is the event of its resolution—in his self-gift to
the Father and to the world, Christ achieved the reconciliation of all things. It is this Christic
dynamic within human freedom that figures violence as a christological phenomenon in
history, a phenomenon shaped by this trinitarian synthesis in nonresistance.

4.5 The Violent Rejection of the Incarnation

As the revelation and enacting of this reconciliation of the two pillars, Christ has set
himself in the cross-hairs of a human community that in so many ways refuses his answer.
We do not have the space to illustrate how this whole embrace of the human pathos by Christ
slowly escalates during Christ’s life and eventually yields the crucifixion. Christ in this
Chalcedonian formulation of the two pillars takes our place as our representative, and in the
great exchange suffers the pathos in our place, draining the bitter cup of wrath which this
pathos brings upon itself. This is all described in “the action”, and Balthasar brings together
many models of the atonement through this incarnational atonement theology.

What we are concerned with here is not so much the way this escalation incorporates
various aspects of atonement, but simply how Christ’s presence, both in his life, and
subsequently in post-Christian history, draws to itself the hatred of the human community.
Balthasar believes that the more Christ is revealed as this unfathomable synthesis within the
world, the more humans become conscious of themselves in their historical nature. Christ
wakens humans to themselves. Over time in the post-Christian era, where Christ presses in,
there people become more conscious of their self-possessed autonomy. Freedom is latched
onto and exalted. But where the second pillar (consent to the other, and the absolute) is
refused, this growing self-conscious autonomy only heightens anxiety and fear because it
becomes ever-more obvious that it is unsupported within mundane life.
The revolt against Christ is an attempted severing of the incarnation’s unity of self-possession and consent. It is a refusal of what Christ’s synthesis means for the fulfillment of human destiny. It is a refusal to acknowledge that this, finally, is the only possible human fulfillment of freedom. It is a refusal of human limits, “a neglect of man’s relativity and time-bound nature; in Christian terms it involves a disincarnation, a flight from time and presence.” For Balthasar, this is what characterizes life in the secular west: an unprecedented freedom as autonomous motion coupled with an unprecedented refusal of the second pillar, consent. There is thus the heightened vision and temptation to “be like God” in opposition to human creatureliness. Because this heightened vision and self-consciousness nevertheless fails to achieve its goals it occasions a surging anxiety and desperation yielding to violence.

Balthasar sees this refusal to be a kind of Gnosticism. Gnosticism for Balthasar is not only an early-church heresy, but a perennial temptation inherent in incarnational faith. Kevin Mongrain argues that for Balthasar, Gnosticism is a sweeping illness that in any of its forms takes exception to the earthiness of the incarnation on the one hand, and on the other hand, to the fact that humankind needs outside, divine help in achieving gnosis. It rejects the historically contingent events of the biblical narratives as too earthy, it is “disdainful of the Christian claim that the eternal God entered time, becoming incarnate in a human being, suffered, died, and was resurrected as a spiritual body.” It also rejects the utter dependence of humankind on God. What the world then substitutes is divinity without Christ. For Christ and the church the very end-point of divine expression was the assumption of human flesh in

75 Ibid., 4:145.
76 Mongrain, The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs Von Balthasar, 36.
humility and meek devotion to God, but in alienated humankind, Gnosticism seeks divinity by assuming a godlike stance within the world. “Gnosticism becomes synonymous with the claim that the eventual full rational discernment of all the laws of nature and history will allow the human race finally to take away the sins of the world and establish a universal reign of peace, justice, and happiness of earth.”

Secularity in its more malicious forms and Gnosticism are thus closely related for Balthasar. The creature in the throes of the revelation of God incarnate grabs hold of the freedom embedded in this revelation and “tries to arrogate divine nature to itself without sharing in the Person who is always endowing, receiving, pouring forth and giving thanks for that nature—and who embodies its self-giving.” Instead of responding in step with the trinitarian pattern of gift and return, finite freedom “changes it into a calculating, cautious self-preservation.” According to Balthasar, the intent of God to live out deifying love under human conditions is met with a demonic intent to live out hate under godly conditions. It is not met with a demonic intent to “become flesh.” Rather, it is met with a mockery of incarnation and the worship of dis-incarnation.

In the post-Christian era—where the world’s relation to God has objectively been framed by Christ alone, but where humans refuse this synthesis—“man’s openness to the upper realm becomes a purely anthropological fact that belongs henceforth to the immanence

77 Ibid., 138.
78 Balthasar, Theo-Drama, 1994, 4:328. The reason the creature can so casually reject the “whence” of this freedom is because of its freedom, its autoexousian, the gift to be self-determining in a limited way.
79 Ibid.
of horizontal world history.”80 People resist the intensification of the pathos revealed by Christ and seek desperately to solve it, after all, along purely human terms. Hence people’s tendency to “attribute absolute significance to relative fragments of meaning in history and to commit themselves utterly to such constructions” is heated to a degree that can only be described in the liturgy and slaughter of the Apocalypse.81 This is the titanism of post-Christian humanity and it emerges directly out of the pathos described above.

In Balthasar’s view, after Christ’s incarnation, humankind can no longer sustain the comfortable naïveté of an existence suffused with the warm glow of the gods. The numinous path of paganism is foreclosed and in this sense the revelation of the Christic synthesis is the source of secularization for Balthasar. As the one who “solved” the pathos through yieldedness to the Father, Christ has objectively taken all glory and divinity from the gods (thus ‘disenchanting’ nature), and has revealed that this glory can only be found in self-giving, creaturely existence in offering to the Father.83 If humans resist this answer to their pathos, their only option is radical and violent secularization, the desperate fulfillment of human life on its own terms. It cannot be fulfilled any longer by “the gods.” Humans will attempt to orphan the achievements of Christ and replicate them apart from the whole synthesis he achieved.84 “Particularly where Christ’s claim is put provocatively by his

80 Ibid., 4:72.
81 Ibid., 4:73.
83 Ibid. This is similar to the argument of David Bentley Hart, whose indebtedness to Balthasar is well-known though he does not mention him in this case. “God and Nothingness,” in I Am the Lord Your God: Christian Reflections on the Ten Commandments, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Christopher R. Seitz (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 55–76.
followers, pillorying the oppressive forms taken by the state, economics or racist fanaticism”, this secularism will act “in a positively anti-Christian way.”85 This vision, refusing God’s answer to the pathos from beyond this world, guarantees itself “by the greatest possible use of all worldly force (for example, vast stockpiling of arms, police, propaganda, concentration camps)”86. And this “possibility of concentrated power”, which drove the powers to crucify the Savior has since then “increased beyond all imagining…. Weapons produced on the pretext of being for mankind’s redemption would suffice to destroy the entire world, not just once but many times over, and their material potential conceals the spiritual potential of the ‘plan’ that opposes the redemption effected by Christ.”87

One aspect of this grand attempt is the transformation of technology. Before the post-Christian era, technology “referred initially only to the technological improvement of the instruments that serve man” but in the modern era (following Hegel) humans, “having jettisoned metaphysics—gained control of the political and ethical realm and changed society’s entire life into technology. To this technology the autonomy and dignity of the individual were sacrificed.”88 Where technology once was a fragment, a small piece of the puzzle, now it becomes a totality. Violence for Balthasar includes technology loosed from its creaturely role and enslaved in Post-Christian desperation to synthesize nature and grace. It is turned into a refusal to exercise holy endurance, an impatience at the long-protracted process by which God is giving the world its unity in difference. What this yields is modernity’s

85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., 4:441.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 4:91.
destruction of creation. All of this violence is a rejection of the manner in which Christ has reconciled all things in heaven and on earth.

This account of the spiritual reality of post-Christian hubris connects with the description we earlier saw as James Reimer’s understanding. Violence in the modern world according to him was “intrinsically linked to our view of nature, science, and the human as a creative agent with unlimited freedom as a historical being to shape his or her destiny without reference to some absolute realm of justice or limit.”  

89 Reimer also sensed the Christic roots to this notion of the person and suggested that the notion of the modern person was a secularized version of the person as set forth in patristic debates over Christology. Balthasar goes further in elaborating how a neo-Chalcedonian understanding of unity in difference, as modulated by the Son’s self-offering, perverts in modernity to a “sacral” violence that ultimately evades secularization in its idolatry.

This then is an attempt to read modern life through the apocalyptic, dramatic lens offered by the book of Revelation. At the beginning of his venture into theo-dramatics Balthasar wrote this dense paragraph which aptly sums up this dynamic. In it we find a perspective of Christ-dramatized life in the world. Worldly existence dwells under the weight of glory:

Essentially [worldly existence] is an opening-up or a closing-off to the presence of some light that radiates from existence. Seeing or not seeing; letting be or violently overpowering, imprisoning, extinguishing. In oneself or in others. Confusing the power of what seems, shines, radiates gratis (which equally implies surrender and powerlessness) with the power of possession and the urge to dominate. The confrontation of these two kinds of power, the succumbing of the vulnerable, defenseless power to the force of arms, revealing, as it succumbs, the inseparability

within it of power and powerlessness. The vessel shatters, and finite speech with it, thereby opening up to an infinite speech that acts and suffers in it.\textsuperscript{90}

In a Christ-haunted world\textsuperscript{91} existence cannot be a neutral dithering placidly between good or evil. Christ in his un-guessable, startling synthesis of human existence never departs but presses into each moment of the world’s days. Where this is the case, human life can only be “an opening up or a closing-off”, a “letting be or a violently overpowering.” In this milieu where a stark \textit{autoexousian} or self-determination is presented by Christ there will be a constant temptation to grab hold of that freedom and use it now to dominate what can only be had as the free gift of the Father. In this violent clash, the defenselessness of the saints, while appearing to be weakness, will, because of its Christic posture open up an infinite speech of omnipotent power within the world.

\section*{4.6 The Church and Provocation}

This dramatic understanding of the relentless incarnation of Christ can be extended by what Kevin Mongrain sees as Balthasar’s \textit{corpus triforme} understanding of the incarnation. In this perspective of the incarnation the Word takes human form in the Old Covenant, in the earthly life of Jesus, and in the body of Christ which is the church. In this three-phase manifestation of God in human form, the world is confronted in a way that elicits historical change.\textsuperscript{92} The incarnation has a pedagogical function within the divine economy, not only

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\textsuperscript{91} To steal a line from Ralph Wood’s title, \textit{Flannery O’Connor and the Christ-Haunted South} (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005). Flannery O’Connor’s fictional characters are an apt demonstration of humankind weighted with divine freedom, often leading to violent revolt.
\textsuperscript{92} Mongrain, \textit{The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs Von Balthasar}, 29. Mongrain argues that this \textit{corpus triforme} view of the incarnation is an Irenaen understanding of the incarnation that Balthasar used across his work.
appearing among humans but gradually shaping, forming and directing believers in the trinitarian love made manifest and real in the Christ-event. This too is the church’s divine incarnational vocation.

As such, the church, Balthasar will argue, is a key phase in the incarnational unveiling of God and in the pedagogy of the human community. Ethics (faith, hope, and love) within this corpus triforme are a disciplining in the posture of incarnation. But the question for our concern here with dis-incarnated violence is, in what way does the church experience or bear within its body human resistance against this divine path and pattern? First, the church’s long-suffering experience of the provocative incarnation mingles it with the “historical” Jesus of Nazareth and the journey to Jerusalem. The church participates in Christ as he is sent to follow God’s will to the very end of time. Which means that saints “follow his will into the abysses opened up by his provocation, with all the monsters that lurk and slumber there.” The saints live in the fault line between the two tectonic plates of the world and the Lamb and express by their own prayer and lament the pressure created by this grinding collision. This is “the central object of faith’s pondering on this drama” that yields the texture of Christian ethics: “[I]t is as the slain Lamb that he won his victory; it follows that his disciple’s struggle cannot be an armed one, except their armor be the full panoply of

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93 Mongrain is arguing that Balthasar has an Irenaen understanding of the effect of the incarnation in the world.


faith (1Th 5:8; Eph 6:14f), and especially the ‘endurance and faith of the saints (Rev 13:10).’”

In the Book of Revelation, there is only one way to combat the trinity of hell, which is the final shape of evil: believers must bear witness in their lives and in their blood, thus fully incarnating their faith as they pit it against utter, satanic dis-incarnation…. This eschatological opposition between the apparent omnipotence of evil and the apparent mortal powerlessness of believers cannot be dismissed as a mere vision. It is genuine prophecy.  

But this paragraph leads immediately into a section in *Theo-Drama* IV titled, “The Church’s Form: Beautiful and Marred.” This raises for us the question of whether divinely-goaded dis-incarnation is also a feature of the church’s life, or whether it is only the world’s reaction against the church? The church, according to Balthasar, does not only stand with Christ in regard to this provocative finger in the world’s side—the church itself is provoked, scandalized. Balthasar sees the church in history not only standing with Jesus, but also participating, at some level, in the world’s revolt against him. “Her history—past-present and future—is almost inevitably tragic” as she straddles in her existence a bundle of tensions she finds almost impossible to manage.  

In this section, Balthasar does not attribute violence to the church (though he concedes in other places the violence of church history). Balthasar seems willing to grant that

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98 Ibid., 4:452. Balthasar believes that in a world where a “secular” synthesis appears successful it will become increasingly difficult to be a Christian, since the Christian must relativize it all in the name of the incarnate One. Cf. Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, 191.

99 The realms of “time and eternity”, the “already and not yet”, of “visibility and invisibility”, of “obedience and freedom”, of “the order instituted by Christ and the authority and inspiration of the Holy Spirit in each of the Church’s members”, of “tradition and constant newness”, and of “rootedness in the Old Covenant and of that which transcends it.” *Theo-Drama*, 1994, 4:453.
the church itself is sinful, \textsuperscript{100} though he still describes an \textit{immaculata} over against this divided, heretical, and sinful body. \textsuperscript{101} Of chief concern for Balthasar in this section is “the domestication of faith” in which “faith is overtaken and hollowed out by knowledge.” This is a Gnosticism that seems to increase in intensity with every new revelation of the genuine Word of God in history. Wherever there is revelation there is an increased temptation and possibility of securing from it a “law” of history, a birds-eye view now of the way things must be.

A Mennonite steeped in the \textit{Martyrs Mirror} would probably emphasize more bluntly the way in which the church itself has murderously opposed the intensified incarnation of the church in daily life, especially in Anabaptism. The church is the body of Christ and as such participates in his suffering love, but can it carry out at the same time (in other places) the dis-incarnating severing of its members? It seems to me that Balthasar’s own theology points to this possibility in “the church beautiful and marred.” The church itself wrestles with the radical freedom that Christ has infused into worldly life, and is constantly tempted to batten down the hatches and secure by its own strength what revelation it believes now to be in its possession. But as the body which also opens itself to the incarnation, this Gnostic temptation in the church can be overcome.

And this, prophetically, will be the salvation of the world. It is the fruit of the divine determination to love the world in complete incarnate offering, by which God saves and judges the world through its finite freedom. It is as the body of Christ that humankind truly

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid. Cf. Balthasar, \textit{The Glory of the Lord: Seeing the Form}, 1:569–70.

has its way, its fullest freedom, its greatest offering to the salvation of the world. Both by violently rejecting and by lovingly accepting this onslaught, humanity, “guilty as he is in God’s sight, lie[s] passive and anaesthetized on the operating table while the cancer of his sin is cut out.”

4.7 Balthasar and Yoder: A Useful Comparison

Having demonstrated the theme of provocation in Balthasar’s Christology, it may be useful now to draw some lines of comparison between the emphasis of Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder and the thesis of incarnational provocation seen here in Balthasar. I believe that taken together, these theologians are greater than the sum of their parts. These theologians had much in common. Both theologians were seeking to help the church grapple with what it means to live with little cultural and political power. Both were seeking to guide their respective churches in developing theological resources for a renewed engagement and openness to the world. Both saw the “Constantinian” adoption of worldly power by the church in the fourth century to have been a disaster to the witness of the church. It is unlikely that Balthasar could be outdone by Yoder in his assertion that it was “fundamentally important to note that nowhere in the New Testament does the slightest ray of divine glory fall upon the structures of the state…. There is nowhere even the faintest

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102 Ibid., 4:318.
103 I am not aware of either of them ever mentioning the other. They both lived in Basel during the 1950’s and were connected to Karl Barth during that time.
suggestion that the state should take on the form of an earthly reflection, a reproduction or representation of the heavenly Jerusalem and its eschatological glory.”  

Both believed that violence was a decisive symptom of the church’s failure in this worldliness. Both noted that there was in the modern post-christendom church the temptation of another sort of Constantinianism, a progressive application of the “principles” of the cross to the unconverted world as a political and tactical instrument.  

Both believed that the culmination of saintliness in history was not worldly triumph or progress but probable martyrdom.  

It is not difficult to see a kinship between what Yoder called “methodologism” and Balthasar’s understanding of Gnosticism: “according to which theology consists in a theoretical or meta-level discussion concerned primarily with the question of the proper elucidation and interrelationship between an allegedly agreed-upon collection of central concepts or loci, and which can in principle be justified to anyone on the basis of the internal logic of the system itself.”  

Balthasar was constantly wary of any abstractness or speculation in theology. And so both theologians believe that by a fresh openness to the appearance of Christ in his humanity the church could resist both the old and new Constantinianism and be the provocateur of the world’s judgement and salvation.  

But the provocation of Christ in the world highlights what we can see as a mutually beneficial difference between these two writers. To an extent, one may dust off an older,  

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discredited terminology in Christology and suggest that Yoder sees the provocation from below while Balthasar sees it from above. For Yoder, what provokes the world to violence like the crucifixion is the radically “upside down” political reality of Jesus and his community, the concrete ethical practices of the church in obedience to the example of Christ. Yoder’s most famous book, *The Politics of Jesus*, can be read as an extended essay on the real-world provocation which the ethical vision of Jesus for his community of disciples presented to the powers of his time. Jesus takes up space in the moral arrangement of the world—political, social, economic space. Jesus’ ethic presents an either/or to the world whom Christ calls to substitute his powerlessness, forgiveness, generosity for its own might, violence and security. For Yoder, Jesus is not killed by people who mistook him but by people who understood him and recognized in him as a threat to their real-world pretensions.¹⁰⁹

According to Yoder, the church has often rejected this provocation in its own life, seeking ways to sidestep the jagged edges of this humanity of Christ, either by contextualizing Jesus as a product of his time, by spiritualizing his message, or by locating the real intent of Christ in an atonement that is chiefly the forgiving of personal sins on the cross. By these evasions the church’s ethics have been coordinated with other sources; “common sense and the nature of things”.¹¹⁰ For Yoder, it is congregations living now according to this revolutionary scriptural ethic that attract the scorn of the world and participate “in the triumphant suffering of the Lamb.”¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 20.
¹¹¹ Ibid., 244.
We have adverted earlier to criticisms of Yoder’s theology as one-sided. It is unrelenting in the concreteness of its ethic, but numerous readers wonder finally whether Yoder’s church really needs Christ on an on-going basis of spiritual union. Paul Martens expresses rather strongly what for other readers is a more vague suspicion:

Throughout his corpus, Yoder has sought to unite the gospel with a social style, with a particular politics. But perhaps it is also true that to accept fully the synthesis offered as “the politics of Jesus” is also to explode the sought after unity of Jesus’ gospel with a particular politics. However he phrases it—whether as the unity between medium and message, deeds that ‘say’, ‘gospel’ as a secular term, practices that a social scientist could recommend, or any other form of this same principle—the culmination of Yoder’s decades of theological and ethical reflection appears to be the same: Yoder seems to leave us with a Jesus who has become merely an ethico-political paradigm that opens the door for a supercessive secular ethic.\footnote{Martens, \textit{The Heterodox Yoder}, 141–42.}

We can also recall here Reimer’s description of Yoder as having an “inadequate recognition of the ritualistic, cultic, mystical, and sacramental aspects of the religious experience.”\footnote{Loewen, “Reply to A. J. Reimer, ‘The Nature and Possibility of a Mennonite Theology,’” 172.} Yoder, it seems to me, has read Jesus correctly as far as he goes. I have not seen in Martens or elsewhere, a successful diagnosis of a heresy within Yoder’s theology. I would simply say that he lacks a sensibility for the incarnational relation of yieldedness, prayer and contemplation with which Jesus sought his Father, and the path which that “vertical” nonresistance opens for the church’s sanctity. This lack of concern for spiritual union in daily \textit{Gelassenheit} creates the suspicion that God for Yoder is “only” about ethics. It also creates the impression that the only thing provocative about the church is its moral achievement of Jesus’ ethics, rather than pointing to how Christ might also be present (provocatively) within the church’s sin as well. The grace that manifests in the undeserved acceptance of the sinner, is also a provocation to the world, and it is not emphasized greatly in Yoder’s work.
Balthasar, we might say, comes at provocation from above, as something intended and enacted as the theo-dramatic intent of the entire plan of salvation originated in the Father’s love. Its primary texture emerges as a trinitarian analogy in the human condition. As God descends into human affairs, a hidden “solution” is planted within the world which grows in fruitfulness and in its ability to provoke scandal. What is precipitated in the world is a spiritual more than an ethical crisis, although ethical dimensions are always present. It is not so much Christ’s moral teachings but his relationship with the Father and his insistence that this submission in humble earthiness is the divine plan for the cosmos that elicits the anger. Thus, for Balthasar, the provocative nature of the incarnation is often a hidden affair; it is the unseen presence of Christ in the saintly, but often hidden “secret” nuptiality of the contemplatives that goad the powers to revolt against Christ. There is less emphasis in Balthasar on the church’s compassion, generosity, and the radical reorienting of its power structures to reflect Christ’s powerlessness. It is not the exalted discipleship of the church that is a burr in the world’s saddle, but the hidden presence of Christ in her humble presence and prayer.

Frederick Bauerschmidt however, fears that Balthasar’s “fear of Titanism lead[s] him to underplay the fact that Jesus has given his followers a way that is, by God’s grace, in fact *livable*—albeit stumblingly—in this world, and livable not just for individuals, but for the community of disciples as a whole.” 114 Balthasar, he argues, “does not really pursue the opening that his own theo-dramatic approach makes for a new political theology” and that “Balthasar’s comments on the political significance of the cross seem, frankly, banal.”

Balthasar is so concerned that the cross not become a tactical instrument in the creation of human community that he fails to show its genuinely incarnational presence as an alternative human community, structured by a new economics, hierarchy and reciprocity. Kevin Mongrain responds to Bauerschmidt by pointing out what our work here has seen clearly; Balthasar’s theology of the incarnation does not permit any either/or between the vertical, spiritual realities and earthly, political realities. It also has an intensely political drama within it that Balthasar explores with his treatment of Revelation. But Mongrain and Bauerschmidt both agree that Balthasar’s location in an upper-class Switzerland did not give him the sensibility he needed, nor the proclivity to explore how theo-dramatics interacted with social evils beyond the Marxist messianism that was his frequent target. These writers tend to think Balthasar would be helped by not only critiquing Moltmannian progressive liberation theologies on the left for their gnostic appropriation, but applying a critique also to destructive capitalism on the right. I think that would help, but from a Mennonite perspective there is a further suggestion, that Balthasar extend his theo-dramatic provocation argument to congregations, communities of Jesus who, through their participation in Christ’s yieldedness to the Father, allow their structures, polities and ethics to reflect the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus’ destabilizing of power in the church. In this way, a Mennonite will need to go beyond Balthasar and insist that the incarnation of Christ takes up form in the Nachfolge of believers in congregations of discipline and peace.

In neither of these theologians is there any reason to exclude the other on this front. Balthasar, while he does not linger long on the ethical practices of the church, certainly sees
sanctity as a manifestation of Christ in his body.  

There is no reason why this could not be spelled out with greater emphasis. It could also be said that Balthasar is so keen to emphasize the Augustinian peregrinating, fragmentary life of the city of God that he does not match his exalted spirituality of individuals with a comparable congregational life. Likewise, there is no reason why Yoder’s Politics of Jesus could not be extended beyond the “body politics” of the church to acknowledge the hand of the Father at work, eucharistically in the assent of the church to Christ’s suffering in the world. Yoder could have written about the limits of “ethics” and the need for prayer, hidden sanctity, and a fruitfulness (grace) beyond moral communities of Jesus worshippers, but he rarely did. I would suggest that Yoder’s understanding of provocation from below, and Balthasar’s understanding of a descending provocation could join together to issue in a fuller testimony to scripture’s clear affirmation of both aspects. It would be a fuller reflection of the incarnation. Yoder’s concrete ethical practices of the church could be seen together with Balthasar’s mystical presence of Christ in hidden sanctity and prayer to more fully embody the Chalcedonian mission. They could both compensate for idiosyncratic insensibilities in the other. Yoder can help the church prevent an amoral, apolitical spiritualism, and Balthasar can help prevent a moralistic secularity from creeping into our ethics. In this way, both Christ’s relentless embrace of the human affairs and his gesture to eschatological completion of all things in God would find a more adequate place. They would in this way together more fully account for violence as christologically goaded.

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115 See especially his essay, “The ‘Beatitudes’ and Human Rights.”
4.8 Conclusion: Violence as Post-Christian Dis-incarnation

If Mennonite pacifism is to retain its theo-dramatic role within salvation history it needs to consider Balthasar’s christologizing of violence. In order to do this it needs to commit itself again to the neo-Chalcedonian understanding of how God took human nature to himself and consented to the implications. When violence is again seen as a Messianic woe, the travail of a world in the labor pains of Christmas, pacifism becomes a response of consent to the incarnation. This does not answer all the questions we have about the nature, inevitability, and taxonomies of violence. What it does is offer a view of violence that has a deep grounding in the book of Revelation and in an understanding of nature and grace from Balthasar’s perspective.

I have already shown how Balthasar’s understanding of the theo-drama in Revelation lends a dramatic depth to Mennonite debates about the “violence” of God. It allows us to see how God can be praised for destroying evil, without violating human freedom. But now we can go further and suggest additional ways in which this theology of provocation fills out a theology of peace. First, what this chapter has demonstrated again is that a Balthasarian return to Chalcedonian theology is not dismissive of the missional drama of the church’s vocation in the world. Rather, the Chalcedonian witness allows Balthasar to see the deeply theo-dramatic nature of violence and of the way violence itself is taken up into the work of reconciliation. In Dyothelite Christology, a deep freedom and power is given to the human community. The post-Christian world, if it accepts this lofty freedom (which it seeks to) must accept the manner of its enactment on earth: Christ’s bi-directional nonresistance. The rejection of this nonresistance is the divine judgement against the world. If pacifism is to be
more than a secular, instrumentalist practice, violence needs to be seen in the theo-dramatic depth of the scripture.

Second, in this apocalyptic view of history, the church is involved in the world not first by seeking worldly power or by convincing the world to notice its relevance. Here, rather, the church is involved in the world because the Lamb unveiled before the world is incarnate in her life. Pacifism becomes in essence the act of prayerful consent. By being united to the Lamb, the One from whom the world cannot lower its eyes, the church is in the world and is rejected by the world. As the church, through baptism, the Eucharist, discipleship, and worship, is united ever-deeper with her slain Saviour, it is “caught in the cross-fire” of the world in its business with the Lamb. The church becomes involved in the world not first by its political action (though that is not excluded), but by its union with the Lamb who is always pressing in. In this theo-dramatic view there is no divide between worldly involvement and spiritual union.

What this christological view of violence makes possible is the understanding that all the actions of the church, whether prayer, the sacraments, worship, preaching, or evangelisation, are as much an aspect of pacifism as peacemaking and political action toward social justice. The church’s whole work is to consent to the Lamb in the manner in which it appears. If this account of violence is true, then all these actions find a unity in the various ways the church comes to embrace and be embraced by the descending pressure of Christ on the world. It is Christ who goads violence and who over-comes violence. The church’s actions can either consent or revolt at this presence.
Third, this vista on violence sheds light on why war-making in the modern world seems unable to rid itself of religious, sacrificial underpinnings and rarely remains content with limited, rational ends. I have not discovered any writing of Balthasar’s that considers the just-war tradition of the church. However, his descriptions of the violence in the encounter of the Lamb and the world show us why just-war theory, the attempt to chasten war to rational, proportionate ends, runs so contrary to the post-Christian mind. Violence in the theo-drama is not a rational, carefully measured act of judgement upon evil, as just war advocates would like it to be. Humankind, which refuses both the Lamb’s powerlessness and its glorious divinity, attempts to be secular, yet discovers that within a purely secular frame, the vigor required to prosecute war is lacking. This is not to say just-war prudence should not be sought, but only that secular, rational explanations for the fury demanded in war fail to satisfy a post-Christian mind. Stanley Hauerwas in particular has pointed out the sacrificial, mystical-religious nature of American wars.\footnote{Stanley Hauerwas, “Why War Is a Moral Necessity for America or How Realistic Is Realism?” \textit{Seminary Ridge Review}, Spring 2007.} People will not fight for their country as cynics, Hauerwas writes, and the modern nation state inevitably reaches past rationalism to more primal, cultic justifications for war. To secularists, the all-out claims of good versus evil, and the securing of cosmic righteousness by the “ultimate sacrifice” seem more adequate to the demands and costs of war than more scientific language. Balthasar’s view of history as occurring with such immediate intensity before the Lamb’s coronation gives material, objective content to this tendency to ramp up rhetoric to all-out sacrifice for cosmic righteousness. Balthasar sees the military-industrial complex as profoundly theo-dramatic.
In the first chapter on Mennonite rhetoric on pacifism we showed that “nonviolence” was not the bottom line for Anabaptists such as Michael Sattler, Pilgram Marpeck and Menno Simons. Rather, pacifism was dependent on a Nachfolge Christi, the imitation, participation and solidarity of the believer with the meek, incarnate Christ. It was this union with Christ that determined the saints’ approach to violence rather than the ideal of “nonviolence” as a detached principle. Balthasar’s approach to the Lamb’s confrontation in the book of Revelation offers us a retrieval of that approach to Christology. It assumes that the church will very much be in the world, a constant reminder to the world that Christ still presses in. It is the violence in the interchange between the Lamb and the world that will be met nonresistantly. The Lamb’s breaking of the seals unleashes a turn of events that results in the dark power’s self-destruction. However, since this is the Lamb that is fighting, and since the saints are called to wait and endure, an ethic of openness to the deeds of the Father through the suffering Christ become the modus operandi of Christian ethics. We turn then from provocation to convocation.
Chapter 5. Convocation: Ecclesial Enemy Love and a Missional Pacifism

5.1 The Ecclesial Contours of Mennonite Pacifism

In seeking a dogmatic momentum for pacifism, we are examining three aspects of the arc of the incarnational descent of the Logos into the world. We are positing that pacifism, to be a theology of peace, is united with Christ who travels this path into the far country. It adopts his posture toward the Father and toward the world. It experiences the backlash of alienated humankind, knowing the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. In each of these aspects confession and ethics are joined together in the union of the church with her Lord.

We come now to the final phase of this descent into flesh, the appearance of glory in human conditions as the church. Here at its most incarnated fulfillment pacifism blossoms as real-life ecclesial love. Trinitarian love opens out to enemy love which opens out to fraternal love. What we are seeking in this chapter is an emphasis in ecclesiology on the contemplative union of the church with the enemy love of God out of which fraternal love in the church emerges. This is the *convocation* that mirrors the provocation of Christ in the world.

Before we wade into Balthasarian terrain again, it is important to say a few things about the relation between pacifism and ecclesiology in the Mennonite church. It is stating the obvious to say that for early Anabaptists, the rejection of the sword was ecclesially founded and practiced. Peter Reidemann, in a 1545 Hutterite confession of faith, says, “Christ, the Prince of Peace, has prepared a kingdom for himself, namely, the church, and has
won his kingdom by shedding his own blood. Therefore, all worldly warfare in this kingdom has come to an end…. Therefore, Christians should not take part in war, nor should they use force for purposes of vengeance.”¹ Here the church was to be the place where the atonement of Christ founded a peaceful nonresistance toward evil for the body of Christ.

In the sixteenth century, the practice of this was often dependent on a “two-kingdoms” theology which drew a severe ethical division between the world as ruled by the state and the church as ruled in the “perfection of Christ.”² The church was to be free in its reverence for the Lord. State violence had its place in the worldview of these Anabaptists, but the church (including all members) was to be a unique, heroic mission set free within the world to live in union with Christ’s use of power. Because of this two-kingdom theology and the brutal reality of politics in the sixteenth century, it was difficult, if not impossible, for Anabaptists to participate in the magistracy and in several other vocations in society. In these spheres the “missional” ability of a Christian pacifist to influence society was minimal. And yet, these “two-kingdom” pacifists were vigorous in propagating their faith abroad in a way that few other churches of the time were.³ John H. Yoder argues that the unique missional fervor of these beleaguered Christians arose precisely because of their refusal to avail themselves of the state’s coercion. “In the sixteenth century, established Protestantism

¹ Riedemann, Peter Riedemann’s Hutterite Confession of Faith, 134–35.
² The term used in the Schleitheim Confession in 1527. Friedmann, The Theology of Anabaptism, is a thorough interpretation of Anabaptism as a “two-kingdom” theology. I recognize that there was diversity in Anabaptism, especially in the 1520’s. However, few Anabaptist leaders that survived past the Münster episode articulated a theology of culture for involvement in societal leadership.
³ For a description of Anabaptism’s surprising missionary activity see David Almon Thiessen’s MCS thesis, “The Church in Mission: Factors That Contributed to the Sixteenth Century Anabaptists Being a Missionary People” (Regent College, 1980). See also Arnold Snyder’s description of “the communication of Anabaptist ideas” in Anabaptist History and Theology, 167–84.
generally disavowed the concept of world missionary outreach...[because] the numerical fusion of church and society made it simply unthinkable that the Christian faith could be propagated in another form than in the extension of political and cultural sovereignty of Christendom.”\(^4\) Anabaptism, in this view, displayed a freedom from the world that permitted its life to be calibrated to Christ. It did not need to pace itself to the protection or enforcement of any government and thus was free for mission.

A key ecclesial aspect of early Anabaptist pacifism was its belief that the difference between church and world lay in its mode of judgement. Walter Klaassen says of early Anabaptists, “the sword is almost always opposed, not to nonviolent resistance, but to the ban.” When Christ took the sword from Peter, he gave him instead the power to peacefully bind and loose in the church. This form of ecclesial judgement entailed “a totally new life orientation in which all human relationships are governed by patience, understanding, love, forgiveness, and a desire for the redemption even of the enemy.” One of the basic problems of the sword for the Anabaptists, according to Klaassen, was “that killing a person destroyed any possibility of improvement or repentance” and amounted to “a usurpation of the divine prerogative.”\(^5\) Anabaptist thinking insisted that Christian judgement conform to the judgment of Christ and further those ends for which he died. In the Schleitheim Confession for example, the entire discussion of the sword revolves around the kinds of judgement that Christians can or cannot render. “In the perfection of Christ, however, only the ban is used for a warning and for the excommunication of the one who has sinned, without putting the


flesh to death, —simply the warning and the command to sin no more.” After exploring various ways in which worldly judgement fails this test of daily connectivity to the judgement of Christ we find this conclusion:

In brief, as is the mind of Christ toward us, so shall the mind of the members of the body of Christ be through Him in all things, that there may be no schism in the body through which it would be destroyed. For every kingdom divided against itself will be destroyed. Now since Christ is as it is written of Him, His members must also be the same, that His body may remain complete and united to its own advancement and upbuilding.

Church discipline then was intended as a pacifist mode of judgement expressed toward other Christians for the sake of Christian unity. The church’s refusal to use the sword anywhere in or out of the church, was rooted in this calibration with the judgement of Christ. In this pre-modern setting it remained the case that only churches that practiced this peaceful judgement could practice pacifism. The church was in this sense not “defenseless”; it had church discipline.

According to this interpretation, one can see in early Anabaptism a kind of triangle between pacifism, mission and judgement. Because the church had no coercive powers at its disposal to further itself, it involved itself in evangelization. Evangelism was the church’s announcement of God’s judgement on the world—both in his loving suffering and in his fiery wrath. Because it had no coercive power for its protection it developed a theology and practice of church discipline.

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7 Ibid., 251.

8 Anabaptist missioners were frequently prophet-chiliasts who sensed the end of the world pressing in, and who rallied people to join the elect who would be spared. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 167–68, 175.
But the danger of this judgement becoming “worldly” or merely human was a constant reality. Pilgram Marpeck, for example, wrote four long letters to the Swiss Brethren on matters related to church discipline. He accuses them of running ahead of the Spirit of Christ and pre-judging outside the parameters and pace of salvation. “By their fruits (He does not say by the blossoms or the foliage) you shall know them” he writes, which means that a hasty, harsh and human judgement must be avoided.\(^9\) Whoever, therefore “estabhshes, commands, prohibits, coerces, drives, punishes, or judges before the time the good or evil fruit is revealed, lays claim to the authority, power, and office of the Holy Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ and, contrary to love, goodness, and grace, runs ahead of Christ.”\(^10\) Arnold Snyder argues that it was the eclipse of an imitative, Christ-tethered form of judgement in favour of a form more focused on a vision of a pure church, that eventually caused the problems the Dutch Mennonites experienced in the later sixteenth century.\(^11\)

However, separatism was the outcome of Anabaptism in its sixteenth-century context. At this ecclesial level, Mennonites, at least until the twentieth century, did not often see their pacifism as missionally active in the world. It was rather a ‘stance’ or a privilege, accorded to them as Mennonites where this could be secured, which exempted them from the exercise of worldly judgement. According to the seventeenth-century *Martyrs Mirror*, the defenseless Christian might be a leaven, witness and provocateur in society, but there was little thought that Christians had a mission to translate their peace theology into the worldly structures of

\(^9\) Klassen and Klaassen, *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 323.
\(^10\) Ibid., 324.
society beyond the congregation. For Mennonites in Europe and in North America, ecclesial pacifism was more a reason for separation than involvement in the world.

With the founding of twentieth-century parachurch organizations such as the Mennonite Central Committee in North America, Mennonites began to discover ways to translate their pacifism into mission beyond the church. This was abetted by the mid-century emphasis, borrowed from biblical scholars such as Oscar Cullmann, that God was Lord of the whole world and not only of the church, and that therefore the convictions of the church in these matters needed to be published abroad and established in society in instrumentalist peacemaking. This enabled a more missional pacifism. It fueled an evangelical urgency to the practice of pacifism; now the church possessed a much-needed medicine in a violent world. But this urgency to leaven society with nonviolent witness could also make the connection with ecclesiology more tenuous. It could have the effect of exporting pacifism from the church. Was pacifism now something only for specialists involved in international and societal activism and leadership? If pacifism was now carried out in ways shared by

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13 In Cullmann’s view, the church was at the heart of the kingly reign, but the reign extended beyond the church to include the state which, though unconscious of it, nevertheless also existed under Christ’s direction. See J. Denny Weaver, ed., *John Howard Yoder: Radical Theologian* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 151–54. Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill call this shift in Mennonite peace theology the most significant theological transformation in church-state relations for the twentieth-century Mennonite church. J. H. Yoder’s later *The Politics of Jesus* was only the concretization of this new frontier. See Driedger and Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking*, 121, 147; Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties*, 197–204. However these authors provide no reflection on whether this shift to a “Lordship canopy” might also entail a weakening of the link between pacifism and the church. There does seem to be some data that suggests that the new peacemaking and activism practices of the Mennonite churches have not been as closely dependent on participants’ church involvement. Driedger and Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking*, 225–27.
many people outside the church, how was this still ecclesially formed?\textsuperscript{14} As we pointed out in chapter one, a pattern of secularization is tempting wherever the church seeks to embed the gospel out in the world in the daily walk of the laity. It comes to be questioned whether such action is truly dependent on the church at all.

But with (or perhaps because of) this tenuousness, twentieth-century Mennonite peace theology sought all the more to emphasize the organic connection between pacifism and ecclesiology. Yoder was a key part of this and his work plows important ground for our work in this chapter. Here the church was described as that place on earth where the kingdom of Christ takes up a visible, political reality, and where the defenseless power of the cross meets sociology.\textsuperscript{15} The church, Yoder says, is the social form of the Gospel in this world.\textsuperscript{16} If anything, the church plays a more central role in the refusal of violence than ecclesiology did for early Anabaptists.\textsuperscript{17}

Stanley Hauerwas, a close follower of Yoder’s theology of the church and its connection with nonviolence, argues that “keeping theological ethics theological” means beginning and ending ethics in and for the church. For Hauerwas, “Christian beliefs about

\textsuperscript{14} MCC calls itself “an arm of the church” and requires that its workers “have active membership in or demonstrated commitment to and participation in a local Christian church.” However, baptism is not required. See https://mcccurrentopenings.secure.force.com/recruit/fRecruit__ApplyNotice?page=AboutServingwithMCC.

\textsuperscript{15} Yoder emphasized that his goal was not to create an unpopular church, or a minority church, or a counter-cultural church, but a church with “fidelity to the jealousy of Christ as Lord”. Yoder, \textit{The Priestly Kingdom}, 86.

\textsuperscript{16} Yoder, \textit{The Original Revolution}, 108–9.

God, Jesus, sin, the nature of human existence, and salvation are intelligible only if they are seen against the background of the church.” As Christians “we believe we not only need a community, but a community of a particular kind to live well morally.”\[^{18}\] The task of the theological ethicist, according to Hauerwas, is to give some account of the difference that being in the church (with its peculiar stories, rituals, traditions, and beliefs about Jesus) makes for ethics. Ecclesiology is the theological component that makes ethics theological ethics, and the church is the school of virtue in which believers are trained in peace.

Hauerwas has asserted the need for a tradition of practices (much more so than Yoder)\[^{19}\] by which the church passes the reality of socially-embodied salvation from generation to generation. For Hauerwas, the church is the school of gospel pacifism.

However, in developing a framework for an ecclesial basis for pacifism, one must also hear a recent criticism of Hauerwas expressed by Nicholas M. Healy. Healy argues that Hauerwas has elevated the church as an ethical community by using “social-philosophical theories” rather than first-order reflection on God. Hauerwas, he claims, is partaking of a view of the church that is rooted in Frederick Schleiermacher’s understanding that “[t]he function of Christian Churches is to mediate Christ’s particular experience of God through their patterns of life. Thus the lived experience of a Church is prior to – and to some degree normative over – its interpretation of scripture and doctrine.”\[^{20}\] Accordingly, Hauerwas has

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located the church vis-à-vis dogma in such a way that dogma has become dependent on the church rather than vice versa. The chief ecclesial concern for Hauerwas is apologetics, or the use of the church to make Christian ethics intelligible and attractive in the world. “His account of how we come to belief and what makes it an attractive possibility is treated not in terms of the attractiveness and cogency of a Christian account of who God is and how God relates to us, but largely in terms of what we do as the church.”21 This places heavy demands upon the church to be something that it almost never achieves and it locates the core of theology in what the church can manage to demonstrate with its ethics.

It is not my task to adjudicate whether Hauerwas, in the end, is ecclesiocentric in the way that Healy contends, but this accusation does signal a warning for us in developing the dogmatic basis for a theology of peace in its ecclesial form.22 Any description of the church here must be genuinely incarnational in the neo-Chalcedonian key we described earlier, where the priority of God in his mission is paramount, thereby securing the genuinely earthy, perduering and sojourning nature of the church without dissolving it into God. The church must be structured, empowered, judged and limited by God and God’s action in Christ. The statement, “Let it be with me according to your word,” becomes the posture of incarnational ecclesial ethics. But as this incarnational reality, it must also be a genuinely earthly community, susceptible to investigation as a “social phenomenon”. We could say that the church is a “social phenomenon” deified to express humanity’s overdue praise to God. Are


22 For a retort to Healy’s very critical introduction see P. Travis Kroeker, “Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction,” Modern Theology 32, no. 2 (April 2016): 300–302. Kroeker maintains that Healy has misunderstood the ways in which Hauerwas’s understanding of the church is theological, and not merely theoretical or sociological.
these “phenomena” taken into God’s salvific mission and do they become transparent to the Spirit whose work it is to choreograph this mission within the relationship of Christ with his Father? This is Balthasar’s question for ethics. It is not difficult to find references within Hauerwas’s writings that display an openness to this dynamic, even though dogmatics has not been fully explored in his writings.23

What we are seeking then is a deepening love for the enemy which comes from the missional vocation of the church in cadence with the judgement of Christ. Balthasar offers an ascetic understanding of Christ in the church that views the believer as coming to mingle in Christ’s incarnational loving judgement of his enemies. This is where the missionality of pacifism is founded, and we will argue that it is a helpful ecclesiology of pacifism. We turn now to Balthasar to grasp his vision of fraternal love in the church, and the way this issues in a kind of Christian judgement.

5.2 Balthasar’s Theology of Love

Balthasar writings are filled with a theological vision of love and this vision shapes his view of the church. He writes in Mysterium Paschale: “Born of the utmost love of God for the world, the Church herself is essentially love. What she is, that she ought to be: her

23 Hauerwas has, in fact, been a mighty and vocal opponent of ethics divided from theology. It would, however, be fair to say that Hauerwas is insistent that ethics be done in close fellowship with theology and that the best moral theologians are those immersed in the church’s “story”, but he himself has assumed the writings of others for this rather than explicating the dogmatic tradition himself. For a description of his commitment to a *theological* ethic, see the section “Who are Christians? The Christian Story” in Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2001), 54–181.
essence is her unique commandment (John 15:12.)” All of Balthasar’s writings could be described as an attempt to receive the vision of the love of God and to understand what this means for a church apprehended by that vision. Nicholas J. Healy states, for Balthasar “being—creaturely being and trinitarian being—unveils its final countenance as love in the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.” This is the source of his ethics and we will see the extent to which neighbour love is bound up with the incarnation for Balthasar’s ecclesiology.

It is in love where the analogy of being between God and the world most clearly becomes visible for Balthasar. In Love Alone is Credible, for example, Balthasar explains something central to his theological aesthetics, which is that God’s revelation becomes credible and intelligible to us as we perceive and respond to it as love. In this gift and reception and re-gift of love, God becomes credible, or knowable. Christian fraternal love is figured in profound ways by the love of God. As humans become more radiant with God’s love they become not only more fully human, but also able to grasp the nature of God, which is love. Divine love and neighbour love come into tight-knit harmony. In the incarnation, the analogy of being, structured by love, is exposed in history-turning potency. Here the action of God in love comes to be expressed in the most-human action of the Son of a Jewish virgin.

24 Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 134.

25 Nicholas J. Healy, The Eschatology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar: Eschatology as Communion (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 211. This is not the Healy referred to above in the context of Hauerwas.


27 This is explored in Love Alone Is Credible.
We should emphasize that the contemplation of divine action and being is the decisive element in Balthasar’s understanding of human love. Contemplation is a prayerful “letting be”, an inner longing, the receptive attentiveness of the believer to the beauty of Christ in the world. In contemplative prayer, the texture of the incarnation in its self-giving and sacrificial reality is received through the spiritual senses. This is union with Christ. The loving contemplation by the believer of the Word of God as it appears in the world is itself a form of love that both transforms the person and extends the person’s love out to the neighbour. Prayer, for Balthasar, is the opposite of violence.

But it is also through loving our neighbour that we contemplate the love of God. “That is why we can speak of our brother, not as ‘Christ in disguise’ but as the ‘sacrament of Christ’.” Contemplation of Christ and neighbour love mutually nourish each other.

The eyes of Christian love are full of faith and of faith’s contemplation; they have a luminosity which discovers and lights up a supernatural depth in whatever and whomsoever they fasten upon: this sinner, this unattractive and insignificant person, this avowed opponent of the Church and of Jesus Christ is in reality my brother; Jesus Christ has borne his sins just as he has borne mine (which means that there can be no accusations on either side); his unpleasant characteristics are a burden he is obliged,

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28 “If revelation were not love, then a receptive disposition of pure letting be—which is intelligible only as the attitude of love that allows itself (as faith) to be led beyond all desire for self-knowledge—would be inhuman and unworthy of God, and God’s revelation itself would not be able to instill such an attitude as an answer to his Word. Love can accord a priori (and therefore as faith) only with love, never with nonlove.” Ibid., 83.

29 Balthasar’s theology of the spiritual senses has been described recently by Mark McInroy. McInroy shows that Balthasar was concerned throughout his theological anthropology to demonstrate that through grace, humans can perceive divine glory, and that this God-given capability is not the end-point of mysticism, an elite achievement granted only to the few, but rather how all believers can be transformed to embody the love of God. McInroy describes Balthasarian spiritual senses in a way that supports our contention in this thesis that the spiritual life is figured by the incarnation. Spiritual perception includes sensory corporeal perception but sees “the depths within the form”. This is the unity in difference of contemplation patterned in the incarnation. Balthasar on the “Spiritual Senses”: Perceiving Splendour (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 186.

willy-nilly to drag around with him, and although I cannot see it, this burden has some connection, through God’s grace with the total burden which weighs on the shoulders of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{31}

In the trial which the encounter with the other brings, some dimension of Christ’s agony presses into the experience of the believer.

We are seeking in this thesis a form of enemy love that includes but goes deeper than the instrumental techniques the world has discovered to reduce violence and develop a just society. Balthasar was concerned to describe a form of love that “is not written against a background of merely interpersonal relationships and motivations for conduct, but against the background of a unity that lies above the persons, overlapping and embracing them all”.\textsuperscript{32} In these general introductory remarks about love for Balthasar we can see that a contemplative, prayerful attentiveness to the Word of God in the world is the basis for a spirituality of “letting be” by which the believer enters the mystery of God and becomes transparent to God’s love. This is a good beginning to understanding gospel pacifism as a prayerful reception of God’s love as it unfolds in the world.

5.3 The Expropriation and Appropriation of the Believer in Christ

With those introductory comments on Balthasar’s understanding of love, we move to suggest the way pneumatology and soteriology coalesce for Balthasar in a way that makes a path for an ecclesiology of enemy love. What we see here is a theology of ascesis by which

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 216. Helmut Harder notes that though Anabaptists rejected the sacramental system of the medieval church, they retained the sacramentality of the church as a whole. The church became the one sacrament of Christ. See the unpublished \textit{Historical and Theological Essays Presented at the International Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue 1998-2002} (Winnipeg, Man, 2002).

\textsuperscript{32} Balthasar, \textit{The Glory of the Lord}, 7:447.
the believer is lifted from self-regarding egoism and mingled with the descent and glory of Christ. It is through this ascesis that the church rises to offer a judgement not of a merely human sort, but embraced within Christ’s judgement. A quote from Pilgram Marpeck nicely anticipates what we will explore in Balthasar:

Without the artistry and teaching of the Holy Spirit, who pours out the love, which is God, into the hearts of all the faithful, and which surpasses all reason and understanding, everything is in vain. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son, and He witnesses to the Father and Son in the hearts of all the faithful; He copies and repeats the perfect law of the liberty of Christ. The faithful look into this law of liberty in order that they may fervently do what Christ spoke and commanded.33

It is helpful once again to exposit a specific section of writing where this comes especially to the fore. In *Laudem Gloriarum* is the final section of the last volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar’s theological aesthetics. As such it describes a kind of climax or final flourish of glory in the world. Theological aesthetics for Balthasar could be described as a divinely chastened epistemology.34 It is “a ‘coming to see’ the form in which God’s Word comes to us, gives itself to us and loves us.”35 Balthasar is concerned to do theology as though God had spoken first, and to work “in the power of the divine love which draws near to us and enables us to receive itself.”36 This is a significant and central feature of Balthasar’s theological aesthetics: *divine glory establishes the conditions of its own reception* by transforming humans into a posture matching the manner in which the glory is displayed in the world.

34 “What is here called ‘aesthetic’ is therefore characterized as something properly theological, namely, as the reception, perceived with the eyes of faith, of the self-interpreting glory of the sovereignly free love of God.” Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, 11.
36 Ibid.
How is divine glory displayed in the world? It radiates out in divine *expropriation*, whereby the Son gives over possession of himself to the Father in humble descent. For Balthasar this handing over by the Son is an inner-trinitarian reality that finds economic expression in the incarnation. We saw this trinitarian dynamic in the previous chapter in our discussion of the divine *traditio*. The Father gives divine being (freedom) to the Son who offers himself back in a gift of free gratitude.

This divine expropriation becomes the archetype and inner spiritual momentum of a responding human expropriation. God gives being (freedom) to us and we offer it back in a gift of free gratitude. This offering back is a self-expropriation. Persons are raptured beyond themselves through the contemplation of the manner of divine love. For this reason, there is in all of Balthasar’s spirituality an awareness of ecstasy, of being drawn forth to participate in the dynamic that is unfolding in the outpouring of God’s love. This rapture, because it is a conforming to something beyond itself, does not come easily—it involves a painful dying to oneself in order to become conformed to the glory made visible. This ascesis is the sanctifying transfiguration in the ecstatic expropriation of the self. Faith, hope and love are the human responses appropriate to the manner of the appearing of divine glory in the world. They are postures effected by the divine glory, attuning the believer to know God.

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37 This is analogous to the appearing of any beauty before our eyes. “[T]he demand the beautiful itself makes to be allowed to be what it is, the demand, therefore, that we renounce our attempts to control and manipulate it, in order truly to be able to be happy by enjoying it: all of this is, in the natural realm, the foundation and foreshadowing of what in the realm of revelation and grace will be the attitude of faith.” *The Glory of the Lord: Seeing the Form*, 1:153.
Here at the end of The Glory of the Lord, Balthasar suggests that the consummation of divine glory’s entrance into the world is not the return of such glory back to the One, as was suggested in neo-Platonic philosophy, but rather he claims:

The final point of the outpouring of God’s love…is the dawning of the divine love in what is not God and what is opposed to God, the dawning of eternal life (as ‘resurrection’) in utter death: not the dawning of the divine ‘I’ in the non-divine ‘Thou’ but the dawning of the divine I-Thou-We in the worldly, creaturely I-Thou-We of human fellowship.\(^{38}\)

In this quote we can begin to see a Balthasarian ecclesiology of enemy love. The consummation of the entrance of divine glory in the world is the enemy love of God taking form in the creaturely “I-Thou-We of human fellowship.” The response of the church to God’s entrance “is the inherent and logical end of an act of glorification begun by God himself.”\(^{39}\) Because of this, the church’s life, “above all the mutual love of Christians, is an act of praising God not only in an external way, but with an inherent relationship to the essential glory of God.”\(^{40}\) The words “external” and “inherent” are key here. Balthasar is envisioning the closest possible relation between the archetype of expropriation and its type, without collapsing the difference. The church in its earthly, perduring visibility in mutual love is the glory of God become incarnate. The incarnate God is its archetype.\(^{41}\) The church in its very nature is a rapture, a coming out of egoism, elicited by the beauty of God’s appearing “in what is opposed to God.” The church’s fraternal love is precisely this mode of rapture from egoism, the conditions created by divine glory itself for the reception and

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\(^{39}\) Ibid., 7:399.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) This again has close similarities with Pilgram Marpeck’s understanding of the church formed by the “outer” and “inner” aspects of Christ. Klassen and Klaassen, The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck, 378–79.
assimilation of divine glory. Fraternal enemy love, we might say, is the epistemological condition established by God for his own reception and knowledge in the world.

As expressed above, the “glory” of the church is her participation in divine self-expropriation, in the Son’s dispossession of his own will in surrender to the Father. In Balthasar’s view, the Father/Son relation is not jealously guarded by God. It is a complete act of hospitality that the world is invited to mingle in.\textsuperscript{42} Bringing a human fellowship into being within this mystery between Father and Son, Balthasar says, is the work of the Holy Spirit: “Since the Spirit himself is the glorification of the love between Father and Son, wherein God’s true glory disclosed itself to us, it is likewise only he who can bring about glorification in the world.”\textsuperscript{43} The church lives in the Spirit “space” between Father and Son. In keeping with his Augustinian theology of the Spirit, Balthasar holds that the church is in fact an earthly Holy Spirit-manifestation of the love between Father and Son. As the church is brought into the Father/Son relation at the point where Jesus “breathed out his spirit”, the church becomes a partaker of this divine trinitarian love. By the Spirit’s work, the church is

\textsuperscript{42} God “is the opposite of a strict lord who demands that what he has lent out should be given back to him intact and untouched. He is the sower who…watches to see what will come from the union of divine vital power in the world that receives it.” \textit{The Glory of the Lord}, 7:432. The church is the incarnation’s obedience and love sown in the world, and God now becomes “latent”, God watches “contemplatively” to see what fruit the world will yield with the seed of the Word of God within it. Ibid., 7:419.

\textsuperscript{43} Balthasar, \textit{The Glory of the Lord}, 7:389. This is very close to the centre of Balthasar’s pneumatology as described much more fully in \textit{Theo-Logic}, 2005, esp. 3:157-164. Balthasar believes that the Spirit is both the expression of the love between Father and Son (after Augustine) and also the fruit of the love. The Spirit is the “Gift” (162) namely, the love that is given between Father and Son, and it is also the excess (160), a fruit which is nevertheless not external to the love. When believers receive this “Gift” (162) in salvation they receive the relation of the Father and Son, which is divinity itself, deification. “The Spirit should be called \textit{donum doni}, that is, the Father’s love, given to the world in his Son and ‘poured out into our hearts’ through the gift of love in the Spirit” (162).
“raptured” out to participate in cruciform triune love. Here Christopher Steck captures Balthasar’s sense:

[T]he Christ-event has really become, through the Christians’ incorporation into Christ, their story, not just epistemologically (i.e., the lens through which they interpret their lives), as it might seem in some works of narrative ethics, but ontologically, as the fruit of the Spirit’s power to ‘liquefy’ the Christ-form, to use von Balthasar’s language, by stamping it into the lives of his followers.44

This is why the church’s true form is mutual love; the Christ-event of love offered to the Father is “liquefied” into human community as eucharistic mutual love through the Spirit.45 The church’s fraternal love is a Spirit-led mingling in the dynamic that unfolded between Jesus and the Father.

Pneumatology is further related to soteriology for Balthasar. Through the Spirit, the distance between Christ and humans, by virtue of his being the representative substitute (over-against us who are represented), is overcome and we are led to the inside of what has been done pro nobis, and ‘while we were yet sinners.’ By overcoming, as it were, the vicarious separation of the pro nobis, the Spirit enables the human community to enter the trinitarian “reconciliation” of resurrection-defeated death, in which the economic “distance” between Father and Son was overcome. “When they are thus brought inside, they both recognize and grasp from within what had apparently taken place outside those concerned in it. And when they enter the inner room of the Spirit, they necessarily become participants.”46

By the power of the Spirit the saint comes to a relation with God in his trinitarian love that is no longer heteronomous, external, or alien—since Christ in the incarnation has genuinely

44 *The Ethical Thought of Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, 89.
taken our place, the Spirit’s work is made possible. Christ (by divine expropriation) takes human’s place and the Spirit brings humans (by expropriation from egoism) into the place of Christ. In this way (and only in this way) the church appropriates God. The church is ushered into a communion with Christ in his lonely death.

Believers come to know from the inside “the establishment in Christ…and, in the same breath, in us too… the whole extreme tension between powerlessness in the lostness of death and the supremely mighty power of God’s resurrection.” 47 This lived Christic tension is the very dynamo of God’s love in its incarnate form. It is this pneumatic inclusion into the tension that is a well-spring for an ethics that is more than merely instrumental and worldly. It is an earthliness set within the Father/Son relation.

The Spirit of God is sent to change this possibility into a reality. He shows the world that the poverty of the Son, who sought only the glory of the Father and let himself be robbed of everything in utter obedience, was the most exact expression of the absolute fullness, which does not consist of ‘having’, but of ‘being=giving’. It is in giving that one is and has. 48

Soteriology, pneumatology and ecclesiology thus come together. In the entrance into this divine community (Balthasar calls this divinization 49) the church participates in the incarnation and is conformed to the inner dynamic of the mission of Christ in human flesh. “In order to draw near to God, one must not move so much as a step away from the Incarnation.” 50 We become people who love at great cost. Hence “man enjoys an inner

47 Ibid., 7:394.
50 Ibid., 3:78.
participation in the attitude of divine selflessness, and he is able, like Christ, to give an incarnated form to this attitude in giving away his own goods.”

What we are seeking to see here is enemy love immersed in the church’s inclusion in the trinitarian dynamic of expropriation, as it unfolded on the cross. Here the divine “I-Thou-We” was transposed into what was not God, what was opposed to God. The Spirit brings the church into this cruciform relation. In this Spirit-induction into the Father/Son expropriation, the saints become united with the one who died as their representative, in loneliness.

To sum up what we have seen so far: The Spirit creates the church by bringing (rapturing) the human community into the glory of God established in the love of Jesus for the Father, lived in utter extremity in the cross and resurrection. The conditions for grasping his divine love are an expropriation from our egoisms by the glimpse of this divine beauty. In this Spirit-created body of Christ believers come to live inside the pro nobis of Christ before the Father. We do this by being expropriated of our ego-centred selves and by being given for the other in union with Christ’s self-gift of himself to the Father. In this expropriation, we rightly appropriate God.

I am suggesting that this trinitarian, crucicentric ecclesiology is a worthy ecclesiological contour for a church seeking to grasp what enemy love means within a secularity that often seeks to hive off Christian postures and run off with them as self-standing principles of nonviolence or peacemaking. Here fraternal love has a vertical and horizontal axis in the relation between the Father and incarnate Son shown in scripture. But we need to see more clearly how this is ecclesial enemy love.

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5.4 The Brother for Whom Christ Died

We have already seen Balthasar’s suggestion that the culmination of divine glory in the world is the incarnation of God in what is opposed to God. Balthasar situated the severe commands of the Synoptics regarding love for enemies within the solidarity of Christ with humans, especially Christ’s human enemies. What we can see in the section “The Brother for Whom Christ Died” within In Laudem Gloriae is that Balthasar saw the dominical commands of the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain immersed within the larger trinitarian drama of God reconciling the world to himself. In this dramatic setting these commands become constitutive of the inner mystery of the church.

He begins to explicate enemy love in this way by describing the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant viewed from the perspective of Christ.52 There was already in the old covenant both the command to love God and the command to love the neighbour, but the full scope of their unity was yet unseen. The demands of neighbor love there were limited by the understanding of God’s election of Israel. There “God is ‘obliged’ and summoned to punish Israel’s enemies; he hates the evil-doers, and the Israelite has the right and the duty to join God in this hatred.” The love of neighbour was severely limited because God’s election of humans was seen as limited.

52 This transition is a recurring point of discussion in Balthasar’s writings. For Balthasar, Jesus was an un-anticipatable fulfillment of the old covenant, in whom none of the old covenant forms were left behind. He broke them open, making them transparent to God’s missional intent in the world. For a discussion of Balthasar’s approach to the old and new covenant see Todd Walatka, “Theological Exegesis: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Figure of Moses,” Pro Ecclesia 19, no. 3 (2010): 300–317.
Though this particularism was already questioned in the old covenant, Jesus proclaims “the lordship of God, the dominance of God’s will and act and disposition not only in Heaven but also on earth, and God’s victorious superiority to all that men contrive in the depths of their hearts.” The horizon of Christ’s expansion of the apparent limitations to the covenant is God’s lordly goodness to all creation. “All the apparent limitations in Old Testament ethics derived from human deductions from the incomprehensible election of one and not of another.”53 But these “human deductions” needed to be overcome for God’s covenant promises to Abraham to be fulfilled. The full Creator intent of God for the whole world needs to break open within God’s covenant with Israel.

Thus, the commands to love the enemy in the Sermons entail a closer calibration of the human community with the steps of divine love into the world, rising beyond merely human self-enclosed calculations. The commands in the Sermon on the Mount presuppose this dilation of the loving intent of God on the earth. In the “antitheses” (Mt 5:21ff) of the Sermon on the Mount, the limitations of the old covenant are exposed and opened “making them transparent to the original total will of God.”54 Here the exaltation of the Creator God comes to define redemption’s limits (or lack thereof). God is “your heavenly Father, who makes the sun rise on the good and bad alike, and sends rain on the righteous and on sinners” (Mt 5:45). “This exalted state is kingly; to imitate it, it is necessary to be exalted above the covenant relationship between two unequal partners—a perfection is required that

54 Ibid., 7:436.
corresponds to that of your heavenly Father.” In withholding redemption from God’s “enemies” Israel was sheltering itself within its own enclosed system. That is a Gnostic failure, in Balthasar’s terms. It makes absolute what is only a human construction.

A fundamental equality now emerges to view. The universal love of God the Father “which had to present itself first in the old covenant as a kingly freedom of election, goes to its end in Jesus’ partiality for the sinners, tax collectors and harlots, the lost and the rejected.” In Christ the election of God is now known as coterminous with the Creator sovereignty of God. These bracing demands in the Sermons are thus un-anticipatable readings of divine election, lifted by revelation above the humanly deductible limits of neighbour love. Gnostic human ideals and constructions end up fragmenting and dividing the human community rather than offering unity. These commands of unreserved love and defenselessness demand the end of an appropriation of God severed from the revelation of divine self-expropriation. They break open a conception of unity in difference that falsely proclaims divine assent to human gnosis. Here Balthasar is showing that the commands of nonresistance are the redemptive revelation of the truth about nature or creation. God’s creative intent for the world is brought into view by the redemptive incarnation of Jesus.

Here Balthasar writes this vital sentence:

The works of love must certainly remain (Mt 7.21), but within the framework of the disposition of the Father and the Son: deriving from the heavenly simplicity of the Son’s transparency to the Father, which leads to the simplicity of his Cross in which it is made concrete—for it is there that Jesus does not resist the one who is evil, it is


there that he let’s himself be struck on the cheek, gives even his cloak, goes two miles, and loves his enemies (Mt 5.39ff).\textsuperscript{57}

We return here to the bi-directional nonresistance of Christ, issuing out into a bi-directional unity in difference of the Christian. The nonresistance of Christ to the Father becomes a “transparency” to the Father’s unlimited election of the least, the last and the enemy; what we have been calling a bi-directional nonresistance. “The works of love” are lifted out of a merely human context and limitation and taken into the “heavenly simplicity of the Son’s transparency to the Father” and through this participation in the Trinity, become concrete, human enemy love to the ends of creation. These commands become, as it were, doors to the Father/Son relationship on the cross, displaying as that relation does the Father’s love for the least and the last enemy. These commands witness to the cross as it displays the Father’s absolute lordly freedom over the tribalism of the world’s gnostic construction.

In submission to the sovereign lordship of God’s love over the earth, Christ goes forward in his life from birth to resurrection and ascension over-stepping boundaries to humanly-perceived election that had been set in far too limited and particularistic a manner via human deductions. “The internal and external boundaries that had been set for love (sabbath ordinances, laws of purification) are very deliberately broken, the solidarity with sinners is provocatively stressed…and Jesus goes towards his death without averting his gaze, in order to live out his motto, to serve rather than to be served, to the end and ‘to give his life as a ransom for all.”\textsuperscript{58} Christ says, “‘What you have done to the least of these you have done to me’, because I stand with my whole being behind the least, whose burden of

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 7:437–38.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 7:438.
poverty, hunger, tears, and oppression I have superabundantly taken upon myself.” 59 This is the “communion established by God, not merely promised from afar, not merely afar, not merely offered, but really bestowed on humanity as a whole.” 60 This boundary-breaking is Christ’s total availability to the Father’s will for the world.

This can be included now in what we said earlier about the Spirit’s role of bringing the church into the dynamic between the Father and the Son on the cross. It is this real incarnational (not abstract or hypothetical or merely “eschatological”) communion of solidarity with the least and farthest, beyond human deduction, into which the Spirit brings the church when she is drawn into the trinitarian relation. 61 To be a pentecostal church is to be a body that lives with real-time, spiritual, concrete immediacy the breaking of Gnostic, humanly deduced notions of election in the Son’s utter solidarity with enemies on the cross. The life of the Spirit-church is now the presence, the incarnation of this solidarity of Christ with the world, in the world. “[F]rom now on, one’s fellowman—whether friend or foe—is ‘the brother for whom Christ died’ (I Cor 8.11; Rom 14.15).” 62 Here the “protological, apparently impartial love of God has arrived, by way of the Old Testament predilection of the

61 Christ’s solidarity with his enemies is extended, for Balthasar, to a “solidarity with the dead” in the Holy Saturday descent into hell. This is explored with the help of Adrienne Von Spehr in Mysterium Paschale and eventually becomes in his later writings Christ undergoing the fate of the damned in hell. The wisdom of this has been debated but for our purposes in articulating the church’s location in the cross of Christ, it is enough to assert that Christ bore the curse, punishment and wrath which the sin of humankind merits. The most severe critic of Balthasar’s theology of the descent has been Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, Light in Darkness: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ’s Descent Into Hell (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007). Alyssa Lyra Pitstick and Edward T. Oakes debated the matter subsequently in “Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy: An Exchange,” First Things 168 (December 2006): 25–32.
‘chosen’, ‘beloved’ Israel, to its eschatological end.”\textsuperscript{65} Each individual now stands in a new place. Christ has “born the guilt of this human ‘Thou’ and has died for him, and therefore can identify himself with every individual at the last judgement.”\textsuperscript{64}

And this is an un-guessable revelation of judgement. It is the judgement of God in its eschatological form that shapes the saints’ approach to each person, friend or foe. Here the judgement of God is already pronounced upon the Son of God and this Son, as the brother of all people, becomes for them the path towards a new election, or solidarity with God.

This hope was the source of Balthasar’s humanitarian ethics. Balthasar, who was often nervous about issuing grand social agendas for the church to implement in societal change, was nevertheless quite clear about the mission of the church when this was tethered contemplatively within the offering of Christ to the Father. There was a hope for humankind articulated in the cross, and this hope needed to “move into all the other structures of human society”:

It remains a significant sign that Christian involvement in its most resolute forms has always been initiated with a persistent and sometimes almost stubborn preference for places where, from a human and worldly point of view, there is no more hope, or the involvement no longer seems worthwhile. For example, in caring for the dying, for life grown old and worn out, for the incurably sick, the mentally ill, and the handicapped, where not even a smile of thanks is ever to be expected, we should not ask whether such undertakings make sense or are worthwhile, for they were undertaken…in a consciousness that, in an involvement of this sort, the Christian understanding of hope sometimes becomes visible in its pure form.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{65} Balthasar, \textit{The von Balthasar Reader}, 413.
It is both the burden and the hope of the church to be figured by this overcoming of a particularist election in Christ. It is a burden because the world is deeply sinful and throws up a mighty resistance to the church’s bi-directional nonresistance as we saw in the previous chapter. And this resistance is not only “in the world” but in the church as well because the church struggles to be conformed to this love. It is also a burden because for Balthasar, the entrance of the glory of God into the world is not a “merely forensic justification”, an eschatological, “not-yet”, or “simul justus et peccator” kind of righteousness, but an earthly holiness that impinges on the world, we might say, an inch at a time.

But this real and present burden is also the hope of the church. Balthasar can be very circumspect about how possible it will be to accomplish what he in one place describes as the beatitudes’ human dignity using the beatitudes’ attitude of total reliance on God. This may be exceedingly difficult and never perfected. But as the pilgrim church is able, and as


67 Balthasar also has a form of this Lutheran emphasis, but, like the Anabaptist critique of Luther, resisted its tendency to envision a righteousness that was theoretical, or hovering somewhere above the daily sanctity of the believer. Christ does impute righteousness to us, but it is real, human righteousness, in battle with lingering sin and effecting real communion between the saints. See Ibid., 103–14; Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, 1994, 4:417.

68 This distinguishes Balthasar’s approach to the Sermon’s lofty commands from the “agape theology” approach used by several twentieth-century Protestant theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr. For Balthasar the Sermon’s nonresistant commands as located in the theo-drama do not constitute some “impossible ethic” meant to drive one to pure grace. The solidarity of Christ with the enemy is itself an objective reality, the truth within the world that is to be reckoned within one’s interactions. This trinitarian location of the enemy is the truth about this person; it is not some ideal or purely vertical assertion unrelated to the justice which this person deserves from us. Christians, if their work is to correspond to this revelation will seek to work out, by the Spirit, a prudential life according to this truth. Cf. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 35–62. See also Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1953).

empowered by the Spirit, it will take concrete steps to live this way and not that way in response to this revelation. The inability of the church to live according to this vision results in suffering rather than in despair, in patience and modesty rather than in conjuring some worldly justice per worldly standards. It results in what Balthasar elsewhere describes as a Christian anxiety for the world stemming from its union with Christ which is the missional centre from which ethics would proceed in the world.\textsuperscript{70}

In \textit{The Christian and Anxiety} the shape of this hope is felt where the church “constantly demands too much of natural man by asking him to imitate Christ.” This entire path forward of coming to unite with the archetype, Christ “will always appear, and rightly so, to be an exorbitant demand, an excessive strain, and thus a threat to and the destruction of natural man and his laws and limits.”\textsuperscript{71} The path from the old covenant to the new is trod by each person the church beckons into her solidarity. But in all this the church’s “sole desire” is that the person “might dare in faith to go beyond his own nature.” And to this end God has, “by becoming a visible man and founding the visible Church”, given believers the “abundance of visible helps as found in the organs and functions of the Church”:

ecclesial office and the men who exercise it; Sacred Scripture as a tangible word; the sacraments as definite forms and vessels of the salvific encounter between man and God; tradition, which enables the believer to align himself with the past; the example of the saints and of all fellow Christians who have a living faith; the firmly established order of the Church year, which takes the believer in and leads him gently from mystery to mystery.\textsuperscript{72}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 149–50.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 150.
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Further, in an essay Balthasar wrote setting out the agenda for *Communio*, a journal he co-founded, he describes the way the Lord’s Supper especially is the spiritual means by which people are drawn into the solidarity of Christ with the world:

The reality of Jesus’ eucharistic self-communication at his Last Supper and in the communion of those who take part in the meal which is established...[is] not in any sense magical, but sacramentally objective and inseparably constituting both communion with God in Christ and communion with one another (1 Cor 10:16ff); this opens out a possibility of living for others which exceeds purely human capacity because it is a sharing in Christ’s vicarious suffering for the Church (and thereby for all men) (Col 1:24), involving sharing a common lot with the Lord (“live with,” suffer with,” “be crucified with,” “die with,” “be buried with,” “be raised up with,” “be made alive together with,” “be glorified with,” “be fellow heirs with,” “reign with”) which all along is open to a universal human participation, and for that reason alone explains and justifies the difference between “Church” and “world.”

So in summary, this is the way in which Balthasar sees the radical commands of nonviolence within the Synoptics to be united with the larger purposes of God in Israel and in Christ, tearing down boundaries that had till then been human constructions that undersold the love of God. It is by one’s inclusion in the covenant between Father and Son that one comes to have this form of neighbour love. Here the divine love of God for the world becomes the neighbour love of the believer for the enemy. The synthesis this presents between “vertical” love and “horizontal” love is “absolutely creative” and could not have been pre-guessed by any philosophical ideal or principle. It attests to the freedom and lordly sovereignty of God over creation and “it is identical with the unique christological synthesis itself, as this is given expression by Chalcedon.”

The Chalcedonian definition, by describing the matchless unity of God with human flesh exposed to view the way God chose to become a brother to every human person. The church is that human fellowship created by

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73 Balthasar and O’Hara, “‘Communio’--a Program,” 162.

the Spirit to give fleshly embodiment to this unconditional embrace of the human enemy in Christ. Its structures and activities are pointed to inducting believers in real ways into this reality. This I-Thou-We of human fellowship is the earthly summit of the glory of God.

5.5 Balthasar and Judgement

But a question might be asked of Balthasar: is the church, viewed as cruciform solidarity with the enemy merely a blanket, sociological collectivizing of the human race in salvation? Does it create this solidarity by abstracting away from the individual who may yet be a very particular, rebellious sinner? Was there not something about the presence of Jesus that singled out sinners and held them apart from the crowd in judgment? Is this solidarity, as we have described it, not prone to perpetuate the delusion that I as a sinner can hide behind the massa damnata and not come forth in authenticity before God? Here it is important to round out this discussion of the solidarity of the church with the enemy with some of Balthasar’s words on judgement.

On the face of it, Balthasar is open to the criticism that his doctrine of the solidarity of Christ with the enemy presents a “blanket sociological covering” of the human race in salvation. We can note Balthasar’s controversial views of eschatological hope. If all people are known through revelation as those whose curse and guilt have been borne by Christ, “dare we hope that all men be saved?” Balthasar believed that such hope was not only

75 Which of course is the title of his book on the issue. Dare We Hope: “That All Men Be Saved”? With a Short Discourse on Hell, trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988). For a description of Balthasar’s views on the extent of final salvation as a contemplation of the theo-drama see Cameron Surrey, “Heaven Attracts and Hell Repels: A Dynamic
reasonable but demanded of the Christian. By extension, we might ask, does a gospel pacifism rooted in this incarnational, crucicentric unveiling of the Creator’s horizon of election necessarily turn towards universalism? Likewise, does pacifism then tend to become only a general “reverence for life” that refuses violence based upon this enemy’s membership in the human race? Finally, is gospel pacifism of this sort recused from all pointed judgment, the truthful denunciation of sin and the one who sins?

Balthasar did not accept the term universalist for himself. He rejected it because it was not contemplative of the theo-drama. It claimed a blanket certainty, a comprehensive a priori knowledge that, despite all dire warnings of the contrary possibility, all will be saved. But neither, Balthasar insisted, do the scripture and the church’s tradition make an a priori claim that, in fact, there will be people in hell. We can never know that any particular person is or will be in hell, not even Judas. Neither of these two a priori certainties are truly contemplative and Christocentric. Both “rush ahead” of what has been revealed. As we have said at several points in this thesis, revelation for Balthasar has a relentlessly unguessable, un-anticipatable quality to it. Balthasar believes this needs to extend to how we judge people in regard to how their present state relates to their final state.

Interpretation of Balthasar’s Dare We Hope ‘That All Men Be Saved’?” Pro Ecclesia 25, no. 3 (2016): 321–36.

76 This would be problematic, as all Mennonite confessions that I am aware of reject universalism.

77 He was, however, worried that Karl Barth had pressed too far in this direction. Dare We Hope, 94, 197. On the controversy surrounding Balthasar’s alleged universalism see Surrey, “Heaven Attracts and Hell Repels.”

78 Balthasar, Dare We Hope, 20–21.

79 Ibid., 19.

80 Ibid., 208–10.
What we do have in revelation are glimpses of the possibility of universal salvation coupled with the most severe warnings of the possibility of eternal loss. “What we have here are two series of [Scriptural] statements that, in the end, because we are under judgment, we neither can nor may bring into a synthesis.”

The church must remain in a state of fundamental readiness or awareness to both series of statements. To be under judgement is to be a person for whom Christ has stood in his or her place. This places the person in both great hope and great peril. For Balthasar this indicates that judgement is not a universal “collective” pronouncement but a fundamental personal crisis that every person is placed in before God. I have no basis on which to damn anyone else; however revelation places me in the unrelenting crisis of revolt or consent.

Following from this we might say two things in regards to judgement; first, the church has every basis on which to live and love according to the revealed truth that Christ has died for every brother and sister. In this sense we can aspire to a nonresistant “universalist” practice of love. Dare We Hope was, after all, always a book deeply rooted in the love of the church for its enemies. Hope must be maintained “under the presupposition that the solidarity with mankind expressed in the hope is practiced, struggled with and suffered through by Christians in a way similar to that manifested in the lives of the apostles.”

In a discussion about an Augustinian, Calvinist or Jansenist a priori “certainty” that there will in fact be those who have been consigned to damnation, Balthasar asks, “[H]ow, given an eternally valid bifurcation of mankind like this, simple human love of one’s

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81 Ibid., 22.

neighbour, or even love of one’s enemy in Christ’s sense, could still be possible?"\(^{83}\) That is again to fall into the gnostic reduction of election, the unwillingness to believe that the cross exposes the church to Christ’s breaking of all demonic, hubristic tribalisms. If we fall short of this hope, “the only thing of interest for us is that this hell is usually there ‘for the others’, for the sort, naturally, whom one can ‘give hell to’”.\(^{84}\) As a practical tendency, the “‘anonymous reprobate’ (whose existence is assured by the threatening texts of Scripture) is ‘incarnated’ before us in the form of our own personal enemy.”\(^{85}\)

But this practical, lived union with Christ’s judgement of mercy on the enemy also exposes the believer to Balthasar’s apocalyptic theo-dramatic law. The Christian must, open his heart and allow himself to be most intimately affected, challenged, hurt. God in Christ went to the place of the loneliest sinner in order to communicate with him in dereliction by God. Christian community is established in the Eucharist, which presupposes the descent into hell (mine and yours). No flight into an abstract unity is permitted there. It demands the courage to penetrate into another’s best defended fortress and, in the knowledge that it is, fundamentally, already conquered and surrendered, to contact its very center. That may provoke the other to the most savage resistance, and this must be endured. But it can only be done by completely humble faith in what God’s love has already done, and without any kind of triumphalism, even of love.\(^{86}\)

Thus, the church’s judgement attuned to the solidarity of Christ is a nonresistant unwillingness to reckon with other persons on their terms, and a resolution to judge as Christ has taken their judgment on himself. Nonviolent love is in that sense a Christian judgement of sin in this instantiation and expression.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., 196.
\(^{84}\) Ibid., 193.
\(^{85}\) Surrey, “Heaven Attracts and Hell Repels,” 334.
\(^{86}\) Balthasar and O’Hara, “‘Communio’--a Program,” 167–68.
But then secondly, a contemplative church does not only receive a solidarity with the enemies of Christ, but will also enter into Christ’s unique instantiation of that solidarity with each person. The church will become “co-judge” of the world with Christ, separating the spirits. In this the church participates with Christ in the Savior’s ability, even with only his “presence” or his “word” to separate the spirits. “He and his disciples work as catalyzers.”

Scriptures clearly warn about the real possibility of total loss and this possibility is placed before hearers with the greatest gravity and clarity by a church in union with the provoking Lord. In fact, the church in its crucicentric love of the enemy is a signal that hell, “a christological place” is a real possibility. It is a place Christ has experienced for all and so is real. “[H]ell is no pedagogical threat, it is no mere ‘possibility’.” The church must always “remain at God’s disposal” in this matter as well.

In an essay titled “Persönliche Beichte überhölt?” Balthasar takes up the co-judging role of the church as its practice of confession and penance. He begins by showing the way in the Christian life “every believer is personally placed before the demands of the gospel which separates ‘father and son, mother and daughter…’ to the point that ‘the members of the household of each and every Christian’ are ‘enemies’…. The family of Christians is formed of real persons who are responsible to Christ.” In the church, people become persons personally before God. It is this singling out process that establishes the necessity of personal

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88 Ibid., 457.
89 Balthasar, Love Alone Is Credible, 94.
90 Balthasar and O’Hara, “‘Communio’--a Program,” 160.
91 Balthasar, The von Balthasar Reader, 278. Translated as “Personal Confession”.
confession which forms part of the act of the church’s co-judgment with Christ. The church “has tried to imitate the conduct of Jesus from the beginning” and has tried to “discern the spirits and to forgive or (provisionally) retain sins with his authority.” The church in step with Christ and his judgement must practice confession. It does so as “the community founded by God for the world and filled with divine character and saturated with divine life.” “What is important is that someone who in thought, words, or deeds has offended seriously against the Spirit of the holy church of Christ must personally come forward and responsibly confess.” The need of the guilty person “to be rid of his or her guilt must be incarnated in an external deed, in an encounter with a fellow human being which secures punishment and forgiving reincorporation into the community—both at the same time.”

Balthasar rarely discusses excommunication but in his programmatic essay for Communio he says, “Consequently even exclusion from the visible communion of the Church (excommunication) can only be understood as an educative, temporary measure intended to help the guilty person (as Paul shows, 1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 2:6f).” Thus we can see that the church as a community of solidarity with the enemy “incarnates” this judgement not by ignoring sin, or throwing a collective salvation over the massa damnata, but by being the voice of Christ to the sinner, extending judgement, inviting confession and repentance, announcing forgiveness of sin, and if need be, excommunicating from the church as an “educative, temporary measure”. The key in all this is contemplation—not an a priori

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92 Ibid., 279–80.
93 Ibid., 280.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
judgement but an active, real-time participation in the solidarity of Christ with the enemy of the cross.

Gospel pacifism, I would argue, is a form of judgement. It is the Spirit-led ability of the church to conform its love to the brotherly solidarity of Christ with the enemy and to embody this solidarity existentially in the life of this particular Thou. Christ has loved this enemy and has made himself a brother to this enemy, setting this enemy in a crisis of decision. It was this very embrace of the enemy that exposed the world to the utter transparency of the Son to the Father in the extension of the election of God to creation’s boundaries. But within that solidarity, the presence of Christ (again mediated by the church) places each sinner in a crisis, a choice of either contemplative consent or violent revolt. Gospel pacifism, in order to retain its location in the theo-drama must be both this unrestrained love and this induction into crisis. The church tethered contemplatively to the cross must also be the judgement of the world in this sense too, placing the enemy before the gospel message in all its merciful severity. But we must also press here and say that this solidarity in judgement (unity in difference) is the very figure of the New Testament church. In this sense a gospel pacifism is seeking to enter the very furnace of the reconciliation between God and the world, and to live there as a daily, earthy love. This convocation is what the church nourishes.

5.6 The Implications of the Church as the Convocation of Enemies

This then is the church as the convocation effected by the presence of the incarnation in world affairs as Christ’s solidarity with sinners. Having described Balthasar’s ecclesiology of enemy love in some detail we can now pull this together and offer some reflections about
where this points to in a theology of peace. What we have sought in this chapter from Balthasar is an emphasis in ecclesiology on a contemplative calibration of the church with the tempo of God incarnate out of which enemy love can flow. The church is a loving company of enemies. That is its deepest truth as the incarnation of Christ’s representative solidarity with the human community. “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). This is the work of the Holy Spirit, inspiring the church to over-step tribalistic boundaries that had been set in far too limited and gnostic a way and inducting the church into this love demonstrated in the sermons of mount and plain. The Spirit exposes the church to the dynamic of love and nonresistance between Jesus and the Father, and further, leads the church to become a community of judgement, expressing utter practical solidarity, but also mediating the provocative crisis that the incarnation sets upon the world.

There are several implications that this presents for Mennonite churches who seek to live their unwillingness to kill as an outworking of their salvation. First, this is a pacifism deeply entwined with the prayer of the church. The church’s wisdom on the relation between contemplation and action is ancient and Balthasar sought to restore the balance in favor of action flowing from a “kneeling theology.” In prayer the church becomes indifferent to the ways God intends to bring salvation to the world. Specifically for Balthasar, in prayer the church becomes Marian, open to the mission of Christ and led to place herself within Christ’s disponibilité before the Father. It is prayer that nurtures a wise unity in difference with the

97 An Ignatian term for an active disposal of oneself that ever seeks the Father’s face for guidance. I like Sr. Gill Goulding CJ’s analogy of a tennis player dancing on the court baseline, anticipating the opponent’s serve. The player’s eyes are fixed on the opponent and the dancing is an indifference, a disposal of oneself to be wherever the serve goes. From an in-class lecture at Regis College.
world, not as a self-standing principle but as a daily contemplation of the theo-drama as it unfolds in the world before the eyes of the church. It is people who cultivate prayer in the church who can do their work in the world, alongside their fellow secularists, but nevertheless remaining in step with the gospel momentum in the world. It is not first the kind of work one does that sustains peacemaking as an ecclesial, gospel work in the world, but whether one is doing work out of a contemplative mingling with the Savior’s mission. Here are Balthasar’s words:

_Prayer_, both ecclesial and individual prayer, thus ranks higher than all action, not in the first place as a source of psychological energy…but as the act of worship and glorification that befits love, the act in which one makes the most fundamental attempt to answer with selflessness and thereby shows that one has understood the divine proclamation. It is as tragic as it is ridiculous to see Christians today giving up this fundamental priority…and seeking instead an immediate encounter with Christ in their neighbor, or even in purely worldly work and technological activity. Engaged in such work, they soon lose the capacity to see any distinction between worldly responsibility and Christian mission. Whoever does not come to know the face of God in contemplation will not soon recognize it in action, even when it reveals itself to him in the face of the oppressed and humiliated. 

Secondly, a church contemplative of the descent of God into the world is aware that its obedience is a divinely given “epistemology” by which it can claim to know God. The church cannot know God except through its participation in the radiance of God’s glory in the world as this glory is transposed into bi-directional nonresistance. This is earthly beauty, to care for the orphan and advocate for the oppressed in the solidarity of Christ. In this way the church’s worship and action become transparent to each other. The vision of God perceived in the church’s prayer, scripture reading and Eucharist, and the vision of God perceived in costly obedience in mission outposts, nourish together an understanding of

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beauty. It is the “ecstatic” appropriation of divine glory that leads to the costly expropriation, and costly expropriation leads to appropriation of God as he has given himself to be known. Theological aesthetics can re-orient a pacifist church by an awareness of cruciform beauty.

What this divine epistemology opens is the possibility that a church can speak for God. As a church in step with the theo-drama in bi-directional nonresistance, it can be entrusted with the judgement of God. “Where two or three are gathered… I am there among them” (Mt 18:20), theo-dramatized so that “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven” (Mt 18:18). We return then to the early Anabaptist proportionality between church discipline and pacifism and understand (in hindsight) that where this proportionality is skewed by a church self-absorbed by its own purity, or by its own pacifist principle, it will lose its incarnational unity in difference.

Thirdly, this will be a church that lives by and with love. One would think it assumed that a church committed to pacifism would have a theology of love at its centre. This cannot be assumed. In a secular age, wary of the abuse to which that love is susceptible especially when coupled with religious fervor, it is tempting to place one’s hope in themes such as “justice”, “dignity”, the “sacredness of life”, “human rights” or a democratic concern for “silenced voices”. All of these themes can be integrated in love but one cannot assume they come from love. Christian love is a human willingness, whether carried out by reason, sentiment, or natural bonds, to regard another person as Christ regards them. It is deeply Christic in the most incarnational sense. It is personal without being sentimental. It is gentle

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99 Anecdotally, I observe that to the extent that Mennonite churches seek vigorously to transpose nonresistance into active peacemaking, they tend to move from a language of “love” to terms of “justice”.
without being flaccid. In all things it looks to the parables, teachings and actions of Christ to attune its posture to Christ. An ecclesial pacifism underpins a life of friendship within the world. The Mennonite emphasis on vigorous congregational friendship, camaraderie and mutual aid is delightfully located to be a community of earthy love in its most incarnated form.

Fourth, a church contemplative of Christ will really be a nonresistant, nonviolent church. As it is conceivable that a church in a secular age may reduce love to “the politics of Jesus”, so it is also tempting to speak much about love but little about how this relates to the structures and practices of violence in society. Balthasar has warned us that discipleship genuinely attuned to the Christ of the beatitudes is an exceedingly difficult pilgrimage, but this is exactly the set of problems a church obedient to the Sermon on the Mount must choose to face. The Savior who set his life down in the place of his enemy as a transposition into human conditions of filial love for the Father is the very Lord who forbade killing and vengeance in the pursuit of justice for his disciples. The more the Mennonite church’s pacifism is plunged into the Chalcedonian dynamics of salvation, the more its witness will become an inescapable inspiration and challenge to the broader church’s ethics. Here the inner drama of the Christian gospel unfolds in the daily workings of the world.

Finally, a church living an organic relation to the love and obedience of Christ on the cross to the point of suffering love has to be serious about ascesis, the practices by which human narcissism, egoism and individualism are challenged and confronted. As Balthasar has shown us, to assimilate God in the manner in which he has revealed himself demands an expropriation of the self for the sake of the glory of God in mission. This is a church that expects and resources people to think about suffering and trials as a participation in the cross
of Christ, the way in which he assumed sinful flesh and offered it to the Father as loving gift. The saints too, receive the path of their lives in all its pain and joy and offer it to the Father through the Spirit. This refers not only to persecution and martyrdom but to a \textit{Gelassenheit} in which the daily ordeals of life are understood as immersed in the suffering body of Christ in the world, partaking of his nonresistance to the Father and the world’s wretched condition. It is in this availability that the resurrection and ascension too find their transposition in the lives of believers. A secularization (or medicalization) of suffering is closely related to a secularization of pacifism. Where the hidden mystery of God’s hand in the vexing trials of the world is denied, believers are robbed of a primal posture inherent in Christic nonresistance. In this thin milieu the suffering incurred in loving relations is reduced to something strictly interpersonal. Balthasar has shown us that this pain is also an important dynamic in our relation with Christ, who appears in the neighbour.

Finally, a church that seeks a contemplative simultaneousness with Christ in his solidarity with enemies is a church that offers judgement. Fraternal admonition, truth-telling, accountable leadership, and the practice of excommunication, when figured by the scriptures, can be ways in which Christ becomes visible in the world, taking genuine space in communities, without achieving that space violently. I would argue that in order for pacifism to remain ecclesial it must re-discover (with lessons learned) forms by which the judgement of Christ borne in his wounds can discipline the church and offer critique and encouragement to the world. A church that no longer has the strength to offer a peaceful judgement on sin, will soon find itself offering a violent judgement on sin. This is a church that can no longer claim a decisive union with Christ in being his provocative presence inciting the world to drama.
Conclusion

We come to the conclusion of our attempt to re-figure the nonviolent, peaceful, forgiving and costly love of enemies with the shape of God’s descent into the world in Christ. The central problem this thesis has sought to address is the apparent reality that in secularity we can be good without God. When the gospel is lived as daily obedience a vexing optical illusion emerges. The more the church presses the gospel into the earthly structures of daily life, the more it appears to be merely that: earthly daily life. In secularity, where the world and God are ever-more consciously held apart, the church must stay in step with the incarnation by insisting with more intensity on the mighty synthesis envisioned in the Chalcedonian definition. In the introduction we stated that we sought a theological ethic that sought first to see what God was doing and then to act in tune with this vision. The definition, in its Neo-Chalcedonian, Maximian, Balthasarian form, positions the church to sink into a converting union with Christ and by this union hold together in one sanctity Christ’s love for the Father and Christ’s love for the world. That makes possible a genuinely theological ethic within a secular age.

Mennonites in their history have labored in the tension between pacifism as union with Christ and pacifism as a cognate of modern attempts to create civility, order and productivity. Mennonite pacifism survived in part because it was effective at producing the productive citizens states coveted. Recent relief and peacemaking efforts likewise make a good apologetic for the Mennonite way of life within secularity. But as society joins in with these efforts for secular reasons, it is increasingly difficult to see a confessional momentum in this endeavour. The inherent connection between these good works and this good confession must now be more consciously asserted where earlier it seemed an organic
relation. Christians must now consciously do as a Christian vocation what others do for secular reasons. This is a basic survival skill of faith in a secular world. For this reason I believe that as Mennonites embrace now the vision of Chalcedon as Balthasar interpreted it, and as this synthesis becomes not merely a structure, but a lens to read scripture by, the Mennonite church will be figured with an incarnational unity in difference. Good works can be Christian sanctity but only in a church that learns to contemplate within the missionizing encounter that the definition of Chalcedon makes possible.

We have seen Balthasar’s Maximian, Chalcedonian Christology and described how this gave Balthasar a foundation to ground the ethical life in contemplation, attending to the posture of Jesus in his ministry making hypostatic choices. Every decision, act of love and judgement in Christ’s life, death, resurrection and ascension, was for Balthasar a revelation of the inner-trinitarian dynamic of “letting be”, or nonresistance of Jesus to the Father. Christ actively allowed himself to be begotten, receiving from the Father the power “to have life in himself” (Jn 5:26). Thus for Balthasar the daily actions of Jesus, his “secular” life, to use the word in its ancient meaning, is at each moment a transposition of his eternal divinity-as-Sonship. A key aspect of our argument has been that the incarnation is not merely the unity of divinity and humanity, but the unity of Sonship and humanity. In this unity there is no zero-sum relation between divinity and humanity though Creator and creature remain distinct. Christology, mission, and ethics come together as a union with Christ’s nonresistance to his Father. Balthasar also absorbed Maximus’s dyothelite emphasis. Christ entered fully into the created nature of the human being, refusing to violate the created direction and longings by which humans were sent out to find their home in God. Christ took this to himself even in the cursed state in which he found it. He transposed the human fear of
death, the human instinct of self-preservation (even self-defence) into an offering given on behalf of his Body, the church. In utter love for his enemies he remained fixed on his Father’s will even as the larger panorama of salvation’s plan was veiled from his eyes. This amounts then to a bi-directional nonresistance, a refusal to violate either Sonship or humanity, even under the violent conditions of the human community. Christ shares this synthesis of heaven and earth with his Body, making the church analogously figured by Sonship and Christ’s archetypal humanity. This we argued gives the church a *Gelassenheit* that does not violate human nature. It also does not violate the deeply divine origins of this height of love.

We then entered the throes of history, noting how Balthasar understood the Apocalypse to reveal the Christ-haunted existence of humanity in post-Christian realms. In Balthasar’s view, many people to whom the Lamb has appeared will writhe in rebellion, resisting the answer to humankind’s deepest pathos revealed by the nonresistance of the Lamb. Humankind in the wake of the Lamb’s victory erects all manner of disincarnating schemes, seeking to wrest fulfillment, immortality and power from the One who has given it to them in the form of a nonresistance to the Father. The violence met with the enemy-love of the saints is here understood to be a Christ-provoked Messianic woe. The enemy is not secularized but is known to be tangled in a fight to the end with the Lamb who holds out the offer of freedom—both freedom of movement and freedom of ultimate dependence.

Finally, we argued that Balthasar’s ecclesiology of solidarity with the Son’s offering to the Father through the work of the Spirit understands the depths of the church’s life to be an event of enemy love. It regards everyone it meets as “the brother for whom Christ died”. Violation in the church is defined as treating someone in a manner that over-rules the fact of
Christ’s present solidarity with this person. Christ stands in for this person now in sacrificial, loving exchange; the believer’s attitude toward this person must be contemplative of how this person is not here in the world as herself alone, but exists in Christ’s great exchange. A convocation of the world under the great exchange within the church shapes the church’s judgement. We noted how Anabaptist church discipline, at least as shaped by Michael Sattler and Pilgram Marpeck, sought non-violating forms of judgement.

Khaled Anatolios (borrowing from Jean-Luc Marion) provides the metaphor of a “saturated phenomenon” to describe the relation between trinitarian doctrine and the Christian life. I think he provides a helpful way to also see the incarnation and its relation to sanctity and ethics:

A saturated phenomenon involves an excess of presencing that so overtakes and overwhelms the knower that she cannot objectify the source of this saturation and enclose it within her cognitive grasp. Similarly, the meaning of trinitarian doctrine, or the apprehension of the trinitarian being of God, cannot be epistemically enclosed or objectified. Rather, we appropriate the meaning of trinitarian doctrine by learning to identify and interpret the various aspects of Christian existence precisely as saturated by the God who is Trinity; conversely, we learn to identify the God who is Trinity through the saturated phenomenon that is Christian existence as a whole and in all its aspects.¹

The description of the incarnation as the presence of God in human flesh is an “excess” in that it cannot be comprehended or grasped by the knower or the doer. It is overwhelming and overtaking in the infinite surplus of its depths of meaning. No act of human love, even if done out of deified union with Christ can adequately capture the meaning of Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. A human act will always fail at some level to be an appropriate manifestation of the incarnation, just as the Nicene creed fails to

comprehend the Trinity. And yet, as Anatolios argues, while “trinitarian doctrine does not allow us to encompass the being of God within the confines of human knowing… it does regulate our being and knowing so as to enable us to successfully relate ourselves to God, who is really Trinity.”

Gospel pacifism, I have argued, is a saturated phenomenon. It is a human articulation of the meaning of the incarnation as the reconciliation between God and the human community. It is a real-time prolongation of the incarnation that nevertheless cannot grasp the mysterious depths inherent in its form. It really is the incarnation we are seeing when we witness these acts of sanctified and costly love. And yet these acts “do not allow us to encompass the being of God within the confines of human knowing.”

This understanding of dogma, I believe, is what James Reimer sought in his work. He predicted that a church that forgot the patristic achievements would soon be a church that presumed to “grasp” and “comprehend” the full measure of the gospel within its ethics. What we have added to Reimer’s vision is the argument that Chalcedon not only created a bulwark ensuring a sense of both the transcendence and immanence of God, but that confession positions the church to encounter Christ in the scriptures and participate in the unity in difference he lived in his sojourn before the Father.

In three aspects—incarnation, provocation, and convocation—we understand Christology to be not merely a “structure” or “scaffold” or “foundation” but the dogmatic union of the church in the mission of Christ from the Father. All this depends on the saints, in fact, being united in a real-time solidarity with Christ. Here Chalcedonian faith opens a path to union with Christ that carries within it certain postures and moral choices. Christology in

\[2 \text{ Ibid., 9.}\]
this perspective is a description of how God overcame evil with good by incarnation. It is a description of how God took the evil of the world to himself and “used” it to offer humankind’s greatest gift to the Father in grateful love. It is a description of how this is not merely something God does for the human community, but something that the church is invited to participate in through baptism, Eucharist, church discipline, and costly sacramental obedience and sanctity in the world. By confessing along with the church in these ways, a believer is trained and brought “up to speed” with God’s past, present and future act of salvation. However, in no way can the church claim that the saturated phenomenon which is the incarnation is exhausted by her ethics.

In this perspective, dogma is alive and dynamic; it is given by God through the church to initiate the world into salvation, to bring the world into potent contact with the Christ who will not leave. Dogma unveils God and his manner of bringing about reconciliation. Dogma does not excuse the church from contemplating Christ’s life and death, but rather lays itself down as the Spirit-guided path directing the church ever back to Christ as he is revealed by the Father. It does not sever Christ from the gospels but deepens the mystery of Christ. It guards against any attempts to hive off the saving events into earthly constructions the church can manage on its own. Dogma serves to prevent salvation from becoming anticipatable. In this sense dogma keeps the church’s confession nimble and ever-responsive to the living Christ revealed in scripture and in the life of the church.

What is needed for activists, peacemakers, mediators, politicians, conscientious objectors and peace studies theoreticians is baptism, and the day-by-day contemplation of Christ as revealed in scripture. To imply that a peace witness can be sustained without this day-to-day beholding of the glory of God, is to invite a humanism that does not know its
possibilities and limits. It will become the practice of peace that eventually disincarnates. It will fail to be proportionate in the tensions between individual and community, contemplation and action, human flourishing and martyrdom, involvement and withdrawal, freedom and dependence, blessing and judgement, effectiveness and faithfulness. This proportionality comes through solidarity with Christ as displayed in the church’s scriptures. In obedience to his command, in imitation of his posture, in the strength and direction of his Spirit, and in the embrace of his Body, believers’ lives become the Christ-figure in the world. What this thesis would support is greater attention to Christian spirituality in the work of peacemaking. As those who mingle in the mission of Christ, workers must attend not only to job skills and theory, but to hearing the voice of the Father. In the Mennonite tradition, this vocation is rooted in believers baptism and nurtured in a disciplined church that shares the Lord’s Supper together. With the growth of parachurch organizations the union of the worker with Christ through baptism, Supper and discipline, centred as these are in congregational life, has been diminished. The argument of this thesis would point in the direction of a renewed covenant between the church and the parachurch. The parachurch, in all its efficiency and expertise risks secularization—achieving human flourishing without regard for the farthest ends of God’s mission to unite all things through his church.

What further theological work needs to be done in light of the argument of this thesis? First, while this thesis has not focused on itself as a Roman Catholic/Mennonite dialogue, it does provide a model for how this relationship can be nourished in the future. D. Stephen Long has shown the following to be true in the friendship between Barth and Balthasar: as both sides become more intentionally immersed in the reality of Jesus’ presence in the world as revealed in scripture and the church’s ancient wisdom, the reality of solidarity
between the churches emerges. This is not a foundation upon which to build unity, but the unity itself. This thesis has modelled a way towards unity that does not focus on vexing theological differences. Rather, as each church deepens its grounding in the glory of Christ and is shaped more fully by Christ’s figure in the world, more formal union becomes possible.

Second, our foray into post-Chalcedonian Christology as a resource for Mennonite ethics takes us into territory where the icon controversy forced the church to develop a Christology that clarified what it meant for God to truly take up residence as depictable human flesh. Mennonites, following John Howard Yoder, on the other hand, have argued that the life of Jesus in all its political, economic, and social contours is livable by the Spirit-filled church. Is there not a doctoral dissertation waiting to be written that brings these two concerns together and shows that icon-writing and non-secular Christian sanctity have a close relation. Both are the incarnate, but not secularized manifestation of God in flesh.

Third, the whole theme of violation which we have only touched on in this thesis needs to be developed philosophically to inform our understandings of what constitutes violence. We have shown that violation must be defined by how the Christic and trinitarian events of salvation take up and wield nature hypostatically. Pressing further, we need to explore how this teleological understanding of the world could guide prudence. What does it mean to violate a tree? A planet? A fetus? A gender? A murderer? What this question will ask Christian pacifists to do is retrieve the idea of nature, an idea that has fallen into disuse and has not been part of Mennonite reflections on peace.
Fourth, the material here on James Reimer points to the need for historians and theologians to do further research into the borrowings of Mennonite theology from so-called mainline Protestant theologians such as Paul Tillich. Work has been done on the relation of Yoder and Barth, on the relation of Mennonites and Evangelicalism, and on the relation of Mennonites and fundamentalism. An emerging body of work is appearing on theologians from the global south within Mennonite theology. However, this needs to be accompanied by further study on how the North American Mennonite church resisted or accepted the influence of modernist, liberal, or mainline theology of the twentieth century. How did this affect the way dogma and ethics were joined?

Each of these suggestions for further study would deepen our understanding of theological ethics. Secularity now presents us with the opportunity to put back together in a deeper way what had previously been joined less consciously. We may lament that this “disenchantment” has occurred, but Balthasar has shown us that an awakening to ourselves and to our final destiny in God can deepen rather than diminish piety when it is taken into the mission of Christ. It may be the way in which Christ is bringing his church to a more intentional manifestation of the beauty of God.
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