A Nonviolent Augustinianism?:

History and Politics in the Theologies of St. Augustine and John Howard Yoder

by

Charles Mayo Collier

Graduate Program in Religion
Duke University

Date:_____
Approved:

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Stanley Hauerwas, Supervisor

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Reinhard Hütter

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Amy Laura Hall

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Paul Griffiths

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James Wetzel

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Graduate Program
in Religion in the Graduate School
of Duke University

2008

ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The theologies of St. Augustine and John Howard Yoder are, if at all treated together, typically contrasted. This negative juxtaposition is in so small part due to the very different reputations of each theologian on the question of violence. This dissertation demonstrates that the standard contrast between the theopolitical visions of Yoder and Augustine is mistaken. An introduction portrays the cumulative work of the chapters as the unfolding of a question about the contemporary reception of Augustine and Yoder: Might John Howard Yoder's "pacifism of the messianic community" be received as a radical form of Augustinianism? The dissertation consists of four chapters, each dealing with some aspect of Yoder's or Augustine's thought which, under closer examination, reveals an interesting line of convergence with the thought of the other. The politics of historical interpretation, the challenge of interiority, the aims of historicism, and the nature of "the political" are taken up in succession. An affirmative answer to the overarching question is suggested, but the more important task is to render the question salient for contemporary theologians and ethicists.

For John Calvin Collier

Father, teacher, friend,

and number one fan.

[T]he choice of Jesus was ontological: it risks an option in favor of the restored vision of how things really are. It has always been true that suffering creates shalom. Motherhood has always meant that. Servanthood has always meant that. Healing has always meant that. Tilling the soil has always meant that. Priesthood has always meant that. Prophesy has always meant that. What Jesus did—and we might say it with reminiscence of Scholastic christological categories—was that he renewed the definition of kingship to fit with the priesthood and prophecy. He saw that the suffering servant is king as much as he is priest and prophet. The cross is neither foolish nor weak, but natural.

—John Howard Yoder, "Are You the One Who Is to Come?"

Did we become Christians then, my brothers, in order to avoid failure or to achieve success? Is that why we have enrolled with Christ, and presented our foreheads to receive this great sign? You are a Christian. You carry the cross of Christ on your forehead. This mark teaches you what it is that you confess. While he was hanging on the cross—the cross you carry on your forehead; it doesn't inspire you as a symbol of the wood, but as a symbol of him hanging on it—to repeat, while he was hanging on the cross, he looked at the violent people around him, he put up with their insults, he prayed for his enemies. He was a doctor—even while he was being put to death, he was healing the sick with his own blood, by saying, 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do' (Lk 23.34). . . . So learn from this sign, my brothers, learn from the mark that the Christian receives even when he becomes a catechumen—learn from this why we are Christians. It is not for the sake of temporary or short-lived things, whether good or bad. It is in order to avoid evils that will never pass away, and to acquire goods that will never come to an end.

—Augustine, "Sermon 302: On the Feast of St. Lawrence"

Contents

Acknowledgments

The ideas that have evolved into this dissertation date back to 1997, when I was completing a Masters of Theological Education at Duke Divinity School. That was the same year in which I became engaged to Erin Angela Martin, to whom I have now been married for over ten years. Here, at the end of what has surely been a long and arduous process for my wife, I must acknowledge her first. Erin has endured a great deal over the years of my wrestling with this thesis, not the least a great deal of uncertainty about whether I would ever finish it! I am enormously grateful for her love, support, and encouragement. Finishing this dissertation is not the most important thing we have done together, but I simply could not have done it without her. Her flexibility and sacrifice for the sake of my work have characterized our marriage. While my children—Krysten, Katie, and Elijah—have been cheerfully less concerned about the completion of my doctoral program, they have shouldered their share of the burden. I suspect each of them looks forward as much as I do to a life our family has yet to know—one with a father who is not dissertating. From a greater distance, my mother, Martha Mayo, and my brother, Darryl Collier, have never failed to lend their support to the cause— whether financial, emotional, or intellectual. They should know how much their support has meant to me. If they read nothing more than these Acknowledgments, it would be enough.

I have had the great privilege of trying to write against the grain of contemporary interpretations of John Howard Yoder and St. Augustine under the direction of Stanley Hauerwas. Professor Hauerwas has been as patient with the glacial pace of my writing as he has been affirmative of the work he has received. Though most

of what I know theologically I learned from Hauerwas, the evidence of that learning is off the radar of this dissertation's scholarly apparatus. The fact that Hauerwas could care less about that has been one of the most important things he has taught me: theology serves the church by directing our attention away from ourselves and towards what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ. I hope I have managed to acknowledge him by reflecting something of that witness in this dissertation.

One of Hauerwas's good friends, Jon Stock of Windows Booksellers and Wipf and Stock Publishers, took a risk and hired me as an acquisitions editor two and a half years ago when this dissertation was still very much a work in progress. Were it not for Jon's patience and generosity, along with the kindness of the many good people at Wipf and Stock and the hospitality of the "new monastic" folk of the Church of the Servant King, I could not have completed my work. Jim Tedrick, my managing editor, and K. C. Hanson, my editor-in-chief, have let me arrive to work late and then work from home on Fridays—all because they believe in what I have attempted to do in this dissertation. They have even suggested a willingness to publish it.

When we left North Carolina for Oregon in the summer of 2006, we left behind an extraordinary congregation in Southern Pines United Methodist Church. Actually, we were sent forth by that delightful church, as they discerned and then celebrated with us the preposterous "opportunity" of relocating our family 3000 miles away for the sake of my work. Large chunks of this dissertation were written either in the study of their parsonage or, once Katie and Krysten came to live with us, and after Elijah was born, in a makeshift office in a closet just outside the sanctuary. The fact that, prior to their adoption, our daughters were baptized and raised by their grandmother and members of Southern Pines UMC, makes our indebtedness to that body of believers complete.

When I was seven years old, my family relocated from Tulsa, Oklahoma, to Houston, Texas, where my father, an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church, had entered a doctoral program in medical ethics at Rice University. The demands of family life, the ordained ministry, and a severe disruption brought on by a change to the program at Rice, ultimately spelled the end of my father's hopes of receiving his Ph.D. I know, without having broached the subject with him, that completing my doctorate will generate in this otherwise stoic man a tidal wave of emotion. I dedicate this dissertation to him and to the memory of his countless encouragements. I know of no other father who encourages his children like John Collier. A retired Methodist pastor of forty years, and once a star pitcher for a Texas Longhorn baseball team that played in the College World Series, my father is capable of Wesleyan baseball metaphors: Darryl and I grew up being constantly reminded that we were "number one on his scorecard, and number one in his heart." After a long career of parish ministry, and now a few years of serving the poor in retirement through his non-profit ministry "Caring Friends," my father has innumerable fans of his own. He has been an incredible support to a great many people. Finally coming to the end of this dissertation, I can say with confidence that they don't know the half of it. I am his number one fan.

Introduction

The argument of this dissertation is twofold: first, that the work of John Howard Yoder can be received as a radical form of Augustinianism; and second, that a radical form of Augustinianism is the one most worthy of the name. As the chapters attempt, cumulatively, to make this case, I will use this introduction to do three things: first, situate the dissertation within the ongoing scholarly task of receiving both Yoder's and Augustine's theology; second, highlight how my reading of Yoder as Augustinian is meant to exemplify the task of critical remembering about which we still stand to learn so much from both Augustine and Yoder; and third, say more about my title and its interrogative form, or about why I think the question of a nonviolent Augustinianism is at least as interesting as the cumulative answer I develop in the following chapters. These are what I take to be the three most significant aspects of the reflections that follow.

Before turning to them, however, I should add a note about terminology. When I say "Augustinian," I cannot and will not mean everything that is or has been described under that heading. The same is true of "the political," "historicism," and several other terms used frequently in the pages that follow. My use of terms is necessarily argumentative, and for reasons that, if not immediately apparent, should become clear in what follows. If I resist the temptation consecutively to summarize the chapters, each of the introductory sections will present opportunities for gesturing towards the substance of the chapters. Here, I'd like to draw out some of the more important interconnections between the individual chapters as well as between the individual chapters and my larger thesis.

Receiving Yoder, Receiving Augustine

In seeking to clear a space for an Augustinian reception of John Howard Yoder's theology, I must, at various times in the chapters that follow, dislodge a number of contemporary estimations of Yoder's work, both critical and sympathetic. However, the most important obstacle to overcome is arguably in the primary literature. References to Augustine are scattered throughout Yoder's work, and they are almost uniformly negative. Yoder seems to have viewed Augustine as the theological handmaiden of the Constantinian perversion of the Church. Consider a concatenation of quotes from Yoder: "Since Augustine called on Caesar to bring the Donatists back into the fold, the ability to impose assent was assumed to be a mark of the truth."[1] "It is not at all surprising that Augustine, for whom the Constantinian church was a matter of course, should have held that the Roman church was the millennium. Thus the next step in the union of church and world was the conscious abandon of eschatology."[2] "The awareness of the visible reality of the world leads to . . . scandalous conclusions. The first is that Christian ethics is for Christians. Since Augustine this has been denied."[3] Finally, "When Magisterial Protestantism sought a date for the fall of the church, it was found somewhere after the fifth century, so that the ancient creeds could all be retained. Anabaptism found the root still deeper, at the point of that fusion of church and society of which Constantine was the architect, Eusebius the priest, Augustine the apologete, and the Crusades and the Inquisition the culmination."[4]

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[1] John Howard Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation," *Faith and Philosophy* 9, no. 3 (1992): 293.
[2] John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood : Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, Edited and with an Introduction by Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 154.
[3] Ibid., 62.
[4] Ibid., 89.

Everything that follows in this dissertation turns upon a rejection of Yoder at precisely the point of his assessment of Augustine. In the margins of Yoder's many books and essays, I have written "Augustine" dozens of times; only a few of them to mark instances where Yoder actually names the great Latin Father. The others flag arguments by Yoder that seem to me to be fascinatingly consonant with the most important insights of St. Augustine. I came to write this thesis by discovering that the unacknowledged connections are much more interesting than the curt dismissals. I hope to suggest to future readers of Yoder that Augustine is actually an indispensable resource for helping us to see what Yoder was all about.

It will be abundantly clear in the pages to follow that I have learned a great deal from Yoder. Indeed, my great sympathy for Yoder will, I suspect, lead some readers of the following chapters to dismiss them as a Yoderian perversion of the real Augustine. Though I would reject such a conclusion as a careless reading of the dissertation, I can recognize a grain of truth to it: when it comes to one particular aspect of Augustine's thought—the theological justification of limited forms of violence—I believe we should reject Augustine's arguments, and I believe that largely on the basis of what I have learned from Yoder. However two aspects of my argument are crucial to emphasize in connection with this critique of Augustine. First, my twofold thesis only gets off the ground through a prior rejection of Yoder's impatience with Augustine. Having studied Yoder's theology for over fifteen years now, I marvel at how consistent and interrelated his claims are. However, I doubt very seriously that Yoder's dismissal of Augustine is a *sine qua non* of Yoder's theology. If my reading of Augustine is Yoderian, it can only be so because of a prior critique of Yoder.

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Second, I argue not so much for a Yoderian revision of Augustine as for a radicalized Augustinianism, or, put differently, an Augustinian revision of Augustine. Yoder certainly assists me in this task, but what I find in Augustine are the same powerful theological arguments that Yoder deploys on behalf of nonviolence. Indeed, I would say that the heart of my argument is not so much that Yoder should trump Augustine when it comes to violence, but rather that Yoder's theological critique of violence is as powerful as it is because it moves in deeply Augustinian registers—or, put differently, because it leverages crucial Augustinian resources.

Moreover, if I doubt that Yoder's dismissal of Augustine is a *sine qua non* of Yoder's theology, I also doubt that Augustine's defense of certain limited forms of violence is a *sine qua non* of his own theology. Indeed, putting it this way generates a rather simple question that defenders of Augustine's affirmation of some forms of violence rarely feel the need to ask: Is the embrace of violence actually intrinsic to Augustine's mature theology? To be sure, an embrace is *present* in Augustine's mature thought. But the more interesting question is, Does it have to be? What is it about Augustine's theology of grace that requires it? What is it about his robust trinitarianism that mandates it? This dissertation is an exercise in making these questions look as perplexing and malformed as possible. For while I view these questions to be, in the end, deeply misguided, they do in fact haunt efforts to use Augustine as an authority on why Christians should sometimes kill other human beings—including other Christians—or lend their theological support to those who do. We need more than a summary of *what* Augustine ends up saying in book 19 of *City of God*, or of *what* Augustine ends up defending in *Epistle 93*. We need to know why his embrace of "secular" force follows

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from his Christology; why his defense of coercion is required by his pervasive treatment of Christ's humility; and so forth.

Perhaps the largest obstacle to my thesis in the secondary literature on political theology is silence. Many, perhaps most, contemporary Christian ethicists who write today about topics on which Yoder was either an expert or to which he contributed incisive reflections simply ignore him. This was frequently the case when he was alive, but it is arguably more pronounced now, a decade after his death. This is not because the issues to which Yoder devoted so much energy have become less pressing. Six years after his death, the United States responded to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, by invading Afghanistan and launching a "preventive" war against Iraq. The case for war was advanced by George W. Bush, a President who has made much of his Christian conviction and of his confidence about the role of America in God's plans for the world's redemption.[5] As I write, Afghanistan has transitioned from U.S. to NATO occupation, and the U.S. occupation of Iraq is about to enter its sixth year. There are indications that American troops could be stationed in Iraq for at least another decade. In the midst of these wars and their official justifications, debates have raged among American Christians about the proper Christian attitude to war and peace. Are Christians called to nonviolence, just war, realism, or some other option? What is the proper role of the state—particularly its sword-bearing function—in God's providential designs? Is war sometimes the only alternative for those who seek the peace of Christ, or is the peace of Christ the only alternative in a world bent for war? Do Christians have

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[5] For an extensive look at Bush's political messianism, see Michael S. Northcott, *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire* (London: Tauris, 2004).

anything distinctive to say or do about terrorist violence, or do they simply fall in line with the prudential judgments of their elected representatives?

These are questions to which Yoder devoted considerable intellectual energy. He made the theological case for pacifism like no other American before him—indeed, like no theologian before him—and he did so by taking with utter seriousness and respect alternative theological positions on the question of war and Christian discipleship. He read and responded to Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, H. Richard Niebuhr, Paul Ramsey, James Gustafson, and Stanley Hauerwas, to name but the more prominent of his interlocutors. He engaged liberation theologians, feminist theologians, dispensational Protestants, and neoconservative Catholics. He looked at the questions historically, exegetically, systematically, taxonomically, and ecumenically. He published books with university presses (e.g., Notre Dame), major publishers of Christian theology (e.g., Eerdmans), and denominational presses (e.g., Herald and Abingdon). Yoder wrote technical, intra-guild essays for peer-reviewed journals like *The Journal of Religious Ethics* as well as more popular essays, sermons, and even memoranda. His writings, while in many instances published in obscure and less-frequented places, have nonetheless reached a wide audience. *The Politics of Jesus* has been one of the most widely read texts in Christian ethics of the past fifty years.

Nevertheless, when the crunch came before the latest American wars, it is safe to say that Yoder's way of framing the issues was distant from the theoretical and practical reasoning of most Americans. In fact, most American Christians rushed headlong into the options—both intellectual and practical—that Yoder spent a lifetime critiquing. Rather than grapple with the challenge posed by Yoder's arguments to contemporary demands for Christian allegiance and obedience in times of war, prominent American

theologians declared their allegiance—allegedly as an *alternative* to the pacifism of the

sort espoused by Yoder—to Saint Augustine and his allegedly definitive and

sophisticated way of framing the issues. In what follows, I hope in some small way to

problematize this choice—i.e., for Augustine, against Yoder—by drawing out what I

take to be the deeper affinities in these two otherwise very different theologians. I

believe that a better understanding of Yoder's work would make it much harder to

elevate Augustine's political theology as an alternative to Yoder's.

Yet, as I have said, the argument is twofold. For I also believe that a more careful

understanding of Augustine's achievement should eventually lead readers to more

properly esteem Yoder's own contribution to contemporary theology. Indeed, it was

through the work of one of the most careful readers of Augustine's mature social

thought, Robert A. Markus, that I was put on the path of this dissertation. In *Saeculum:*

History and Politics in the Thought of St. Augustine, Markus helped me to see past Yoder's

caricatures of Augustine to one of the most important affinities between their

theopolitical visions: namely, their common rejection of the temptation to read the

meaning and direction of history off of what Yoder called the surface of events.[6] And

Rowan Williams's very careful essay on Augustine's political thinking, "Politics and the

Soul,"[7] confirmed my own conclusion that Augustine, particularly in *City of God* 19, was

demanding something very much like the ecclesial relocation of the political that is at

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[6] R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, Revised ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Markus has revised his argument about Augustine's contribution to modern secularity in conversation with both critical responses to his work and other contemporary political theologies, most notaby John Howard Yoder's, in R. A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, Blessed Pope John Xxiii Lecture Series in Theology and Culture (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).
[7] Rowan Williams, "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the *City of God*," *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987).

the heart of Yoder's *Politics of Jesus*.[8] Thus it is my hope that the chapters of this dissertation contribute in a modest yet corrective way to the ongoing reception of both Yoder's and Augustine's thought.

Memory and Redemption

As an alternative to superficial narratives of power and glory, Augustine and Yoder both teach of the importance of having memory humbled and transformed in and through the judgment of Christ. They both insist that such transformation is a necessary and ongoing task for pilgrim citizens of the Kingdom of God. Christian identity is, for Yoder no less than Augustine, doxological just to the extent that it is repentant and public, or rather public *because* repentant—and therefore unafraid of being brought into the light of truthful description. It is no exaggeration to suggest that for both Augustine and Yoder the way we remember the past is a crucial aspect of the ongoing work of Christ's reconciliation in the present. Thus wrote Yoder, "Every contemporary option assumes a view of history; if the history is misread the light it throws on the present may also be colored."[9] That Augustine agreed is amply demonstrated by the *City of God*, the *opus magnum et arduum* in which he undertook to convince educated pagans not to denounce Christianity for the fall of Rome to the barbarians.

　　None of this is meant to suggest that there is only peace and light in my pairing of these particular theological minds. On the contrary, another conviction that put me on the path to this dissertation has turned out, naturally enough, to be one of its

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[8] See John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus : Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 42 n. 36. Also John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, Institute of Mennonite Studies Series ; No. 3 (Newton, KS: Faith and Life, 1964), 18, John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 222ff.
[9] Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, 85, Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

implications: the best arguments take place between the strongest positions. While I am enough of a contrarian to enjoy a good fight for its own sake, theological spectacle is not what I mean by a good argument. I speak rather of the sort of dialogical exchange that, on account of the skill of the rivals, carries the disputants beyond previous limitations. I have tried to facilitate such an interesting argument between the greatest Latin Father, St. Augustine, and the greatest Mennonite theologian, John Howard Yoder. I have attempted to put these two theologians into critical conversation with one another, and I hope I have convincingly laid out the constructive results.

However, I have been aware throughout that many will find this enterprise doomed from the start. There is an obvious David and Goliath problem. However great a Mennonite theologian might be, what ground could he possibly hold against the most formidable theologian of the Western Church? I confess to thinking quite important ground has been held, but the proof will have to be in the reading.

Pressing the Question

The title of this dissertation is in the form of a question—A Nonviolent Augustinianism?—and for two reasons. First, I want to acknowledge from the beginning the challengeable nature of the affirmative answer I will provide. The various arguments in the chapters to follow, when taken together, suggest that Christians need to receive the work of John Howard Yoder as a form of Augustinianism. It is clear, however, that nonviolence and Augustinianism, insofar as they are ever juxtaposed, are typically contrasted. This is true for both parties to the debate (i.e., contemporary Augustinians as well as Yoder-inspired Anabaptists), although, as we shall see, "debate" is something

that rarely happens when it comes to the work of Yoder and Augustine.[10] The obvious difference—Yoder the Free Church pacifist, Augustine the Constantinian bishop—seems to have freed readers (in Yoder's case, himself) from listening very carefully to the consonant, even beautiful harmonies within these distinctive theological voices. It appears to have escaped almost everyone's notice that Yoder's politics of Jesus is, in key respects, constructed along Augustinian lines.

In another sense it seems rather trifling to argue that Yoder was an Augustinian theologian. As a child of Western Christendom, how could Yoder have been anything else? Western Christianity after the demise of the Western Empire just was in certain respects Augustinianism, so dependent were the churches on the literary inheritance of Augustine, an inheritance which, rather miraculously, survived the barbarian invasions to become theological orthodoxy for the West. How interesting is it, really, that a Western theologian should exhibit Augustinian traits?

Yet, if in one sense it is not surprising at all, that is because it is a sense that nobody is contesting. Of course Yoder stands in the stream of theological history cascading down from Augustine—as did Luther, Thomas, Francis, Barth, and everyone else in the Western tradition. My thesis is stronger: namely, that Yoder is in some ways most Augustinian where the consensus typically holds he is least so. While contemporary Augustinians typically go to some lengths to qualify, resist, or ignore key portions of the Augustinian legacy themselves, their eventual avowal of some form of justifiable political violence is usually enough to establish their Augustinian *bona fides*. I know of no contemporary Augustinian ready to follow the great Doctor's arguments all

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[10] Of course, there are exceptions to the rule. See, for example, Gerald Schlabach, *For the Joy Set before Us : Augustine and Self-Denying Love* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press), Alain Epp Weaver, "Unjust Lies, Just Wars? A Christian Pacifist Conversation with Augustine," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 29, no. 1 (2001), P. Travis Kroeker, "Is a Messianic Political Ethic Possible?," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 1 (2005).

the way in *Epistle 93*—where persecution is construed as value neutral and the righteous are said to be able to rightly order political terror, whereas the unrighteous cannot; but no matter, so long as contemporary admirers of Augustine are willing to go far enough to embrace some limited form of political violence. And this is where the chasm with Yoder allegedly opens up. It is, it would seem, perfectly Augustinian to revise Augustine here or there, so long as one eventually gets around to defending the use of coercion in politics; whereas to follow Yoder, or to follow Jesus according to Yoder, is to go after the justification of violence root and branch. It is thus understandable that contemporary Augustinians and Yoderians try to avoid one another.

I say it is understandable, though I believe it happens to be wrong. For the intuitive contrast turns on the making of the justification of force a *sine qua non* of Augustinianism, which as I have already said needs to be questioned. Is it really the case that every Augustinianism must be, in some measure, a violent one?

The second reason for the interrogative title is of greater import than the first. The better question is not, Could Yoder have been a nonviolent Augustinian? but rather, Can we? The use of Augustine to shore up Christian support for the violent struggles of every age ought to make one wonder. Is *this* really what Augustine intended to achieve in book 19 of *City of God*? Justification for the Crusades? Wars of religion? Colonialism? Wars to end war? Wars to make the world safe for democracy? The "war against terrorism"? Augustine has been called upon by defenders of "the tradition" to bless these and other violent misadventures. Is there nothing in Augustine to help us resist the latest siren call for war (not to mention this naïve account of "the tradition")?

Another problem with the intuitive contrast between Augustine and Yoder flows from the polemical nature of contemporary engagements over the challenge of politics

and violence. Obviously, contemporary pacifists are critical of Christian defenders of justifiable violence in general, and thus derivatively of Augustinian defenders of justifiable violence. But here we would do well to attend to a common feature of Augustine's and Yoder's theologies, namely, their invitation to rigorous criticism of their own positions. Both Augustine and Yoder summon their readers to reach back behind their claims to the scriptural basis of the faith. Both encourage us in fact to critically engage them in light of the prior and englobing witnesses of scripture and tradition. They are keenly aware of the ways in which the priority of scripture is threatened by subsequent traditions that claim to have the final word on scriptural interpretation. Thus writes Yoder:

> The use of history for apologetic purposes puts a bind on the reading of history. If we assume that those people are what make us able to respect ourselves, that apologetic use may get in the way of our reading the story of those people. If on the other hand we are closer to adolescence, and we assume that those people are what we have to react against so that we can respect ourselves, that anti-apologetic use puts a different kind of bind on the story.[11]

Augustine and Yoder, By Way of Hans Frei

My effort to provide a sympathetic reading of Yoder and Augustine gets under way in chapter 1 with a close reading and analysis of the work of Hans Frei. This requires a better explanation than that I happen to have written a master's thesis on Frei's work. The extended engagement with Frei's work is crucial to the broader tasks of this dissertation, and I will conclude this introduction by naming the most important of them.

First, Hans Frei, at least in certain key respects, worked out of a very similar historical and theologial context as did John Howard Yoder. Frei was not an Anabaptist,

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[11] John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution: A Companion to Bainton* (Elkhart, IN: Distributed by Co-op Bookstore, 1983), 166.

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but his efforts to think through the challenges presented by modern hermeneutical developments to the Church's Chalcedonian commitments helps me to illumine certain aspects of Yoder's work that I believe deserve greater attention. I suggest that Yoder's peculiar argument for a christological historicism can be best understood when it is set against the same intellectual context out of which Frei was working.

Second, Frei was one of the chief inspirations for postliberal theology, a movement that has generated some of the most sympathetic readings of Yoder's work. As appreciative as I am of those efforts, I think they too often fail to attend to one of the most important differences between Yoder and at least the roots of postliberal theology: Yoder's reading of Scripture, tradition, and history was self-consciously *political* from the very beginning. In this difference, I suggest that we begin to appreciate the Augustinian character of Yoder's theological vision. The politics of interpretation was as close to the heart of Yoder's thought as it was to Augustine's

Third, both Frei and Yoder produced a narrative of decisive setbacks, or "great reversals," in Christian history. Frei's reversal comes to a head in modernity, Yoder's with Constantine. This divergent reading of Christian tradition relates to the last point, in that Yoder's reading of the Christian past was, like Augustine's, consistently theopolitical. Contrasting Yoder's work with Frei's thus helps me set the stage for construing Yoder's christological historicism as a radicalized Augustinianism. Augustine often told his readers that what he wanted more than anything else in his readers was a frank critic. While we never get frank criticism of Augustine in Yoder's work, we do get something more interesting. We get an Augustinian unmasking of the Church's Constantinian capitulation to a politics of glory.

The epigraphs for this dissertation are meant to be a bit surprising. They suggest that Yoder was the metaphysician, and Augustine the theologian of the cross. Everyone knows that the reverse is true. I have learned from reading Yoder and Augustine together that we should never want the one (ontology) without the other (cross).

1. After

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Turning Points

Consider a list of recent book titles:

> *After 9/11*
> *After Virtue*
> *After Diana*
> *After Christendom?*
> *After Darwin*
> *After Christianity*
> *Ethics After Babel?*
> *After Auschwitz*
> *After Macintyre*
> *After Augustine*
> *After Writing*
> *After Theory*[1]

What is one to make of this preoccupation with a preposition? The many "afters" in this list of titles—from popular to philosophical, secular to theological, all written within the last twenty-five years—suggest a certain consensus about the importance of history for contemporary life.[2] Amidst the flux of temporal change, particularly significant events

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[1] Michael Barletta, *After 9/11: Preventing Mass-Destruction, Terrorism and Weapons Proliferation* (Monterey, CA: Monterey Institute of International Studies Center for Nonproliferation Studies, 2002), Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), Mandy Merck, *After Diana: Irreverent Elegies* (New York: Verso, 1998), Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom?: How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991), Timberlake Wertenbaker, *After Darwin* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), Margaret Daphne Hampson, *After Christianity*, 1st North American ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, Italian Academy Lectures (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1988), Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism*, 2nd ed., Johns Hopkins Jewish Studies (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), John Horton and Susan Mendus, eds., *After Macintyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair Macintyre*, 1st ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press,1994), Brian Stock, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998).
[2] I compiled this list several years ago, and then I simply selected a sample of what I found while browsing the Duke card catalogue. Many more "after" books have been published since I first compiled the list. There are now no fewer than four different "After 9/11" books. There are hundreds of books in Bostock library

happen. Certain happenings are, just in the intensity of their meaningfulness, distinguishable from others. Negotiating the challenges of the present, the consensus holds, is bound up with an appreciation of these "afters." History would seem to involve an awareness of how the flow of time *turns* at certain points, *after* which things are different than they were before. To reflect the consensus in theological ethics would seem to involve an acknowledgement that living rightly—morally, faithfully—requires an understanding of one's relation to the past, especially the "pivots" that have preceded us. For the consensus entails a posture of retrospection and implies that the challenges of the moral life are inseparable from the challenges of the historical life.

The list also demonstrates that human beings are among the "significant things" that happen in history (e.g., Augustine, MacIntyre, Diana, Darwin), and that focusing memory on such significant actors is relevant for those who live in their shadow. We live in the wake of key theologians, philosophers, scientists, even royalty and pop stars, and we must reckon life on this side of their impact. The list further implies that human practices or activities emerge and then get left behind or surpassed (e.g., writing), and that such developments are likewise pivotal. There are also happenings for which the "after" indicates a question (e.g., Christendom and Babel). Are we beyond the medieval synthesis of Church and political authority (Christendom)? How ought we live in a pluralist, relativist world (Babel)? The "after" in these particular titles suggests a questioning about life on the other side of, or about the need to get "past" or *after*, an earlier happening.

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that begin with the word "after." The lion's share of them date from the 80s forward, and the ones that don't are not using "after" in the same way (e.g., several "after action reports" of the U.S. Army from WWII).

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Such formal reflections about a broadly shared commitment to history—our common embeddedness in this milieu of the "after"—should not conceal the disagreements beneath the surface. Does the "after" indicate a lament for what has been lost, or a gratitude for what has been left behind (Christendom)? Does it indicate an imperative to *remember* something terrible, or to *forget* it (9/11, Auschwitz)? Does the "after" bear within itself the meaning of the happening, or does it herald something important precisely insofar as the present meaning is contested (Darwin, Augustine, MacIntyre)? Still more importantly, how do we learn to see the significant "afters" in our world? How do we discern or judge the "afters" that matter, or the criteria by which certain "afters" are related to others? Does it matter who the "we" are who do the judging and placing?

1.1.2 Great Reversals

These questions about meaning and history open onto others, a number of which I shall pursue in the course of the chapters that follow. In the present chapter, I step back from the larger questions to focus on two twentieth-century Protestant theologians, Hans Frei and John Howard Yoder, who labored extensively on what I shall call the problem of the "after" in Christian theology. Frei and Yoder were among the most compelling twentieth-century contributors to theological renewal in the American context, and both men had theological visions keenly sensitized by the importance and difficulty of thinking theologically in the light of time. Moreover, each discerned an historical "after" of immense, if chiefly negative, consequence. Frei and Yoder both wrote with historical sensitivity of "great reversals" in the history of Christianity, and both sought to make their contemporaries aware of the challenge of renewal and reformation in light of these

developments.[3] In the hope of discovering a better way forward, Frei and Yoder

summoned twentieth-century Christians to a painful task, namely, to the recognition of

failure, breakdown, and even, or perhaps especially, betrayal and unbelief. That is to

say, they illumined the ways in which Christianity, awash within the streams of history,

had been shaped by powerful—indeed powerfully distorting —"afters." In their

narratives of reversal, Frei and Yoder told stories of the abandonment of what they took

to be the center of Christian faith and practice. Each traced the contours of something

like a counter-revolution to the original revolution of the gospel, and they were both

convinced that the failure to attend to such powerful redirections would hinder

contemporary Christians from meeting the challenges before them.

 This may seem a strange place to begin a dissertation on the promise and

possibility of a nonviolent Augustinianism. What does a postliberal critic of modern

theology—Hans Frei—have to do with Augustine and the question of violence? The

short answer is "not enough." Frei paid scant attention to the way his sophisticated

hermeneutical reflections related to major questions in Christian ethics, or to the way in

which questions in ethics related to the challenges of interpretation. Missing in Frei's

mature work is an Augustinian sense of the political character of interpretation. My first

aim in this chapter is to demonstrate that John Howard Yoder's christological

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[3] Frei: "it is no exaggeration to say that [in the second half of the eighteenth century] all across the theological spectrum *the great reversal* had taken place; interpretation was a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world with another story rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story." Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 130; emphasis mine. Yoder: "This study shall seek to show summarily how some of the axioms of Western social thought are the product of the deep shift in the relation of church and world for which Constantine soon became the symbol. Our concern is not with Constantine the man. . . . Nor do we suggest that the year 311 represented an immediate reversal without preparing or unfolding. *The great reversal* certainly began earlier and took generations to work itself out. Nonetheless, the medieval legend which made of Constantine the symbol of an epochal shift was realistic: he stands for a new era in the history of Christianity" (John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 135; emphasis mine. The phrase also appears at 140 and 141.

historicism[4] is superior to Hans Frei's postliberal narrative theology *on Augustinian grounds*.[5]

A second reason for a close reading of the work of Hans Frei in this dissertation is that Yoder's contribution to Christian theology is too frequently reduced to his reflections on war and Christian discipleship.[6] As profound as his writings on violence are, Yoder's christological transformation of historicism is at least as interesting and challenging.[7] Reading Yoder alongside Frei allows me to draw attention to what I take to be Yoder's major contribution to the long-running faith and history debate bequeathed

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[4] I owe the phrase "christological historicism" to James Wetzel, who used it in personal correspondence to describe the undeveloped argument of my dissertation proposal.

[5] For the purposes of the present chapter, I will simply assume that Augustine provided such grounds—i.e., sound theological reasons for the mutual implication of politics and interpretation. While Augustine's arguments will be explicated at greater length in subsequent chapters, I believe my reading of them is neither novel nor controversial and trust that assuming them here will not be a barrier to most readers.

[6] I am certainly not the first to notice this problem or the first to seek to correct for it. Michael Cartwright sought to address the same narrow view of Yoder's work by attending to Yoder's ecumenical and ecclesiological writings. See Cartwright's introduction to Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*.

[7] I return to the significance of Yoder's historicism in chapter 4, where I take up the work of Oliver O'Donovan. According to O'Donovan, "historicism" is, to be precise, the problem with modern liberal theology. Yoder's christological intervention into the discourse of historicism makes for an interesting contrast with O'Donovan's sweeping rejection of historicism (though, upon further inspection, it is not as sweeping as O'Donovan suggests). The thesis of the present chapter is relevant to this contrast: O'Donovan, like Frei, is fixated on the "after" of modernity. It is thus no surprise that he remains rather friendly to the "after" of Constantine.

The significance of Yoder's christological transformation of historicism cannot be overemphasized. It is what makes Yoder's relative comfort with historical criticism immune to the otherwise devastating attack on historical criticism by scholars such as Jon D. Levenson. See, for example, Jon Douglas Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993). Levenson subjects historical critical scholarship to withering critique, arguing that "historical criticism is the form of biblical studies that corresponds to the classical liberal political ideal. It is the realization of the Enlightenment project in the realm of biblical scholarship" (118). If this were true of Yoder's christological historicism, it would constitute a very strong reason for refusing my efforts to align Yoder with Augustine. That it is not true is evident from the very next sentence in Levenson's text: "Like citizens in the classical liberal state, scholars practicing historical criticism of the Bible are expected to eliminate or minimize their communal loyalties, to see them as legitimately operative only within associations that are private, nonscholarly, and altogether voluntary." While Yoder certainly affirmed the voluntary nature of the church, he was certainly not embraced by members of the academy for his support for liberal political ideals. On the contrary, he was consistently caricatured by such members as "sectarian" on account of his robust affirmation of the importance of communal loyalties, not least for their role in honest historiography (for examples of this affirmation, see chapters 2 and 6 in *Priestly Kingdom*, "The Hermeutics of Peoplehood," 15–45; and "Anabaptism and History," 123–35.) That Levenson himself seems to have viewed Yoder's historicist reading of the Bible in a more favorable light is suggested by the fact that he later uses Yoder's work to critique certain liberationist readings of Exodus (see *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament, and Historical Criticism*, 145–46). The upshot to all of this is that Yoder sought to theologically transform historicism and historical criticism; he did not intend to leave them behind.

to contemporary theology by developments in nineteenth-century German scholarship. While Yoder's ecclesial identity was American Mennonite, his academic background was deeply German Protestant. I believe Yoder worked from within these two very different contexts to produce an extraordinary historical vision. I hope this chapter contributes in some small way to the reception of this aspect of Yoder's work.

Of course these two goals are finally related. Yoder's Augustinianism is nowhere more visible than in the way Yoder weds his messianic pacifism to historicism. It is this joining in Yoder's thought of questions of power and questions of meaning that generates a highly suggestive account of the surfaces and depths of history. Yoder, it turns out, has his own version of interiority, his own doctrine of divine illumination, his own form of unmasking prideful narratives, his own persistent need to unsettle facile closures, his own refusal of self-possession and self-mastery. We hear these Augustinian echoes most clearly, I argue, when we tune into what Yoder is doing with the discipline of history.

To begin to put flesh on this skeleton of an argument, I will set up my reading of Frei with an account of the inherited theological background that was shared to a remarkable degree by both Frei and Yoder. Their common relationship to Barth and their common concern for the "faith and history" debate in German academic theology frame my reading of the differences. I go on in subsequent sections to provide an account of the evolution of Frei's thinking over time, paying particular attention to the details of Frei's narrative of reversal and the "after" that anchors it. His story reaches its climax in modernity, and I will show how the great reversal for Frei is primarily about the modern corruption of the interpretation of scripture. It is important to insist up front, however, that Frei's abiding concern is not best construed negatively—as if Frei was

most concerned to defeat modern philosophical or theological errors. There was a constructive dogmatic commitment that enabled and necessitated Frei's critique—a "Chalcedonian" concern for the unity of Christ's identity.[8] Frei's rather cumbersome and technical vocabulary—unsubstitutability, ascriptive versus descriptive subjects, manifestation versus alienation ontologies, and so forth—was deployed to renew contemporary appreciation for the unity of the two natures of Christ.[9] Frei saw clearly that modern theology, with its penchant for locating meaning elsewhere than the narrative depictions of Jesus, threatened to break that unity apart and displace the vital center of Christian faith. "Christ" threatened to become a cipher for content that could be grasped independently of the gospel accounts of Jesus.

Frei's project nevertheless retained weaknesses, some of which he became aware, others of which he did not. I will identify a key problem that remained in Frei's later work by turning to Yoder's alternative reading of church history. Frei's abiding concern was to preserve the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus, and I argue that following Frei's lead ought to open up the sympathetic reader to the challenge presented by John Howard Yoder. My claim is that Yoder's christological historicism displays a greater "Augustinian" awareness of the politics of history, biblical or otherwise.

[8] Here I am in minor disagreement with Alex Hawkins, "Beyond Narrative Theology: John Milbank and Gerhard Loughlin as the Non-Identical Repetition of Hans Frei," *Koinonia* 10, no. 1 (1998). Hawkins's essay helpfully illumines the limitations of Frei's postliberal narrative theology by putting him into conversation with the work of Gerhard Loughlin and John Milbank. Hawkins offers "a reading of Frei's work as an essentially negative project aimed at countering the autonomous, disembodied, mentalist-individualist, self-positioning subject of modernity," 62–63. While Hawkins admits that Frei had a "positive concern for the practices of the church" (63), he fails to note that Frei's attack on modernity was funded by a Chalcedonian affirmation of the unity of Christ. This is a minor disagreement, for Hawkins is surely right that, whatever his affirmative commitments, Frei never developed the "positively stated conceptualizations of a narrative realist reading of scripture" (63), which his Chalcedonian commitments should have entailed.

[9] Thus did Frei actually *do* something more sophisticated than the postliberal metaphor of Bible-absorbing-world suggests. Frei obviously sought to restate dogmatic claims in a contemporary idiom so as to renew contemporary appreciation for the relevance of the dogma and thus contribute to that dogma's ongoing role in shaping the worlds in which Christians live. The metaphor of absorption cannot account for Frei's own theological interventions. One sould rather insist, with apologies to Marx, that the point of theology is not to absorb the world but to change it.

1.1.3 Frei, Yoder, and the Conflict between Faith and History

Hans Frei and John Howard Yoder had considerable overlap in their intellectual backgrounds. Frei began doctoral work at Yale in 1947 and completed a dissertation in 1965 on Karl Barth's break with liberalism.[10] Frei's work on Barth's theology is now considered groundbreaking for its departure from the then-standard American reading of Barth as an advocate of neoorthodoxy.[11] John Howard Yoder, who could be rather evasive about Barth's influence on his own thinking,[12] nonetheless dedicated *Karl Barth and the Problem of War* to "the memory of one who faithfully filled the office of teacher in the church"[13]—high praise from a theologian who often implied that criticism was the sincerest form of theology. In the 1950s, Yoder attended a number of Barth's seminars in dogmatics while undertaking doctoral work on Anabaptist history at the University of Basel (his degree was granted in 1962). He informs readers of his book on Barth and war that a "text substantially similar to the present one was read by Professor Barth in the summer of 1957."[14] Yoder notes in the preface that only a profound esteem for the value and impact of Barth's work "can explain the sustained attention to Barth's thought which underlies this attempt at rigorous yet respectful critique."[15] The academic biographies of Hans Frei and John Howard Yoder thus reveal two American theologians influenced—at roughly the same time in their intellectual developments—by respectful engagements with the massive theological contribution of Karl Barth.

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[10] Hans W. Frei, "The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth, 1909 to 1922: The Nature of Barth's Break with Liberalism" (PhD Diss., Yale University, 1956).

[11] Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

[12] John Howard Yoder, "Karl Barth: How His Mind Kept Changing.," in *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

[13] John Howard Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War*, 1st ed., Studies in Christian Ethics Series (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1970).

[14] Ibid., 17.

[15] Ibid., 7.

There are, to be sure, significant differences in their respective contexts, developments, and interests. Yoder was trained as an historian of Anabaptism, Frei as a theologian. Frei was born in Germany and moved with his family to America where he completed his doctoral work. Yoder was born in America and did his doctoral work in German in Switzerland, where he was on assignment with the Mennonite Central Committee. Yoder was born and raised a Mennonite, attended a Mennonite College, taught at a Mennonite seminary, and died a member of a Mennonite church. Frei was born to secularized Jewish parents, attended a Friends school in England, was ordained a Baptist minister after receiving a divinity degree from Yale, and eventually settled in as a lay person in the Episcopal Church. Though trained as a theologian, Frei's most significant publication was *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, a history of developments in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century hermeneutics. Yoder, though trained as an historian, is best known for *The Politics of Jesus*, a book that however difficult to classify is certainly not the kind of history Yoder was trained to produce at the University of Basel. However these differences should not be allowed to obscure the deeper commonality already hinted at by the academic parallels: both Frei and Yoder labored self-consciously on a set of challenges bequeathed to twentieth-century western theology by developments in nineteenth-century German academic theology.

In *Christ, Providence & History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology*, Mike Higton makes a compelling case for interpreting Frei's legacy in light of the "faith and history" debate that went back to Ernst Troeltsch in the early twentieth century, through D. F. Strauss in the nineteenth, and on to G. E. Lessing in the eighteenth.[16] Higton observes that Frei's

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[16] Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004).

mentor, H. Richard Niebuhr, attempted to hold together the thought of Karl Barth and

Ernst Troeltsch:

> If Frei represents one side of that influence, having apparently left Niebuhr's
> classroom through the door marked 'Barth', Van Harvey is a good example of
> those who left through the door marked 'Troeltsch'—i.e., of those for whom a
> Troeltschian account of historical consciousness was primary.[17]

Higton's suggestion is that Frei and Harvey found Niebuhr's combination of Barth and

Troelstch untenable. While Harvey could not reconcile dogmatic theology with historical

consciousness, Frei saw no way to hold together Barth's insistence on the sovereignty of

God with Troeltsch's exaltation of the historical-critical method.[18] Taking an alternative

path to Harvey,[19] Frei sought rather to reverse the Troeltschian/Straussian order of

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[17] Ibid., 25.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Frei appears to have been out ahead of Harvey in appreciating the importance of Wittgenstein for contemporary theology. In a new edition of *The Historian and the Believer* published in 1996, Harvey acknowledges the substantive criticism lodged at his book from postmodern quarters: "What we have in the case of the so-called conflict between historians and believers, the postmodernist claims, is really a conflict among different believers." Harvey clearly has been paying attention to the work of postmodern critics. Yet he goes on to defend his earlier efforts by enlisting Wittgenstein in his defense, even going so far as to suggest that Wittgenstein and Bultmann were making similar points about the incompatibility of modern science and New Testament faith. See Van Austin Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief*, New Introduction by the Author (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), see xi and xxix n. 21.

Harvey is trying to eat his cake and have it too. In trying to shore up the leaky boat of a detached critical historicism by turning "critical historiography" into a Wittgensteinian form of life, Harvey is bailing water with a pick axe. Wittgenstein's philosophical attack on modern foundationalism is not a better way to justify the "modern, Promethean desire to know," as Harvey remarkably puts it, claiming that such a desire is "rooted in everyday life" (xx). Rather, Wittgenstein exposes the ways in which such modern Prometheanism flows from a hostility to the everyday. When Harvey asserts that "The historian is, so to speak, his or her own authority" (xxi), he fails to see that it is just this detachment that Wittgenstein exposes as a form of escapism. For a genuinely Wittgensteinian account of historicity and tradition, including a critique of modern historical technique as an effort to "overcome history," see Joseph Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground:Practical Judgment and the Lure of Technique*, Joseph Dunne, *Back to the Pough Ground: 'Phronesis' and 'Techne' in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle*, Revisions (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 359–62.

Of course, the idea that the historian is her own authority is theologically suspect. Harvey's candor about modern liberal historicism is to be welcomed: it helps us to see why the "historical" lives of Jesus produced by liberal Protestants always turn out to look suspiciously like the lives of the liberal Protestants who produced them. However, no student of Augustine can accept this account of authority. Yoder would add that no serious historian can either. Indeed, as I will illustrate below, Yoder injects an Augustinian critique of prideful self-assertion into the modern historiographical debate. The only alternative as far as Yoder is concerned—again echoing Augustine—is christological transformation.

In a remarkable way Yoder is able to circle back around to Harvey's concerns. For example, Yoder can affirm a will to truth that in principle trumps believing communities. It is just that the truth in question

priority by "finding the proper location within Christian faith for something like the historical world of Strauss and Troeltsch."[20] He was concerned "to allow the question of history to be theologically situated."[21]

Yet even after such a reversal of priorities in Frei's theology, something like "the shadow of Ernst Troeltsch" lingers.[22] For the magnificently intricate historical readings in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* make it abundantly clear that Troeltsch's demands have not been simply set aside.[23] Getting the history straight matters a great deal to Frei, and his keen sense that current theological problems can be critiqued and addressed through careful historicization suggests that Frei might have been trying to hold Barth and Troeltsch together after all. The question is, have Troeltsch's demands been theologically transformed, or does his shadow do more than linger—does it haunt the work of Hans Frei?

I find Higton's interpretation of Frei in light of Lessing, Strauss, and Troeltsch particularly useful, and for three reasons. First, Higton locates Frei's work within the milieu of the "after" with which I began. Frei's work is suffused with an historical consciousness from beginning to end. Whatever else Frei has to say about modern hermeneutical tendencies to prioritize ostensive reference, or to subsume particular biblical truths within a "broader" historicism, this is not because Frei thinks Christian theology is isolable from history. Frei's concern for the unsubstitutability of Jesus Christ

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is for Yoder the one man, Jesus Christ. Yoder's critique of Constantinianism is an exercise in just such a critical historicism. A genuine critical historiography is for Yoder a measuring of all truth claims before the particular history of Jesus.

[20] Higton, *Christ, Providence and History*, 34–35.

[21] Ibid., 93.

[22] On "the shadow of Ernst Troeltsch," see Harvey, *Historian and the Believer*, 3ff.

[23] After presenting Troeltsch's famous three principles of historical investigation (i.e., the principles of analogy, criticism, and correlation), Harvey summarizes the import of Troeltsch's legacy: "Historical explanation . . . necessarily takes the form of understanding an event in terms of its antecedents and consequences, and no event can be isolated from its historically conditioned time and space. Ibid., 15.

is an attempt at greater historical seriousness, not less. If he parts with Troeltsch, it is not over the demand for an appropriately historical consciousness, but rather over exactly what such a consciousness entails.

Second, John Howard Yoder engaged this very tradition and its questions about the relationship between faith and history. Yoder takes up Lessing's "ugly broad ditch" directly in one of his most important essays, "'But We Do See Jesus': The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth."[24] Trained as an historian, Yoder wrote extensively about the kind of theology he thought was required if history is to be taken seriously, but also about the kind of history required if the church's proclamation about Jesus is true. Higton's contextualization of Frei as heir to both Barth and Troeltsch is thus equally appropriate for Yoder.[25]

Third, Higton's way of setting up his assessment of Frei's contribution is useful because it identifies a substantive commonality with which dialogue can be fostered. Both Frei and Yoder engaged the question of faith and history that has shadowed theology since Lessing, and especially since Strauss' *Life of Jesus* appeared in 1835.[26] As

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[24] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 46.

[25] This is the case especially if one overcomes the tendency to interpret Troeltsch's influence strictly in terms of his typological work in Christian ethics. As Alex Sider has argued, it is "crucial to see [Yoder] as an heir to Troeltsch in another respect, namely, in trying to think through the implications of a non-reductive historicism for Christian theology." J. Alexander Sider, ""To See History Doxologically" : History and Holiness in John Howard Yoder's Ecclesiology" (PhD Diss., Duke University, 2004), 18-19.

[26] As we will see, Yoder was routinely dissatisfied with the questions being asked; the choice put to theology by Lessing between particularity and universality was no exception. Chris Huebner rightly draws attention to the significance of changing the questions in Yoder's work. See Chris K. Huebner, "Unhandling History: Anti-Theory, Ethics, and the Practice of Witness" (PhD Diss., Duke University, 2002), 197ff. It is nonetheless important to note the many instances in which Yoder proceeded to answer even the bad questions—the essay on Lessing is, again, exemplary. Yoder did not demand that his interlocutors get the questions right before the conversation could begin. He often took up the conversation as it was presented, and worked with it as well as he could. It was a form of Yoder's patience that is seldom noticed and that worked in tandem with his attempt to change the questions peaceably. Yoder thus was not only capable of seeing the violence lurking in the inherited questions, as Huebner correctly notices; he was also concerned to make a nonviolent dialogical intervention. See, for another example, the introduction to *The Priestly Kingdom*, where Yoder writes: "my articulation of the pacifist witness has been predominantly dialogical, addressing issues in the terms in which they are put by others rather than explicating my own views or those of the historic

we have already seen, Frei was convinced that a false order of priorities had been set

between theology and history. In *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* Frei tells in painstaking

detail the story of how that false ordering emerged. He describes the climax as "the great

reversal" in biblical interpretation: "interpretation was [now] a matter of fitting the

biblical story into another world with another story rather than incorporating that world

into the biblical story."[27] In Frei's description of the reversal, one hears echoes of Barth's

refusal to discipline the knowledge of God by some other, ostensibly wider or more

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peace churches. The value of such a dialogical denominational format is that it educates one in respect for the thought systems of others. Its liability is that it exposes one to being misinterpreted by others as though one represented a 'pure type' which they can use as a foil" Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 1. We should be grateful for the grief this patience evidently caused Yoder, for it is out of the need to clarify misunderstandings that Yoder put together books like *The Priestly Kingdom*, *For the Nations*, and *To Hear the Word*. In the introduction to *For the Nations*, Yoder writes: "My accepting the 'sectarian' label for myself, for purposes of discussion within American Protestantism, 1950–1990, is like the Jew in Babylon in 500 B.C.E. using Chaldean or like Buber, Landau, and Zweig in Germany in 1920 using German; I have usually done it, accepting having no choice but to play by other people's rules. Yet it routinely has led to misunderstanding and misrepresentation." Yoder, *For the Nations*, 4. Interestingly enough, Augustine also argued for patience with bad questions. At *Confessions* 11.12.14, Augustine writes, "I will set about replying to the questioner who asks, 'What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?'" The version of the *Confessions* I have used is Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, Vintage Spiritual Classics (New York: Vintage, 1997). Augustine clearly thinks this is a bad question, as a paragraph later he speaks of the "giddy-minded person [who] wanders off into fantasy about epochs of time before creation." It makes no sense to speak of some time "before" God created the ages (11.13.15). However, Augustine continues, "I will not respond with that joke someone is said to have made: 'He was getting hell ready for people who inquisitively peer into deep matters'; for this is to evade the force of the question. It is one thing to see the solution, and something different to make fun of the problem. So I will not give that reply. I would rather have answered, 'What I do not know, I do not know,' than have cracked a joke that exposed a serious questioner to ridicule and won applause for giving an untrue answer. . . . I boldly make this assertion: Before God made heaven and earth, he was not doing anything." In short, both Augustine and Yoder refused to choose between being determined by bad questions, on the one hand, and refusing to answer them, on the other. Instead, they saw bad questions—and, more broadly, bad arguments—as useful occasions for clarification.
[27] Frei, *Eclipse*, 130.

secure knowledge.[28] And these Barthian echoes remind me in turn of John Howard Yoder's attack on the historical "reversal" of Constantinianism.[29]

And yet just here—in the two accounts of reversal provided by Frei and Yoder—is where I suggest we can best observe Frei and Yoder parting ways. It is noteworthy that two theologians working independently of one another, yet from within a similar theological horizon, arrived at the conclusion that something had gone terribly wrong in the history of Christianity. It is also striking that their diagnoses of the turning point—the "after"—differed substantially. A closer inspection of the contours of the stories told by Frei and Yoder reveals a number of key differences.

While I leave it to the exposition that follows to draw out the differences in detail, I will argue that Frei's constructive alternative to modern liberal theology recapitulated some of the problems he diagnosed. His attention to the evasive hermeneutics of modern academic theology yielded important results. He rightly saw that the allegorical readings of modern liberal theology—wherein the particularities of the biblical stories were treated as dispensable vehicles for more general truths—did violence to the identity of Christ depicted in the gospels, precisely by sundering the intimate unity of divine and human agencies depicted therein. Yet neither Frei's early alternative appeal to intrinsic textual features ("realistic narrative") nor his later appeal to the community's consensual reading practices (*sensus communis*) enabled him to

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[28] In the following small print passage from *CD* II/1 Barth makes the typical point (learned well by Frei) of resisting all human efforts to determine where and how God is to be found. It is not insignificant that Barth is here leveraging Augustine's own conclusion about the benefits of interior ascent in *Confessions* 9.10: "If we really soar up into these heights, and really reduce all concepts, images, words and signs to silence, and really think we can enter into the *idipsum*, it simply means that we willfully hurry past God, who descends in His revelation into this world of ours. Instead of finding Him where He Himself has sought us—namely, in His objectivity—we seek Him where He is not to be found, since He on His side seeks us in His Word." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 2/1* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1949), 11.

[29] Craig Carter denotes a chapter to "Yoder and the theology of Karl Barth." See Craig A. Carter, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 61–90.

confront the *political* nature of the reversal he was charting. In fact, Frei's lack of

attention to the politics of interpretation meant that he missed the most significant

continuity between modern and pre-modern exegesis—namely, the consensus before

and after modernity that the particularities of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection were

irrelevant to a proper understanding of politics and power.[30] Frei thus failed to realize

that the modern "eclipse" he so expertly documented was a rather minor celestial event.

Efforts to evade the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus did not commence, as Frei

suggested, in the seventeenth century. Frei's focus was on a number of the symptoms

and not the disease itself.

While I turn now to substantiating this critical reading of Frei's "postliberal"

theology, it is appropriate to keep the "faith and history" problematic in mind. A critical

engagement between Frei and Yoder cannot evade the question of the relationship

between Christianity and modern historical consciousness. In the conclusion of the

chapter I offer some provisional remarks about the significance of this question for my

quest for a nonviolent Augustinianism. My aim is to refocus the problematic in such a

way that allows Augustine's ancient voice to be appreciated for its relevance to this very

modern debate.

1.2 Hans Frei and the Great Reversal of Modernity

1.2.1 The Unsubstitutable Identity of Jesus Christ

In 1967 Frei published "a theological experiment" in two issues of the Presbyterian

magazine *Crossroads*, essays which later achieved book form in *The Identity of Jesus Christ:*

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[30] Determining Augustine's relationship to this consensus is no simple matter. I return to this question in subsequent chapters, having focused the challenge in the present chapter.

An Inquiry into the Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology.[31] The subtitle is helpful for

understanding the broad aim of the book: Frei's exploration into the identity of Jesus

Christ involves an argument for the appropriate interpretive framework for dogmatic

theology. Yet Frei goes about his task in a puzzling way. Particularly for readers familiar

with his late works,[32] Frei's worries in *Identity* about privileging presence over identity

in reflection about Jesus seem foreign. Yet if one keeps in mind that the problems of

presence and identity engaged in parts one and two of *Identity* find resolution in Frei's

appeal to the history-like or "realistic" character of the gospel narratives in parts four

and five, then Frei's early enigmatic vocabulary can be placed in relation to the concept

of "realistic narrative" that has strong ties to his later and more familiar work. A look at

Frei's concerns in the first two parts is therefore a helpful background for his

understanding and use of "realistic narrative."

Frei's overarching task in *Identity* is to work out the formal implications of a

basic, governing Christian conviction: "in Jesus Christ identity and presence are so

completely one that they are given to us together: we cannot know *who* he is without

having him present."[33] Frei does not seek to establish this articulation by argument, but

rather assumes it, leaving the question of its adequacy open to the community of

Christians. From this basic assumption, Frei argues that while there is unity in Christ's

presence and identity, there is also an appropriate order of reflection. "Who is Jesus

Christ?" and "How is Jesus Christ present?" are questions which can be, indeed often

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[31] Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1975), vii. For the initial publication, see "The Mystery of the Presence of Jesus Christ," Unit I, *Crossroads* (January-March 1967): 69–96; Unit II, *Crossroads* (April-June): 69–96.
[32] Frei, *Eclipse*. Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Hans W. Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
[33] Frei, *Identity*, 7.

are, pursued independently. Frei's contention is that privileging questions about Jesus's presence can only lead to distortions of Jesus's unique, unsubstitutable identity. Only if we order our reflection towards identity first can we do justice to the real presence and identity that are in fact one in Jesus Christ.

Frei defends this contention in two steps. First, he shows how attempts to begin with presence necessarily break down. He explores a variety of ways of approaching presence before identity, and the upshot of his investigation is that the resurrection immediately arises as a problem (How can a dead man be present?), the various answers to which are equally unsatisfactory. The literal evidentiary arguments have staked Jesus Christ's presence on claims of "evidence" which have long ceased to be persuasive.[34] The imaginative attempt to grasp the resurrection gets us little further, asking us to imagine the unimaginable. Finally, conceiving of the resurrection as myth or symbol disperses Christ's presence into general anthropological claims, making that presence something more nearly governed by our own existential self-understanding than by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Christ ceases to own his own presence, for it gets disconnected from his identity by way of symbol or myth.

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[34] This is not to suggest that Frei is unconcerned with the veridical status of Christian truth claims. He too is unconvinced by the evidentiary arguments, not because it does not matter to him whether Jesus was raised, but because the arguments from evidence appropriate modern referential assumptions that subject the biblical depiction to a questionable external authority. Crucially important for understanding Frei's disdain for the commonsensical insistence on historical reference and verification is his assertion, one he claims to have gotten from Barth, that "We have the reality only under the depiction and not in a language-neutral or language-transcending way" ("Theology and Interpretation," *Theology and Narrative*, 103–4). Since for Christians the biblical narratives render the one true depiction of the one true world, "the narrated world is as such the real world and not a linguistic launching pad to language-transcending reality, whether ideal essence or self-contained empirical occurrence" (ibid., 104). Orthodox defenders of historical verification with their "evidence" arguments actually subvert the traditional appreciation of the Bible's totalizing depiction. This is an extremely important issue and obviously raises key questions about the nature of truth and the justification of belief for Christians. No one has dealt with these issues more clearly and thoroughly than Bruce D. Marshall. See his "Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths, in Bruce D. Marshall, ed. *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press,1990), 69–102. See also Bruce D. Marshall, "Aquinas as Postliberal Theologian," *The Thomist* 53 (1989): 353–402.

All of these efforts do confront questions about Jesus's identity (concerns over the resurrection being the prime example), but in yearning to understand and grasp presence first, they distort it or leave it behind. Charles Campbell nicely summarizes this part of Frei's argument: "Jesus' unique, unsubstitutable identity is lost, diffused into human experience, when the question of his presence, the question of meaningfulness, takes priority over the question of his identity."[35]

Campbell's association of "the question of meaningfulness" with Frei's discussion of presence is a helpful pointer to other language Frei frequently deployed to address the same concern. To paraphrase the argument in *Identity* with language from "Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal," a lecture written the same year in which the *Crossroads* articles appeared: attempts to come to terms with presence before discussing identity are prime examples of the apologetic desire, not so much to prove the truth of the Christian faith, but to demonstrate its meaningfulness in a way that is detachable from Christian practices.[36] When presence is given priority over identity, one is left to "'correlate' the Christian message with dimensions of human existence that can be discerned apart from the 'linguistic world' of the Christian faith itself."[37] A "Christ presence" established independently of the scriptural narratives depicting Jesus can only be a translated presence, i.e., one correlated with a more agreeable and universal human understanding. This is clearly Frei's qualm in *Identity* with those who want to maintain the symbolic significance of the resurrection: "[Jesus Christ's] resurrection is the symbol of our ascending (or descending) to another level of our being, so that his presence is

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[35] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 40. As will be everywhere apparent, I have benefited greatly from Campbell's probing, sensitive, and well-written presentation of the theology of Hans Frei. His summary of Frei's thought is the best documented, most comprehensive I know of.
[36] "Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal," in Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 27.
[37] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 33.

diffused into and made to represent all mankind seeking to grasp its own basic longing and true hidden spirit."[38] Resurrection, symbolically understood, turns out to fit quite nicely with the deeply human sense of being, and the meaningfulness of his presence is thus established and made readily available. More is the pity, Frei would add, for the presence so announced is more nearly anthropological than theological, and the unique, unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ has faded into oblivion, or more accurately, been transformed into something we already know or are aware of, or something so ineffable that it can only be pointed to through myth and symbol.

Frei's second step is to demonstrate that apologetic theology is not the only option. By now it is clear that Frei's alternative is to begin with identity. But before turning to his account, it should be observed that a simple privileging of identity over presence will not do for Frei, for there are myriad ways to get at identity, many of which are at least as problematic as the efforts to get at presence.[39] There are, after all, many quests and questors, all aiming at the true identity of Jesus Christ, or as they would prefer to put it, the real historical Jesus. They look like straightforward attempts to take seriously the important, privileged status of identity description.

Nevertheless all of these historical Jesus efforts are, according to Frei, plagued by deeply problematic assumptions about identity. Their efforts to go behind or in back of

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[38] Frei, *Identity*, 32.

[39] This observation goes perhaps some way towards explaining why language about ordering reflections on presence and identity disappears from Frei's later work. It is, of course, the case that Frei became ultimately unhappy with the idealist baggage attached to his technical use of presence in *Identity* (see his "Preface" to *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, written seven years after the *Crossroads* articles and shortly after the publication of *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*; see viii.) But it also seems significant that his emphasis on privileging identity over presence really did not have the cutting edge he wanted it to. Some theologians who privileged presence shared some of the same defects of those who privileged identity. They shared the common assumption that meaning was reference, ideal or ostensive, not something located at the level of narrative, referential or not. This view gets worked out in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, but here it is worth noting that the typology of modern theology Frei eventually works out in *Types of Christian Theology* makes no use of the presence/identity distinction, and probably because Frei was aware that that distinction was far less useful for dividing up the theological terrain.

the scriptural narratives betray an allegiance to dualistic views of the self—the true self always lurking mysteriously behind outward manifestations. Frei insists, to the contrary, that "a person's uniqueness is not attributable to a super-added factor, an invisible agent residing inside and from there directing the body, or what Gilbert Ryle has called a 'ghost in the machine'."[40] On Frei's reading, New Quest efforts to find Jesus's true self behind the texts that narrate the interaction of character and incident, word and action, made precisely this mistake. William Placher succinctly summarizes what Frei affirmed in Ryle: "the human self is not some unknowable inner entity, whose nature may or may not be revealed by the words and bodily actions so mysteriously related to it. Rather, my words and actions constitute my identity."[41] In Frei's simplest formulation, "A man is known precisely to the extent that he is what he does and what is done to him."[42] Thus Frei gives a resounding "No!" to historical-critical attempts to reconstruct, but also a "No!" to existentialist speculations about the ideal self. Where then does he turn?

We are now at a place to understand the significance of "realistic narrative" for Hans Frei in *The Identity of Jesus Christ*. We do not, according to Frei, need to discern presence or meaningfulness in abstraction from identity. Nor need we undertake historical research or deep introspection. We have, after all, *texts*, long held by Christians

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[40] Frei, *Identity*, 42. See Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1949).

[41] Placher, "Introduction," in *Theology and Narrative*, 11.

[42] "Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal," *Theology and Narrative*, 36. We will return to the problem of "surface identity" and the question of interiority in chapter 2. Frei, following Ryle, following Wittgenstein, is rightly concerned to avoid accounts of the self that underlie foundationalist epistemologies. Nevertheless, Frei's simple formulation just quoted conceals the great challenge, at least for an Augustinian, of knowing exactly what a man does or what is done to him. For as Augustine never tires of explaining, we live in a world in which descriptions confusingly proliferate for one and the same deed. Is she lying or telling the truth? Is that surgery or mutilation? Was that homicide or an accident? Are they displaying glory or the fear of death? At times Augustine seems to privilege the subject's insight into the apt description—sometimes only I know if I am lying, for example. However, elsewhere Augustine destabilizes this "I" by illuminating how we often hide our wicked deeds from ourselves out of shame.

to be at the heart of the faith, which render the identity of Jesus Christ and do so in such a way that his presence is necessarily and automatically affirmed. The aforementioned governing conviction, or assumption, is affirmed only in this way, by turning to "the story itself—its structure, the shape of its movement, and its crucial transitions."[43] It is precisely those gospel which that have the character of "realistic narrative" that tell this story, bear this structure, render this unique identity. As Frei claims in the "Preface" to *Identity*: "The kind of theological proposal consonant with this essay rests on a reading of the Gospel narrative to which I have applied the term 'realistic narrative'."[44] It is worth unpacking this claim to understand the full weight that "realistic narrative" is meant to bear in Frei's subsequent work.

So far we have taken note primarily of Frei's objections to various modern theological projects. It might be tempting to think that Frei's objections have been primarily philosophical or literary-critical in nature and that whatever alternative proposal he builds off of "realistic narrative," it is something in addition to, and distinct from, his critical work. Particularly with regard to Frei's appropriation of the work of Gilbert Ryle, one could read his argument as more nearly philosophical than theological and thus unrelated to his appeals to "realistic narrative."[45]

Two details of Frei's account make such a reading untenable. First, one should keep in mind that the governing Christian conviction that Frei assumes at the outset, and to which he appeals to fellow Christians for consent, is itself a reading of the Gospel stories. When he objects to attempts to privilege the presence or meaningfulness of Jesus,

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[43] Frei, *Identity*, 87.
[44] Ibid., xiii.
[45] See note 7 above, where I contrast my reading of Frei's project as having a constructive basis in christological dogma with Alex Hawkins's construal of Frei's project as basically critical.

he does so on the grounds that they distort identity, diffuse presence, or fumble the unity; the bar against which Frei is measuring these projects is, of course, the unity of Christ's presence and identity as they are fitly rendered in the "realistic narratives" that Christians call Gospels. Frei goes so far as to construe the christological dogma of Chalcedon in precisely these terms: "The formula is a conceptual redescription of a synthesis of the gospel stories understood as the narratives identifying Jesus Christ."[46]

Second, Frei found Ryle's model of intention and action attractive because it was formal enough to allow for a reading of the gospel narratives that would allow the unique, unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ to emerge. As Charles Campbell rightly notes: "Frei . . did not argue this point [i.e., the strength of Ryle's model] on general, anthropological grounds. Rather he argued that this approach to identity was more faithful to the character of the 'realistic narrative' of the gospels."[47] His appeal to Ryle for critical and constructive purposes is wholly in the service of a close attention to the peculiar character of the gospel narratives. Thus when Frei claims his theological proposal rests on a reading of the Gospels as "realistic narrative," I would argue that both critique and construction have that resting-place.

Drawing attention to Frei's dependence on "realistic narrative" even in the critical sections of his essay also elicits the circular character of Frei's reflections in *Identity*. As mentioned above, he never sets out to prove the assumed, governing conviction. Rather he generates a reading of the Gospel stories from which the conviction itself is drawn and demonstrates that the tradition of modern apologetic hermeneutics is distorting and unnecessary. This is, as Frei was only too eager to remind

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[46] Frei, *Types*, 125.
[47] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 25.

the reader, "a reflection within belief," and thus neither an introduction of profound novelties to the Christian faith nor a window into a unique, hitherto unacknowledged realm of possibility.[48]

To understand why Frei found this circular reflection compelling, we must finally turn to his understanding of "realistic narrative." To quote Frei's most concise account:

> Realistic narrative reading is based on one of the characteristics of the Gospel story, especially its later part, viz., that it is history-like—in its language as well as its depiction of a common public world (no matter whether it is the one we all think we inhabit), in the close interaction of character and incident, and in the non-symbolic quality of the relation between the story and what the story is about. In other words, whether or not these stories report history (either reliably or unreliably), whether or not the Gospels are other things besides realistic stories, what they tell us is a fruit of the stories themselves. We cannot have what they are about (the "subject matter") without the stories themselves. They are history-like precisely because like history-writing and the traditional novel and unlike myths and allegories they literally mean what they say. There is no gap between the representation and what is represented by it.[49]

Since Frei contends that the Gospel exhibits precisely these peculiar features, we can see in this exposition the seeds both of Frei's discontent with modern theology and of his alternative, Anselmian proposal. The Gospels as realistic narratives render their subject matter, the identity of Jesus Christ, through the close interaction of character and circumstance, with depiction gathering steam cumulatively through narrative display. I said above that Frei found modern theological moves both distorting and unnecessary. They are unnecessary in so far as the identities of Jesus Christ they offer have been preempted by the stories that have him as their unique, unsubstitutable subject matter. Those identities distort in so far as they deviate from the unique identity already fitly rendered in the Gospels.

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[48] Frei, *Identity*, 4.
[49] Ibid., xiv.

When Frei turns to exegesis, respectful of the distinctive "realistic" character of the Gospels, he produces the following extraordinary summary:

> This, then, is the identity of Jesus Christ. He is the man from Nazareth who redeemed men by his helplessness, in perfect obedience enacting good in their behalf. As that same one, he was raised from the dead and manifested to be the redeemer. As that same one, Jesus the redeemer, he cannot *not* live, and to conceive of him as not living is to misunderstand who he is.[50]

Frei has now come full circle. The governing conviction finds its fullest embodiment in a reading of the story about Jesus of Nazareth. Of course, thence came the conviction. Identity and presence are indeed held together. Beginning with the identity of Jesus as rendered in the Gospels has lead to the conclusion that to know who he is is to affirm his presence. Many commentators have observed the Anselmian character of this circularity.[51] Like Anselm's ontological argument from discourse about God to the logical necessity of God's existence, Frei finds that Christian language about Jesus's identity logically entails an affirmation of his resurrected presence.

Now, to an outsider, or perhaps even an insider, this account is bound to assume the character of a very large rut, out of which one will not come once one enters.[52] "What you are telling me," some befuddled observer might say to Frei, "is that *if* I read the stories in this way rather than some other, an affirmation of the identity depicted therein necessarily requires an affirmation of resurrection!" The observer might even concede that a particular reading of the Gospels entails such affirmations, but then the response

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[50] Ibid., 149.
[51] See, for example, Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 51–54. And Placher, "Introduction," in Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 14.
[52] Frei is well aware that his exercise will look quite different to believers and nonbelievers. This attention to audience might suggest an important difference between his formal reflections and Anselm's. But when one pays attention to the specific social contexts of *The Identity of Jesus Christ* and the *Proslogion*, an obvious question arises. Just how many nonbelievers were in Anselm's late eleventh century audience?

to Frei could be, "Why read the stories that way in the first place? There are, as your work demonstrates only too convincingly, many different readings available."

Frei's answer to this question in *Identity* and the "Remarks" lecture marks a very important period in the development of his thought. The answer is, quite simply, that such a reading is what the texts require. The Gospels *are*, at least in key part, realistic narratives, and any other reading strategy, e.g., one which relies on external categories with significant material content, will overwhelm the depiction rendered therein.[53] "If we try to understand the text *internally* (to itself), we must try for a reading in which *the text itself* [emphasis added] is the meaning, the narrative form indispensable to the narrative's meaning."[54] The text has its own world, so to speak, and if we are to approach it with interpretive tools at all, they must be strictly formal. Such convictions produce the following claims (which have a fingernails-on-the-chalkboard effect for postmodern readers):

> My plea here is—the more formal, the less loaded one can make the notion of understanding the better. And that, in turn, involves a search, in deliberate opposition to most of what I find in contemporary theology, for categories of understanding detached from perspectives we bring to our understanding, including our commitments of faith.[55]

And:

> That is to say, the meaning of the text remains the same no matter what the perspectives of succeeding generations. In other words, the constancy of the meaning of the text is *the text* [emphasis added] and not the similarity of its *effect* on the life-perspectives of succeeding generations. No reference to the situation of the interpreter is necessary in understanding the text.[56]

Finally:

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[53] Frei, *Identity*, 89. Frei argues that the existentialist categories of Tillich and Bultmann materially influence identity description and are thus not formal enough.
[54] "Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal," in Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 41.
[55] Ibid., 31.
[56] Ibid., 32.

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> [I]f these [identity description] categories and concepts are suitable formal instruments, they should enable us to see who Jesus is without determining better than *the text itself* the meaning and importance of what the Gospels have to say about him. These categories should serve as organizing patterns to help understand *the actual structure of the text* and bring it into relief together with the story's content.[57]

In other words, the texts, *as realistic narratives*, have built-in structures and features that generate meaning. The task is to tap into this autonomous, ready-made font of meaning without diverting the stream in the process. The tools must therefore be formal and dispensable, for to make any category or concept essential to interpretation is to transfer the meaning *away from the texts*.

Now, it is important to see the consistency in Frei's pleas for formalism and nonperspectival readings. We noted at the outset that he wanted to offer an appropriate interpretive framework, i.e. the hermeneutical bases, for dogmatic theology. Yet we also observed how apologetic efforts to privilege meaningfulness and presence failed miserably in light of the governing Christian conviction. The anthropological preoccupations intrinsic to the apologetic moves of so many modern theologians turn out to overwhelm the unique, unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ. Thus Frei's appeals to "realistic narrative" are meant to subvert modern theology's anthropological apologetics. A more adequate interpretive framework will be dogmatic and christological.

Perspectivalism and general hermeneutical theories laden with heavy material content look to Frei like birds of a feather. References to the *reader's* or the *interpreter's* perspective, or the *human* context of interpretation are thus cast aside for precisely the same reasons idealist reading strategies were—both suggest that an account of the interpreting subject (i.e., a particular anthropology) is finally more determinative than

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[57] Frei, *Identity*, 46.

the text itself. "How do we faithfully read the Gospels without letting our own desires

and hopes do with the texts what they will?" is the kind of question Frei is posing, and

then answering: "We do it simply by paying close attention to the texts." Here it is

worth quoting at length a perceptive, and revealing, passage from the "Remarks"

lecture:

> What I am proposing instead [of apologetics] is that we raise the question in a drastically nonapologetic, nonperspectivist fashion:[58] "What does this narrative say or mean, never mind whether it can become a meaningful life perspective for us or not?" Its meaning, on the one hand, and its possible as well as actual truth for us, on the other, are two totally different questions. If we do that, it seems to me that we come up with a result that the meaning of the narrative is, indeed, Christological in a very strong sense, and Christological in a sense that is focused on Jesus, and either not at all or only from him on the story focused on our relation to him. If that is the case, if the Christology focused by Jesus' death and resurrection is the real meaning rather than a mythological or time-conditioned form of the real meaning of the narrative, it may well mean to the left-wing Bultmannian that the meaning of the gospel story and the possibility of accepting it or having it render life-sense are mutually exclusive. The logic of that narrative, as well as the kind of "hermeneutical morality" appropriate to it, may be antipathetic to the logic and "morality of historical knowledge" as he has defined it. Well, why not? Isn't there something to be said in favor of this clean cut, instead of an apologetic, dying a death of a thousand qualifications by postulating an infinite and perhaps wholly unnecessary regress of meaning of the gospel story, the tacit assumption of which is really that there are no criteria for what it is, except its effect? It means what you feel like having it mean. *The only way to claim more than that on grounds other than those I am suggesting would be to have an acknowledged authority telling us what it means*. In the absence of that authority—and there is no way in which tradition can establish its authority except by authoritarian means—the story seems to mean whatever you want, depending on what "perspective" or "modern view of man" you happen to come from as you read the story and want to find substantiated there.[59]

This is a fascinating quote, for Frei has thought through the subversive tactics at

his disposal and believes he has two, and only two options. He can *either* locate meaning

squarely in the texts themselves *or* he can locate meaning in a standard-imposing

tradition. Both ways, he implies, would result in christological, dogmatic theology in

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[58] Notice how Frei links apologetics with perspectivalism.
[59] Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 40.

stark opposition to modern anthropological apologetics. Yet he dismisses tradition on account of its intrinsic authoritarianism.[60]

But Frei's appeal to the autonomous text lands him in a contradiction. As noted above, he has already appealed to the consensus of Christians in his articulation of the governing conviction. Why does he need consensus when he has the text? And just three pages after the above quote, he responds to the crucial hermeneutical choice that needs to be made—"Shall we, as it were, radiate out from the Gospels with their firm meaning. . . . Or shall we reverse the procedure and move from the wider or narrower context of history and experience . . . to the Gospels for deeper insight on that wider context"—by simply asking, "Why not proceed the way the Church has traditionally done . . . ?"[61] Again, why appeal to a possibly authoritarian tradition of reading when we already have "realistic narratives" to do the same work?

To put the complaint in Wittgensteinian terms, Frei, at this stage of his academic career, demands appreciation for the character of a particular language game apart from its correlative form of life. Here Frei and his adversaries occupy the same intellectual space: neither he nor modern apologists find the liturgical practices of the Church—e.g. baptism, the recitation of creeds, Eucharist, or lectionary readings—relevant to biblical interpretation. To make the point in the language of systematic theology, Frei hangs the necessity of an adequate Christology on the text and not on the ecclesiological practices that both gave birth to, and sustain faithful readings of, the text. Yet he wants this autonomy to be sanctioned by, and carry the authority of, the Christian community.

[60] Frei does not appear to worry that the authoritarian tradition might do with the text what it will, for then the arbitrariness of interpretation would simply be transferred from the individual self to the collective authoritarian tradition and that would hardly be a viable alternative, questions of authoritarianism aside, for someone seeking a fixed meaning. What Frei fails to see as a possibility, Yoder will describe in great detail as an actuality: Constantinianism. I return to this below.
[61] Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 42–43.

When autonomy receives authority or legitimization from somewhere outside itself it ceases to be autonomy.

So we conclude the discussion of *Identity* and the "Remarks" lecture by noting a problematic tension in Frei's account of "realistic narrative". Do we give attention to the Gospels as "realistic narratives" because that is what the texts are and require, or do we read the Gospels as "realistic narratives" because of our location and participation in an on-going community of interpretation that privileges such readings? Frei's early position, while ambiguous, leaned heavily on the former strategy.

1.2.2 Text v. Modernity

The second and final book published in Frei's lifetime is also his best-known: *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*. In it Frei offers a blow-by-meticulous-blow account of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century hermeneutical machinations that ultimately issued in "the great reversal": "interpretation [became] a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world with another story rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story."[62] There were many phases to the reversal, and Frei examines a bewildering number of them. Indeed, when one has labored through the technical details of this transformation and arrived at the final chapter, whether convinced or skeptical, it is tempting to stand firmly behind Frei on at least one thing: "Scarcely a stone of interpretive procedure has remain unturned."[63]

Thankfully, most of the intricacies of Frei's account are peripheral to our central concern. Here we are interested in the role played by "realistic narrative." In the

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[62] Frei, *Eclipse*, 130.
[63] Ibid., 307.

introduction I noted that the *sensus literalis* would largely come to supplant "realistic narrative" in Frei's later work, and I will argue that the *Eclipse* occupies an important point along that trajectory. However, "realistic narrative" as a category or concept is nowhere more clearly defined and consistently deployed than in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, and we will therefore attend to the particularities of its treatment therein.

It should first be emphasized that several related concerns raised in *Identity* are also carried over and given fuller treatment in the *Eclipse*. Frei informs us in the "Preface" to *Identity*, written just after the publication of *Eclipse*, that while he has become tentative about his technical use of the categories of "presence" and "self-manifestation" in *Identity*, his misgivings with apologetics and his preference for dogmatics, or the explication of the logic of Christian belief, have remained firm.[64]

Those convictions in hand, Frei charts in the *Eclipse* the history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century hermeneutics in the form of a decline and fall episode, his hermeneutical opponents in *Identity* finding depth and location against the rich backdrop of their complex, if degenerate, family history. To decline and fall, one must decline and fall *from somewhere*, and this is precisely where "realistic narrative" takes the stage. "Once upon a time, Western Christians read the Gospels as realistic narratives" is a fair characterization of Frei's opening scene.[65] Before the curtains go down there will be no "and they all lived happily ever after," for what once was—a reading of the gospel narratives in line with their realistic character—is undermined, little by little, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century hermeneutical mutations, culminating in an outright inversion of traditional practice. The Bible as "realistic narrative" is eclipsed.

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[64] Frei, *Identity*, xi–xiii.
[65] Frei, *Eclipse*, 1–3, 17–37.

There is no reason to believe that Frei meant anything significantly different by "realistic narrative" in *Eclipse* than he did in *Identity*. His fullest exposition is, however, found in *Eclipse*, where he lays out four distinctive features: 1) sense and subject matter are inextricably intertwined with the narrative shape of the story, including its chronology; 2) characters are located in, and interact with, a social and natural setting, and that location and interaction in turn bear significance for the depiction of both character and setting; 3) as a result of 1 and 2, realistic narratives are "history-like", in that the depictions rendered, even if "miraculous", are indispensable for the development of character and therefore do not symbolize something else; and 4) realistic narrative "is a sort in which in style as well as content in the setting forth of didactic material, and in the depiction of characters and action, the sublime or at least serious effect mingles inextricably with the quality of what is casual, random, ordinary, and everyday."[66] Again, this account of "realistic narrative" from *Eclipse* presents no significant additions to or subtractions from the account given above from *Identity*. Most basically, "realistic narrative" names a particular literary genre in which the subject matter is inseparable from the stories that render it.

The *use* to which Frei puts "realistic narrative" in *Eclipse* is, however, new and interesting. First, Frei shows how the traditional appreciation for the realistic character of biblical narratives was naturally linked with the use of figuration (or typology), and this in two ways: in the service of maintaining the unity of diverse biblical narratives, particularly the Old and New Testaments, and in observing the duty to incorporate

[66] Ibid., 13–14. Campbell also provides a summary of the same four characteristics; see Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 44. Campbell also notes, as does Frei elsewhere, that this treatment of "realistic narrative" is dependent on Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 50th anniversary ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). For Frei's references to Auerbach, see Frei, *Identity*, 116. Also Frei, *Eclipse*, 3, 15, and 28 among others.

"extra-biblical thought, experience and reality into the one real world..."[67] In the glory days, claims Frei, "The words and sentences meant what they said, and because they did so they accurately described real events and real truths that were rightly put only in those terms and no others."[68] An extension of this precritical realistic reading of the Bible was the use of figuration to unify different narrative episodes into one all-encompassing story that adequately depicted the "single world of one temporal sequence."[69] The world depicted by the figurally unified biblical narratives was seen as the one true world, and thus, again by extension, necessarily included "the experience of any present age and reader."[70] In sum, precritical realistic reading led naturally to the figural unification of diverse biblical narratives into one cumulative story, and this unified narrative had a totalizing quality: all of reality—past, present, and future—was to be understood on the terms of this particular story and no other.

Next, Frei charts the story of the breakdown of this precritical practice. Vitally important to Frei's account is the claim that, no matter which stage of the development of distinctively modern hermeneutics one examines, no matter which side of the myriad hermeneutical disputes one investigates, one finds at least one striking commonality: a failure to take seriously the biblical literature as in key part "realistic narrative." Supernaturalists, English latitudinarians, German neologians, historical and biblical critics, Deists, etc. all locate the meaning of the biblical narratives somewhere else than the stories and the depictions they themselves render. In fact, the distinctions between these various groups are found, or so Frei suggests, in the distinctive ways each group

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[67] Frei, *Eclipse*, 3.
[68] Ibid., 1.
[69] Ibid., 2.
[70] Ibid., 3.

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addresses the interpretive gaps that came in the wake of abandoning realistic reading. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were on the whole not times of radical skepticism and round condemnation when it came to biblical interpretation. There was a kind of conservatism to the enlightened interpreters, for they remained convinced of the necessity of scriptural unity and meaningfulness. They simply brought new instruments to old tasks. The result, however, was monumental. Once meaning had been disconnected from the realistic narratives and located in "reference" to something else— either ostensively to events and persons in the "real" world, or ideally to concepts and ideas—the interpretive process began to flow in the opposite direction. Biblical narratives were held up against external standards to determine meaning and meaningfulness, a move unthinkable to those who read the narratives as the true cumulative depiction of the one real world. Now the world is implicitly held to have its own story, according to which the biblical story is to be understood and into which it must be ranged.

This simplistic sketch of Frei's argument in *Eclipse* is hopefully enough to gain perspective on the significance of his use of "realistic narrative." The realistic character of biblical narratives was acknowledged by and determinative for precritical Western Christians and recognized but almost universally ignored by modern hermeneuticians. "Realistic narrative" is thus very much at the heart of *Eclipse*, for Frei's antagonists and protagonists are both located with respect to their stances towards it.

It is tempting to read Frei's critique of modern hermeneutics as essentially an argument against the deviation from a more adequate practice—a traditioned reading of scripture. "Realistic narrative," on this reading of Frei, would be a part of his thick description of the interpretive community and tradition which rightly read(s) the texts in

this way, rather than another. I say this is tempting, because everything is in place in Frei's historical narrative to offer just such an account. His rich history of modern hermeneutics repeatedly shows how theories of interpretation are embedded in traditions of inquiry, which in turn find their home in particular socio-political settings; he shows how new intellectual movements were transformed into established academic traditions in their own right. In describing the rise of historical criticism, for example, Frei argues that:

> if it was to become a concerted intellectual movement, historical criticism had to be the subject of an ongoing literary discussion in books as well as learned journals, and in the university lecture rooms of the professors who increasingly dominated the discussion. In short, to become a major intellectual movement, historical criticism had to become an oral and literary tradition of its own.[71]

By extension one might expect Frei to locate "realistic narrative" within a tradition, e.g., the Western Christian tradition of biblical interpretation, and find his critical leverage against modern hermeneutical practice in the superior interpretive theory and practice of that tradition.

Alas, that does not appear to be the character of the critique. Much as he was in *Identity* and the "Remarks" lecture, Frei is interested in *Eclipse* in holding not one rival tradition over against another, but an autonomous, perspicuous text over against failures to observe the radical significance of that autonomy and perspicuity. In other words, Frei's answer to the question, "Why read the biblical texts this way rather than another?" still seems to be "Because this kind of reading is what this particular genre of texts requires." Indeed, Frei's use of "realistic narrative" in *Eclipse* is more in the service of designating a literary genre (i.e., a name for a group of texts which have a constellation of features in common) than in indicating a tradition of reading, and this

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[71] Ibid., 156. Here, Frei anticipates MacIntyre.

appeal to "realistic narrative" as genre is part of Frei's persistent effort to locate meaning

strictly at the level of textual features—the realistic, narrative shape of biblical texts—

and nowhere else: "If one uses the metaphorical expression 'location of meaning,' one

would want to say that the location of meaning in narrative of the realistic sort is the

text, the narrative structure or sequence itself."[72] The problems mentioned above in

connection with *Identity* are thus reproduced in *Eclipse*.

Frei's ambiguous, or perhaps self-contradicting, insistence on the autonomy of

text and meaning is nicely captured in a discussion of the lack of realism in German

fiction:

> The realistic novel did not grow on German soil. . . . The cultural and literary
> context was lacking in which critical questions as well as those concerning the
> meaning of the narrative biblical writings might have been turned decisively
> from debate about their factuality to an inquiry about the autonomous meaning
> of their admittedly and specifically fact-like or history-like shape.[73]

But if there really is something like autonomous meaning, then why did its discovery

depend on an appropriate cultural and literary context? If a particular intellectual milieu

can blind a generation of scholars from seeing a legitimate hermeneutical option, then a

different context can presumably work the opposite result, and if this is the case, and

Frei's own historical argument powerfully suggests that it is, then some kind of

reference to the reader's or interpreter's location might be necessary to account for right

interpretation. In other words, if context matters, the text is not autonomous. Lynn

Poland notes the problem quite concisely: "If Frei maintains the complete autonomy of

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[72] Ibid., 280.
[73] Ibid., 156.

the biblical narratives, we are left with a puzzle as to how their meaning is actually discerned."[74]

George Schner's assessment of *Eclipse* addresses this complaint about the autonomous text by indicating just what is missing from Frei's account:

> Essential to the retrieval and refusal which *Eclipse* launches is the recovery of something more than a lost "analytic procedure." Recovering the traditioning of interpretation, the community within which interpretation takes place, and the liturgical and spiritual life forms which embody the vitality of realistic narrative are equally important procedures.[75]

Schner's concerns dovetail with issues I raised above in connection with *Identity*. While Frei believed his defense of the biblical texts' autonomous meaning put him at odds with the entire tradition of modern hermeneutics, his refusal to consider the material practices of the Church determinative for interpretation actually leaves him in the same modern camp. Schner rightly insists that more is needed to resist modernity's great reversal than an appeal to an "analytic procedure" called "realistic narrative" reading.

Here I can suggest one reason for Frei's miscue. As is so often the case quite a lot hangs on where our author begins. It strikes me as highly significant that Frei's exemplars for the *Western Christian tradition* of realistic reading are the magisterial reformers, Luther and Calvin, and the somewhat more ambiguously exemplary Lutheran pioneer of New Testament hermeneutics, Johann August Ernesti. It is of course the case that Frei's account of precritical interpretation is meant to set the stage for early-modern and modern developments, and thus Frei's choice of Luther and Calvin is to a certain degree chronologically determined. At the same time, however, Frei does suggest that Luther, and Calvin to an even greater degree, exemplify traditional, realistic

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[74] Lynn M. Poland, *Literary Criticism and Biblical Hermeneutics: A Critique of Formalist Approaches*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985), 137.
[75] George P. Schner, "*The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*: Analysis and Critique," *Modern Theology* 8, no. 2 (1992): 170. Cited in Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 83.

readings. But did "reformation" not mean anything significant for interpretive practice? In other words, is the radical break that culminated in the Protestant/Catholic split in the Western Church actually an irrelevant event in the history of Frei's great hermeneutical reversal?

The importance of this question comes to light in the following quote from Frei's chapter on "Precritical Interpretation":

> In earlier days, when principles of exegesis had been firmly united to dogmatically formulated religion, it was easier to set forth the principles of interpretation, including their relation to historical judgment—such as it was. *The Protestant Reformers had said that the Bible is self-interpreting* [emphasis added], the literal sense of its words being their true meaning, its more obscure passages to be read in the light of those that are clear.[76]

The Reformers apparently had everything they needed, and Frei now needs, to resist modern reading strategies, for what both Frei and the Reformers have in common is an appeal to a self-interpreting text. Moreover the references to "dogmatically formulated religion" and more easily established "principles of interpretation" indicate that, for Frei, everything was in place in Reformation interpretive practice for an adequate, nonapologetic, highly christological reading of scripture. Reverence for the autonomous meaning of the realistic scriptural narratives apparently constitutes, in key part, the precritical Western Christian way of reading.

But perhaps Frei's unquestioning approval of Reformation hermeneutics is a good indication that a stone of interpretive procedure has remained unturned after all. For surely it can be argued that a straightforward lumping together of patristic, medieval, and Reformation interpretive practice under the banner of "Western Christian

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[76] Frei, *Eclipse*, 18–19. That difficult biblical passages should be read through or with the help of clearer ones is a position that dates back to Augustine, and is therefore not a Protestant innovation. The point is not that the magisterial reformers presented wholly discontinuous views—for then disagreement would have been impossible—but that their specific proposals for textual autonomy and tradition-independent clarity are important breaks and mark a pivotal point in the history of interpretation.

realistic reading" cannot do justice to the rivalries and disputes within "the tradition" that culminated in very real and painful divisions. *Sola scriptura* can be, and often is, an interpretive doctrine sharply at odds with other ways the Bible has been read throughout the tradition, and Frei's account of the autonomous text with self-generating meaning looks more specifically Protestant than generically Western Christian. Insofar as appeals to a text disconnected from an interpretive community reproduce problematic Protestant assumptions, we should rest uneasy with any narration of modernity's great hermeneutic reversal that fails to examine the way in which peculiarly Protestant interpretive moves actually set the stage for what was to come.[77] Frei thinks the shift from a) seeing historical reference as concomitant with the literal sense, to b) "taking the fact that a passage or text makes best sense at a literal level as *evidence* that it is a reliable historical report"[78] is a massive one. But equally massive might have been the shift from biblical interpretation rooted in ecclesial or liturgical practices to unadorned interpretation of autonomous texts. It is even plausible that the former shift was in some way dependent on the latter.

This is by no means a knock down critique of Frei's project in *Eclipse*. For we have already affirmed Frei's tendency to associate specific interpretive practices with ongoing traditions of inquiry, and we have also seen how cultural context is actually determinative for Frei in certain instances. Though we have noted inconsistencies in regard to his appeal to context, Frei's account of modernity's failure to see what it had in fact seen in the realistic features of the Gospels—a failure stemming from particular contextual and cultural assumptions—is actually one of the most striking and

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[77] Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), especially chapters 1–3 and 5.
[78] Frei, *Eclipse*, 2.

subversive aspects of the book. In his review of *Eclipse,* Alasdair MacIntyre claims that the most important thesis advanced by Frei is that,

> none of these [modern] critics perceived their own shared framework of interpretation. They did not see that the questions to which they gave rival and competing answers logically presupposed the acceptance of one particular set of disjunctive categories to the exclusion of other possible schemes of interpretation. In particular they did not see and could not have seen that they had excluded from their culture any possibility of understanding realistic narrative as a mode of interpretation. What Frei describes so cogently is the growing dominance among those who think of themselves as peculiarly enlightened of a mode of cultural blindness.[79]

It turns out that Frei also inhabited a framework of interpretation that blinded him to alternative, more ecclesially oriented accounts of "realistic narrative," but this qualification does not undermine the significance of his achievement. Frei's study exposes the pivotal underlying agreements of eighteenth and nineteenth century critics—agreements which, viewed retrospectively, are much more telling than the large number of disagreements between them.

1.2.3 From Text to Tradition

Hans Frei was someone willing to stick to his guns even in hostile contexts. Charles Campbell tells the story of Frei's engagement with Karl Barth's work in the midst of a theological-intellectual climate given to dismissing Barth along with the rest of neo-orthodoxy. Frei, Campbell suggests, understood the significance of Barth's interaction with Anselm's *Proslogion* and it was his persistent refusal to read Barth through neo-orthodoxy that ultimately led to a resurgence of American interest in Barth's theology.[80]

At the same time, Frei was quite capable of searching self-critique. The critical questions posed above were not lost on Frei in his lifetime, and the positions he was

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[79] Alasdair C. MacIntyre, "*The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*: Interpretation of the Bible," *The Yale Review* 65, no. 2 (1975).
[80] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 5–8.

beginning to work out at the end of his life display both constancy and agility: Frei was

quite willing to abandon some previous commitments in the service of other, more

deeply held ones. In fact, Frei was willing to view some of his older positions as but

further examples of what he had been trying all along to resist. The following lengthy

quotes from his most important later essay, "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative:

Does It Stretch or Will It Break?" amply demonstrate this willingness:

> A recent proposal in the argument about the mutual bearing of realistic narrative and historical fact claim in respect of biblical stories, especially the synoptic Gospels, represents a transition from a high-powered to a less ambitious kind of general theorizing. It holds that the Gospel stories as well as large portions of Old Testament narrative are indeed "realistic," but that the issue of their making or not making factual, or for that matter, other kinds of truth claims is not part of the scope of hermeneutical inquiry. "Meaning" in this view is logically distinct from "truth," even where the two bear so strong a family resemblance as the designations "history-like" and "historical" imply. The factuality or nonfactuality of at least some of these narratives, important as it is no doubt in a larger religious or an even more general context, involves a separate argument from that concerning their meaning. The resemblance of this view to Anglo-American "New Criticism" is obvious and has often been pointed out. Both claim that the text is a normative and pure "meaning" world of its own, quite apart from any factual reference it may have, and apart from its author's intention or its reader's reception, stands on its own with the authority of self-evident intelligibility.[81]

> There are two serious problems with this proposal:

> even though [the above account is] less high-powered, general theory it remains. But precisely in respect of generalizing adequacy this theory has grave weaknesses. First, the claim to the self-subsistence or self-referentiality of the text apart from any true world is as artificial as it may (perhaps!) be logically advantageous. . . . Second, it is similarly artificial and dubious to claim a purely external relation of text and reading, which in effect sets aside the mutual implication of interpretation and textual meaning (as hermeneutical theorists would have it) or of reading and the textuality of the text (in terms of the Deconstructionists).[82]

In these passages, Frei, in his own characteristically enigmatic fashion, sets up his

own previous proposal and then knocks it down. He tells us in a footnote that the above

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[81] "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?," in Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 139–40.
[82] Ibid., 141.

position is his own, implied in *Eclipse* and made explicit in *Identity*,[83] but now, in 1983, Frei wants to undercut the critical leverage previously sought in the autonomous, self-evident, perspicuous text. It turns out, Frei suggests, that the appeal to the genre of "realistic narrative," with biblical narratives being examples of a larger class, is but another example of reading the biblical narratives through general hermeneutical theory, even if the theory is more modest, formal, and therefore "less ambitious". Furthermore, Frei contends, to speak of key biblical narrative as examples of something general called "realistic narrative" is to get things precisely backwards:

> There may or may not be a class called "realistic narrative," but to take it as a general category of which the synoptic Gospel narratives and their partial second-order redescription in the doctrine of the Incarnation are a dependent instance is first to put the cart before the horse and then cut the lines and claim that the vehicle is self-propelled.[84]

If we understand the cart as the genre of "realistic narrative" and the horse as the Gospel narratives plus second-order doctrinal redescription, Frei is arguing by use of this metaphor that the irreducibly particular scriptural depictions are lost when taken to be instances of general classes. And this is the mistake Frei believes he made in *Identity* and *Eclipse*.[85]

Interestingly, Frei seems to be suggesting that the genre of "realistic narrative" is actually a secularized, generalized version of a particular, Christian way of reading

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[83] Ibid., 151 n. 27.

[84] Ibid., 142–43.

[85] This is the appropriate context in which to ask whether or not precisely the same mistake is made in Frei and Lindbeck's insistence on speaking of Christianity as one "religion" among many others. It seems to me that exactly the same problems are involved. Any list of similarities between "religions" will be an abstraction, and an abstraction from a particular point of view at that. Singling out what qualities or characteristics have to be met in order to qualify a particular group for the status of "religion" is a notoriously difficult task. Why do we need different cultural/social/political phenomena to be construable as "religions"? Just what work does that do for us? For an argument that the use of religion as a genus with particular religions as species is part of modernity's problematic autobiographical legitimation of the nation-state, see William T. Cavanaugh, "'a Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House': The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State," *Modern Theology* 11, no. 4 (1995).

scripture, and that the use of "realistic narrative" as a general category is a case of its having been put in the lead of its engine and then cut loose as if it provided its own locomotion. In a related way, Frei claims that New Criticism, as a general literary theory, is itself logically dependent on Christian theology.[86] Frei could have been more specific and said *Protestant* Christian theology, for now he implies that his previous appreciation for the autonomous character of scriptural meaning—a textual conviction he shared with New Critics—was a uniquely Protestant view: "Not until the Protestant Reformation is the literal sense understood as authoritative—because perspicuous—in its own right, without authorization from the interpretive tradition."[87]

All of this might suggest that Frei has himself undergone a kind of great reversal—from appeals to autonomous texts to appreciation of readers and interpretive communities—and that much of his earlier polemic against modern hermeneutics is thereby undermined. In one sense this is right: Frei has abandoned the genre of "realistic narrative" as an adequate fulcrum for overturning problematic modern theories of biblical interpretation. In another sense this is quite wrong, for Frei critiques himself for being *too much like* his modern opponents, too beholden to a general theory at odds with the long, multifaceted, but in some crucial sense consistent, tradition of Christian scriptural interpretation.

It might be the case that Frei's later, adjusted position loses some of the force of his earlier, straightforward appeals to a unique textual world with its independent, free-floating meaning—Frei can no longer dismiss interpreters as simply misconstruing *the*

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[86] "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative," in Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 148. This is an interesting supplement to the dominant read of New Criticism as a tradition reacting against the scientific dissection of texts. See, for example, the account of New Criticism in Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 38–46. See also chapter 2, "The Limits of Formalism," in Poland, *Literary Criticism and Biblical Hermeneutics*, 65–105.
[87] "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative," in Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 123.

text. But this does not lead Frei to abandon his conviction that modern hermeneuticians made, and continue to make, fundamental mistakes. Now, however, Frei has to offer a thicker account of the traditional reading of scripture that underwent reversal in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century interpretive developments and that continues to undergo reversal at the hands of present-day descendents of the early-modern pioneers.

Frei's replacement of "realistic narrative" with the *sensus literalis* in his later work is in the service of just such an account, and the continuity in Frei's critique is evident in the work he wants the *sensus literalis* to do. An exploration of Frei's understanding and use of the *sensus literalis* is thus a useful way of looking at how Frei's later work represents "a continuation as well as revision of . . . previous efforts.[88] We will first look at Frei's understanding of the *sensus literalis* and then turn to the place it occupies and the work it achieves in his later work.

In *Types of Christian Theology* and "Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative: Some Hermeneutical Considerations,"[89] Frei offers a complex account of the *sensus literalis*, a complexity that threatens to become confusion due to Frei's lack of clarity about whether "the literal sense" is identical with the *sensus literalis*.[90] However, the difficulty in following Frei here is actually the result of an important shift in his thought. Earlier, "realistic narrative" was part of Frei's quest for a fixed meaning—he resisted general hermeneutics on the grounds that the text was made to mean whatever one felt like it meaning. Though Frei never converts to a subjectivist theory of interpretation, he

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[88] Frei, *Types*, 6.
[89] "Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative: Some Hermeneutical Considerations," in Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 94–116. Hereafter this article will be referred to in both the text and apparatus as "Theology and Interpretation".
[90] See "Theology and Interpetation," 102, for a glimpse of Frei's confusing use of the terms. Charles Campbell has done us a great service by providing a helpful gloss on Frei's usage. See Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 88–89 n. 12.

now insists that the literal sense, to be understood as a tradition of reading, is fluid and changing: "Since I have used the term *literal sense*, let me quickly say a few things about it. It changes so much—actually it doesn't mean one thing—that I'm not at all sure that I want to try and give a specific definition."[91] Unable or unwilling to pin down a definition, Frei offers three ". . . 'rough rules' that have governed the literal reading in the Christian tradition."[92] Whatever "literal sense" or *sensus literalis* is, it will not be discerned or established by strict appeals to textual features—though Frei does not in principle rule out all such appeals—but by an examination of rule-governed practice. This turn to ruled usage thus marks an important change from his treatment of "realistic narrative" in *Identity* and *Eclipse*, where genre classification of key biblical narratives stemmed from structures, literary devices or characteristics intrinsic to the text.

Frei's three rules for the literal sense amplify this break from his previous position. The first rule has already been implied: "the literal meaning of the text is precisely that meaning which finds the greatest degree of agreement in the use of the text. If there is agreement in that use, then take that to be the literal sense."[93] To understand the most widely agreed upon reading of the texts is to understand the "literal sense" of scripture. This is presumably the rule that Frei thought readers might find "a little surprising".[94] In the context of Frei's earlier works it *is* surprising, for now the privileged way of reading of scripture has no stronger foundation than a shifting

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[91] Frei, *Types*, 15.
[92] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 87. The internal quote is to Frei, *Types*, 15.
[93] Frei, *Types*, 15. See also "Theology and Interpretation," 104. Frei writes, "the *sensus literalis* is the way the text has generally been used in the community." The *Types* quote uses "literal meaning," and the article uses *sensus literalis*, suggesting that they are, at least in this instance, interchangeable.
[94] Ibid.

traditional consensus.[95] That somewhat shakier foundation does, however, yield an

important result: "the greatest degree of agreement on the applicability of the literal

sense, whatever it might be, was in regard to the person of Jesus in the texts."[96]

The second rule, presumably derived from the first[97], is that the *sensus literalis* or

literal sense is "the precise or fit enactment of the intention to say what comes to be in

the text."[98] The Christian community has generally agreed that interpretation should

focus on reading scripture and not on something that lies behind or in back of the texts.

Scripture is text, not source, in the consensus. Questions of authorial intention are not

dropped or ignored with this rule, but they find their answers in a reading of the text

(understood as enacted intention) that is "one intelligent activity, not two."[99] As noted

above, Frei had previously affirmed Gilbert Ryle's insistence on the unity of intention

and action on the grounds that "realistic narrative" requires it; now he sees it as part of

an agreed upon reading strategy.

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[95] Campbell does an excellent job in reminding us that "traditional consensus" does not imply some static, unchanging, view of scripture. Frei does seem to want to hold out for a static and unchanging view of what he calls the "ascriptive logic" of the narratives, but this logic is confined to the narrative identification of Jesus Christ, not to specific doctrinal issues. This is, however, not an arbitrarily arrived at logic, but one bound up in the liturgical and ecclesial practices of the Church. It is, moreover, a logic that underwrites, legitimates, even requires the Christian community's openness to diverse readings. Campbell rightly notes that, for Frei, "The 'literal sense' is thus not a static, closed, rigid thing, but is rather embedded in the dynamic, dialogical life of the community of interpretation, but also receives and incorporates new and creative readings into the consensus—a process that is evident in the Bible itself." Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 89. Campbell cites Wayne Meeks ("On Trusting an Unpredictable God," in *Faith and History: Essays in Honor of Paul Meyer* ed. John T. Carroll, Charles H. Cosgrove, and E. Elizabeth Johnson [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988] 105–24) in support of his last claim about the openness of the consensus being already found in scripture.

[96] Frei, *Types*, 15.

[97] I say "presumably" because Frei is unclear on this. On the one hand, the intention/action and sense/subject matter unities (rules 2 and 3) are clearly Frei's own pet projects, so perhaps he is suggesting amendments to the traditional consensus. On the other hand, Frei loses much of the critical leverage he seeks if rules 2 and 3 are amendments and not part of the consensus. Campbell's read is that all three rules are taken to be indicative of the Christian tradition. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 87. I follow Campbell here while noting the ambiguity.

[98] "Theology and Interpretation," 102. Cf. Frei, *Types*, 15, Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 90.

[99] Frei, *Types*, 16.

The third and final rule—also derived from widely agreed upon practice—is that "the literal sense . . . is one that asserts not only the coincidence between sense and subject matter, but may even, as a matter of hermeneutical principle, go further and suggest that we may be asking a misplaced question when we make a sharp distinction between sense and subject matter."[100] In other words, in consensus-literal readings of scripture there is no gap between the narrative and its depiction. The misplaced question is a modern one, and it occurs when the fit between sense and subject matter is shifted from the "intralinguistic or semiotic" level to an epistemological one.[101] Then the fascination with how we know the sense of the story, or how it becomes meaningful to us, ultimately divides meaning (the signified) off from the story (the signifier) and problematizes the traditional view of their coincidence. "[I]n the Christian interpretive tradition of its sacred text," in contrast, "the signifier of the New Testament narrative was taken to be the sequence of the story itself, and what was signified by it was the identity of the agent cumulatively depicted by it."[102]

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[100] Ibid.

[101] "Theology and Interpretation," 103.

[102] Ibid. It is quite obvious that all three of Frei's rules, the second and third being derived from the first, relate to a pre-modern or pre-critical consensus in the Christian interpretive tradition. That is to say, Frei does not set out to find a consensus that includes interpretive practices from the earliest of Christian times up through modernity into the present, giving no extra weight to any given period. Rather he essentially brackets peculiarly modern developments and then looks at how their views match up with the consensus. It turns out that the literal sense persists into modernity—even after "the growth of modern 'representationalism' in epistemology" ("Theology and Interpretation," 105)—but only in forms that threaten to undermine it ("Literal Reading," 129).

Here an objection can be raised. If the literal sense persists into modernity and if the first rule governing the literal sense is its use in the Christian interpretive tradition, what right does Frei have to exclude modern usage from the consensus? Has Frei not stacked the deck against historical critics and proponents of general hermeneutics by in effect denying them a constitutive role in the consensus? His second and third rules deflate modern innovations in interpretive practice, but those same rules would be impossible to derive from a more inclusive consensus.

This objection is serious, for at times Frei will speak as if he is going to look at various types of Christian theology and see how they treat some broad Christian consensus out there called the *sensus literalis*, as if each type knew what that was and had its own way of dealing with it (see *Types*, 2, 18). But in fact, Frei has carefully crafted an account of the *sensus literalis* at odds with a majority (3 out of 5) of the types he proposes. This, one might argue, is potentially problematic, particularly in light of his first rule: literal sense as agreement in usage.

In moving from this dense presentation of Frei's understanding of the literal sense, or *sensus literalis*, to the use he makes of it, one implication should already be clear: Frei can now appeal to the *sensus literalis* rather than "realistic narrative" to address precisely the same worries he had in *Identity* and *Eclipse* about intention/action and sense/subject matter dichotomies. But something more is involved in Frei's treatment of the *sensus literalis* as ruled usage, something Charles Campbell has aptly described as Frei's "cultural-linguistic turn".[103] In treating the literal sense as a way of reading embedded in the socio-linguistic practices of the Christian interpretive tradition, Frei is following George Lindbeck's plea in *The Nature of Doctrine* for a postliberal understanding of religion and theology.[104] Rather than, in liberal fashion, viewing the particular socio-linguistic practices of Christianity (or any other religion) as contingent expressions of a deeper, universal religious essence, or some kind of generally shared pre-linguistic experience, Frei, following Lindbeck, understands those practices as part of "the cultural or semiotic system that constitutes" Christianity.[105] They are not dispensable symbols or trappings but the very flesh and root and branches of the faith.

Frei could respond to this objection in two ways. First, he can point out that he makes a very important qualification of the first rule: the literal sense is not simply the meaning located in any kind of agreed upon use, but "that meaning which finds the greatest degree of agreement in the use of the text in the religious community" (*Types*, 15). "It is the sense of the text in its sociolinguistic context—liturgical, pedagogical, polemical, and so on" ("Theology and Interpretation," 104). The consensus will therefore be taken from what one might call the primary location of scripture. Privileging such a location amounts to affirming that scripture is only scripture in the Church and might indeed involve excluding interpretive theories that deny this or fail to give it sufficient attention. Second, Frei can insist that a consensus does not imply random sampling. He is not offering to count votes and give us a representative view of the literal sense. And his types (all five) are types of *modern* theology, not Christian theology in general. It may in fact be the case that the deck is stacked against modern hermeneuticians, not because of some arbitrary decision of Frei's to privilege one reading over others, but because a tradition of liturgically/ecclesially determined reading practices—a tradition which respects the primary location of scripture—stands against it.

[103] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, chapter 3.

[104] George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

[105] Frei, *Types*, 2.

To understand, or become a part of, this "semiotically coherent cultural system,"[106] one does not look through the particularities of the culture's language for something symbolized at a deeper level, nor does one treat them as truth claims that can be tested for correspondence like any other such claims. Rather by participating in the constitutive practices of the Christian community one acquires the skills necessary to discern the "communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action."[107]

The relationship between Frei's cultural-linguistic turn and his treatment of the *sensus literalis* should now be obvious—the tradition of literal reading is a constitutive part of a cultural-semiotic system and is best understood by examining its ruled usage. As important as Lindbeck's work is for Frei's description of the consensus in the Christian interpretive tradition, it is even more pivotal for his typology of modern Christian theology. The key disjunctive alternative in Frei's *Types of Christian Theology* is a clear and important exemplification of his cultural-linguistic turn, to which we will now turn.

Frei begins *Types of Christian Theology* by laying out "two very different, often contentious, but not necessarily mutually exclusive views of Christian theology."[108] The first view takes Christian theology to be a species (Christian) of a genus (theology) and insists that all Christian theological claims be judged under the same "general criteria of intelligibility, coherence, and truth" as other academic claims.[109] The second view takes theology to be a particular aspect or activity internal to Christianity and "is therefore partly or wholly defined by its relation to the cultural or semiotic system that constitutes

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106 Ibid., 18.
107 Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 18.
108 Frei, *Types*, 1–2.
109 Ibid., 2.

that religion."[110] Whereas on the first view Christian theology is a particular instance of a general, all-religions-encompassing phenomenon, on the second view theology is "a problematic characteristic of Christianity, one specific religion."[111] Obviously, Lindbeck's work lurks in the background here: the basic distinction is between those theologians or academicians who view Christianity in cultural-linguistic terms (the second view) and those who do not (the first).

Having clarified this basic distinction, Frei is occupied in the rest of *Types* with two concurrently executed tasks. The first involves laying out five types of modern theology, the divisions between types determined by the way representatives deal with the two alternative ways of understanding Christian theology. The second task is to look at the way each type handles the *sensus literalis*, with a preference to be shown for the type(s) which prove(s) most amenable to it.

Here we see the precise location and work of the *sensus literalis* in Frei's later thought. Theological projects are assessed by seeing if and to what extent they are governed by the communally authorized rules for scripture. Since the *sensus literalis* is understood and described in exclusively second-view terms (i.e., cultural-linguistic, theology-as-Christian-specific terms), we should not be surprised to find that any type which upholds the first of the two views of Christian theology has a hard time with the literal sense tradition. How can a position that denies ruled usage a privileged place for understanding theology be respectful of the *sensus literalis,* a rule-governed tradition of reading? Seen in this light, the literal sense is *both* a replacement for "realistic narrative" as the critical fulcrum for overturning problematic modern interpretive practices *and* a

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[110] Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 2.
[111] "Theology and Interpretation," 95.

prime example of Frei's cultural linguistic turn. The way scripture is/has been read and the way Christian theology is/has been conceived converge in Frei's later thought, and the *sensus literalis* is the best available exemplification of that convergence.

1.3 Text, Tradition, Politics: From Frei to Yoder

I have undertaken this extended excursus on the theology of Hans Frei in order to draw out what I take to be crucial aspects of Yoder's theology. In tracing the developments of Frei's convictions, we have encountered a number of themes to which I will return in subsequent chapters. First, I noted that Frei's abiding concern was not so much to defeat certain modernist presuppositions, as it was to affirm the identity of Jesus Christ. At the heart of Frei's work is a christological affirmation. It is true that for Frei, as for the contributors to the formula of Chalcedon long ago, the affirmative claims were forged in the midst of controversy and conflict. Frei, no less than Cyril of Alexandria, pressed his case in the midst of contrary positions. But the critique of modernity flowed from Frei's christological commitments, and not the other way around. In the same way, Yoder was only against Constantinianism because he was for the politics of Jesus. Yoder's theopolitical vision is fundamentally christological, with the critiques of other positions derivative of his Christology. One of the aims of this dissertation is to make plausible the notion that the christological derivation of both construction and critique is something Yoder had in common with Saint Augustine.

Second, I observed how Frei's early attempts to resist modernizing circumventions of the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus were later diagnosed by Frei to be but further exemplifications of the problem. Frei's effort to secure the hermeneutical bases of dogmatic theology *in the text itself* was shown to land him in a contradiction—sometimes relying on the practices of the reading community, sometimes resisting them

by appeals to intrinsic textual meaning. Frei's later appeals to a tradition of rule-governed reading, the *sensus literalis*, were meant to remedy the earlier problems. The later Frei is still very much concerned to preserve the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ, but he has now read enough Wittgenstein and deconstruction to know that the early appeals to intrinsic textual features and general categories such as "realistic narrative" were deeply problematic. Texts have no such immediate, transparent meaning. Relying on such an abstraction does not secure the proper hermeneutical bases of dogmatic theology—it rather attempts to avoid the challenge of hermeneutics altogether. It denies, ironically, the historicity of both text and reader. I say ironically, because one way of construing Frei's abiding concern is to say that he sought to preserve the particularity of the biblical witness.[112] Modern liberal theology, in its allegorizing correlation of the meaning of the gospels with general contemporary philosophical categories, effaced the bible's identity depictions. And yet by attempting to secure the biblical depictions "inside" the text itself Frei was guilty of dehistoricizing both the bible

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[112] For a reading of Frei's work that relates him to Erich Auerbach's attempt to "preserve history" in light of the allegedly deleterious effects of figural reading, see John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Dawson's book is so fascinating that tracing all of the interesting connections with the work of this dissertation would require a separate paper. Most succinctly, Dawson helps us to see that Yoder's anti-Constantinianism, together with his christological historicism, amounts to nothing less than a figural reading of history. Dawson writes: "Discerning that intention [i.e., God's] in oddly congruent literary narratives, the figural reader makes explicit the similarities by which otherwise separate events are related to one another as moments in a single divine utterance" (Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading*, 85.). Dawson argues quite convincingly that "preserving the historicity" of Jesus is at the heart of the figural reading of scripture as an ethical practice, because figural reading is about "enabling its [i.e., Christ's] occurrence in the present" (137). Dawson thus offers resources for those inspired by Yoder to describe Constaninianism as a form of failed figural reading. Following Dawson, we might say that Constantinianism is internal Christian supersessionism, in so far as it amounts to a prolongation of something other than Jesus's reconciling power-in-weakness. For evidence that Yoder is in fact a figural reader of scripture and history in the manner described by Dawson—i.e., (like Origen!) discerning the intention of God in manifold events as diverse moments of a single divine utterance: "Should the alternative [to Constantinian historiography] not be a continuing series of new beginnings, similar in shape and spirit, as the objective historicity of Jesus and the apostles, mediated through the objectivity of Scripture, encounters both the constants and the variables of every age to call forth 'restitutions' at once original and true-to-type, at once unpredictable and recognizable?" Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 133.

and the tradition-embedded practices of reading the text rightly—which is to say, reading it *as scripture*.[113]

Frei's early response to the faith and history debate was thus profoundly unsatisfactory. In a sense he suggested he could solve the problem by appealing to a faith unsullied by history: "If you just read the texts for what they say," Frei seemed to suggest, "you will see that the particular identity of Jesus rendered therein is the unsubstitutable key to the whole story." His later proposal avoids some of the ahistorical tendencies in his early work by appealing to the community of interpretation: "If you read the text in the way it has traditionally been read. . . ." However, Frei's turn to the community of interpretation should have entailed a significant revision to his narrative of reversal. The turning point could no longer have been located at the abandonment of intrinsic textual meaning—the forsaking of "realistic narrative." Rather the story of reversal would have to be about how and why the interpretation of scripture was wrested away from the older, ecclesial tradition of reading. The story would not be about modernity versus the text but rather about one tradition of reading versus another.

Yet such a revision would lead to the need for others. We already observed how Frei acknowledged an alternative location to "the text in itself" for securing the meaning of the scriptures. A tradition might instruct us. And yet early on, Frei dismissed that alternative on the grounds that traditions establish themselves inevitably by authoritarian means. We thus arrive at the final contradiction in Frei's mature theology, and the one that will aid our transition to John Howard Yoder. Having finally

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[113] The same questions could be raised about Yoder's "biblical realism." However, as we will see in chapters 2 and 3 below, Yoder's appeals to "the text" are quite different from Frei's and are seamlessly interwoven with his christological historicism.

abandoned New Critical appeals to the New Testament as an iconic text, Frei ends up

with a defense of traditioned-reading. But he has reason to worry that authoritative

traditions are inimical to the task that has preoccupied him throughout his career: the

task of heralding the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ. For what is to prevent "the

tradition" from playing fast and loose with Jesus, much the way modern theologians

have?

If we honor that which is most valuable in Frei's work—his abiding concern to

preserve the unity of the person of the Son in the church's reading of its scriptures—we

are led naturally to the challenge placed before us by John Howard Yoder. For Yoder

addresses this problematic head-on in making his case for the politics of Jesus. He too

was concerned about the erasure of the identity of Jesus Christ. In fact, the christological

basis of Frei's contains the resources for naming what Yoder found lacking in

"Constantinianism": it betrays the unity of the person of the Son.[114] Thus by no means

would I want to suggest that Yoder was simply at odds with Frei. Both theologians

embarked upon a journey of Chalcedonian renewal. Nevertheless, Yoder's alternative

account of the "great reversal" places a strong demand before those who seek, like Frei,

to serve the church by tracing the history of its failures. As Yoder insisted, and Frei had

implied, "Decision in the present is often very much the product of how the past has

been recounted to us."[115] It follows that serious differences in the recounting of the past

will lead to serious differences in the decisions Christians make in the present. The

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[114] For Yoder's affirmation of orthodox or classical christological commitments, see *Politics*, 100–105, and *Priestly Kingdom*, 8ff. "If we were to carry on that other, traditionally doctrinal kind of debate, I would seek simply to demonstrate that the view being proposed here is more radically Nicene and Chalcedonian than other views. I do not advocate an unheard-of modern understanding of Jesus. I ask rather that the implications of what the church has always said about Jesus as Word of the Father, as true God and true Man, be taken more seriously, as relevant to our social problems, than ever before" (*Politics*, 102).
[115] Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 208.

intertwining of historical memory and ethical discernment is thus one of the most important—indeed, Augustinian—lessons to be learned from Frei and Yoder.

I turn then to Yoder's version of the "great reversal" to fill out the challenge that his Anabaptist historiography presents to Frei's postliberalism. We should bear in mind that Yoder and Frei both lived under the shadow of Troeltsch's demand for an appropriately historical consciousness. It is my contention that Yoder's disavowal of Constantine *is* his contribution to this quest. While Frei wants to reach back behind the Enlightenment to rethink the basis of an adequate historiography, Yoder argues that only by reaching back behind Constantine can we root out the problems that plague us[116] and discover the resources for an objective and historically serious theology.[117]

1.4 John Howard Yoder and the Great Constantinian Reversal

According to Yoder, the early Christians were "a minority in a hostile world."[118] They knew as a matter of experience that assemblies of men and women existed in which the reign of Christ was visible, and they took it on faith that the unbelieving world was nevertheless subject to the reign of the same Lord. While the surrounding society was marked by visible unbelief, Christians had been called out of this "world" to be signs of the coming kingdom of God. They rejected Caesar's idolatrous demands and practices,

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[116] By the time Yoder published *For the Nations*, he was seeking to correct for earlier misreadings of his work as fundamentally "anti" or "against" something else. He was also making much more explicit the radical implications of his critique of Constantinianism for a rethinking of the Jewishness of Christian faith and practice. These interests led him to emphasize the pro-Jewish character of his critique of Constantinianism. In the introduction to *For the Nations* Yoder makes explicit how his reading of Constantine and Jeremiah entails a subordination of later historical developments: "The two ancient turning points represented by Jeremiah and Constantine have become . . . the two most important landmarks outside the New Testament itself for clarifying what is at stake in the Christian faith. They are more basic than the more recent turns, which Western Christians call 'the Reformation' and 'the Enlightenment.' It is because of what those earlier changes meant that Reformation and Enlightenment have meaning" (8).

[117] I use the adjective "objective" advisedly. For readers who see red whenever this word appears, I beg for patience and reiterate that I am trying to show how Yoder's disavowal of Constantine provides a potent remedy for this allergic reaction to an ideal of modernity.

[118] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 135.

living in opposition to the mechanisms of power and authority in the Roman Empire.[119]

Whatever the frustrations or sufferings they experienced before a hostile world, their confidence in the victory of the cross and their hope in Christ's ultimate triumph transformed the meaning of such experiences. God was graciously allowing them to participate in the sufferings of Christ. To suffer at the hands of unbelieving pagans meant that they were being mercifully included in the manifestation of God's new age, in which patience and hope were signs of fidelity and witness to Christ's triumph over the powers. They therefore stood with patience before rebellious and violent powers, living in hope for the "millennial" reign of peace in which God would be all in all.

The name for this visible body of believers was "church," and the ethics of the community were assumed to be intrinsic to its confession of faith. Christian ethics were for Christians.[120] The moral life of the Christian was baptismal and eucharistic, and the content of the ethic was christological. Christians were those who had been called out of the world that their lives might be reshaped in and through the power of the risen Jesus. To have one's life so re-formed meant, among other things, that just as the teacher had refused to seize worldly power, so must the student. The disciple would live a life of servanthood, because the Master had done so. The disciple would bear the cross of social conformity, because Jesus had. Such "discipleship" was inevitably risky, but then so had it been for Jesus. There could be faith in God *after* Christ that did not run the risk of being perceived as treasonous by the very governing authorities that had crucified Jesus.

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[119] Yoder, *Companion to Bainton*, 26.
[120] See Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 62. Just after making this link, Yoder continues, "Since Augustine this has been denied," and then moves seamlessly to a critique of Kantian generalizability. This is a bizarre reading of Augustine, without any supporting citation or interpretation.

On Yoder's reading the events culminating in the conversion of Constantine changed all of this. Indeed, according to Yoder the changes are so stark that they deserve to be called a reversal. In a typical formulation, Yoder writes: "The church after Constantine *reversed* the New Testament attitude toward these matters and thereby changed the very nature of what it means to be church."[121] Where it was once in a minority position, now the church has majority status. Where the church was once comprised of voluntary believers, now it gathers members through cultural inertia and political prominence. Whereas a rejected and crucified King was once the reason for belonging, now an armed and empowered one is. The church before Constantine had been visibly distinct, marked by the common life of believers—a common life believed to be utterly dependent on the power of the resurrection. The church *after* Constantine is invisible, as the worldly power of the sword protects, enables, and finally mandates a compromised church. If the fear of the Lord built the church of the New Testament, the fear of the sword built the church of Theodosius.

Yoder is quite careful in the way he attaches the name of Constantine to the reversal he recounts: "The name of the Emperor Constantine figures here and elsewhere in this collection, as it has since his own time, as a symbol of a far-reaching shift in institutional and value arrangements. Constantine himself did not bring them about, nor are we here interested in his personal biography."[122] The far-reaching shift greatly transcends the conversion of a single man.[123] "Constantine" stands rather as symbol for a sweeping restructuring of Christian convictions.

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[121] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 107.
[122] Ibid., 203.
[123] See Ibid., 135. Yoder speaks of the "deep shift in the relation of church and world for which Constantine soon became the symbol." Yoder calls this deep shift a "great reversal" and notes that it "certainly began

> Before Constantine, one knew as a fact of every day experience that there was a believing Christian community but one had to "take it on faith" that God was governing history. *After* Constantine, one had to believe without seeing that there was a community of believers, within the larger nominally Christian mass, but one knew for a fact that God was in control of history.[124]

I draw attention to Yoder's portrait of Constantinianism because I believe his alternative account of the "great reversal" in Christian history accentuates the limitations of Frei's postliberal narrative theology. As already suggested, Frei's concern to preserve the identity of Jesus Christ is akin to Yoder's concern for the normativity of Jesus; Frei's effort to mediate the challenge of Chalcedon to the contemporary church was also at the center of Yoder's project.[125] Nevertheless, according to Yoder the seeds of Chalcedon's marginalization were sown long before Frei imagined. If Yoder is right, they antedate the dogma's formulation, in a process that "began before A.D. 200 and took over 200 years."[126]

This Constantinian transformation of Christianity inserted a trojan horse into the tradition's consensus on the meaning of the scriptures, particularly the relevance of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection for the violence of the fallen powers of the world. After the "great reversal" of Constantinianism, what Frei called the *sensus communis* is, according to Yoder, effectively divided against itself. On the one hand lies the church's proclamation about Jesus, affirming the normativity of his humanity. On the other hand

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earlier and took generations to work itself out. Nevertheless the medieval legend which made of Constantine the symbol of an epochal shift was realistic: he stands for a new era in the history of Christianity." One frequently finds critics of "Constantinianism" derided for their revisionism by contemporary traditionalists on the question of violence in Christian ethics. Yet Yoder understands himself as standing in an older line of interpretation. He rejects the positive interpretation of the "epochal shift," but he agrees that there is great significance attached to it. Hal Drake's work on the meaning of Constantine's reign is no less revisionist than Yoder's.

[124] Ibid., 137.

[125] Also: "What becomes of the meaning of incarnation if Jesus is not normative man? If he is man but not normative, is this not the ancient ebionitic heresy? If he be somehow authoritative but not in his humanness, is this not a new gnosticism?" Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 10.

[126] Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 57.

lie the developments culminating in "Christian" empire, accommodating faith in Jesus to imperial politics. Yoder's account of Constantinianism thus challenges contemporary Christians to acknowledge that, in the light of such internal and ancient contradictions, efforts to settle contemporary debates by appeals to "the tradition" are simplistic. The preservation of the identity of Christ is on Yoder's reading a more complicated task than Frei's postliberalism suggests.[127]

For as Frei implied early on with his worry about authoritarianism, the correct interpretation of scripture is a manifestly *political* matter. Indeed, to speak of certain texts as "scripture" is already to have made contact with the authority of a particular tradition's handling of texts. While Frei became increasingly aware of the limitations of his early New Critical tendencies, his sophistication did not extend to a careful interrogation of the politics of interpretation. He never really took aim at the sociopolitical context of New Criticism's emergence,[128] nor did he bring such a critical perspective to bear upon his later turn to the community of interpretation. This is a peculiar lacuna in Frei's work, especially in light of his rather penetrating account of the significance of Jesus's weakness in *The Identity of Jesus Christ*.[129] Frei's rejection of any form of authoritarian traditionalism would have had a strong basis in his lively reading of the New Testament, yet he never developed such an account. Moreover, had he, he would have had to fundamentally rethink the trajectory of *Eclipse*, as the history of

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[127] In one of his most important essays, "The Authority of Tradition," Yoder argues that the challenge of fidelity is more complicated than either scholastic Protestantism or scholastic Catholicism imagined. "The clash is not Scripture versus tradition but faithful tradition versus irresponsible tradition." Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 63–79. One could argue that Yoder's critique of Constantinianism reveals an irony at the heart of theology-as-modernity-criticism. In being so focused, theology gets overdetermined by modernity, for it allows modernity's self-understanding as "the great transformation" to continue to control the conversation.
[128] Cf. Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 36–48. According to Eagleton, "New Criticism was the ideology of an uprooted, defensive intelligentsia who reinvented in literature what they could not locate in reality" (40).
[129] See Frei, *Identity*.

undermining the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ would have had to extend to the question of how particular readings of the gospels—readings that can in fact become the sense of the community—can be driven by politics that are themselves at odds with the gospel.

Yoder gets a good deal more specific about how the Constantinian reversal enacts such a corrupt *sensus communis*. Behind the puzzling diversity of Christian political allegiances—Christians have baptized world empire, territorial monarchs, democracy, revolution, etc.—lies a single Constantinian root: the "wedding of piety with power."[130] Christianity gets "unequally yoked" to worldly political power, as the marriage is not between faith and the foolish power of weakness—a power whose meaning is manifested by the post-resurrection vindication of the crucifixion—which Paul proclaims in 1 Corinthians 1:18–25; rather, the power to which faith is accommodated is the untransformed power of the worldly political sovereign. On Yoder's parsing of the Constantinian *after*, it is the power of government to which Christian faith gets fatefully attached.

Moreover, this linkage of faith with worldly power changes nothing less than the authentic Christian interpretation of history. Whereas once "the meaning of history had been carried by the people of God as people, as community," now "*civil government* is the main bearer of historical movement."[131] The meaning of history *after* Constantine is to be found in the rise and fall of kings, dynasties, governments, etc. Once the fateful Constantinian "after" has been embraced, the believer's vision and hope are redirected to the machinations of governing authorities. The key to what God is doing in history is

[130] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 140.
[131] Ibid., 138.

to be seen not in the church—whose existence, as prolongation of the incarnation, is entirely dependent upon the *after* of Advent—but in the world. As the appeal to the believer's vision already suggests, the hermeneutical reversal is for Yoder not simply a matter of ideas. It is as bodily as it is political and historical.[132] Indeed, the transformation extends to the emotional makeup of believers: "In Christendom, both optimism and despair are correlated with the direct reading of how it is going for us in the rising and falling of power structures."[133]

1.5 Conclusion

Yoder's portrayal of the Constantinian emotional makeup and its derivation from a Constantinian sociology and historiography are crucial to our dialogue with Hans Frei. Frei was not attuned to the compromised and theologically superficial emotional formation that has become pervasive in the wake of the Constantinian transformation of Christianity. There is nothing in Frei's critique of modern theology that requires a rejection of the linking of piety with power, and it is thus unsurprising that deeply Constantinian contemporary theological movements and their architects could be relatively sympathetic to postliberalism, but not at all interested in John Howard Yoder.

We saw above how Frei, at the end of his career, was left with an awareness of the role of communal authority in the interpretation of scripture. Yet he had also been long aware of the way in which such authority could corrupt the reading of scripture. What was missing was any effort to interpret these phenomena together. Frei discerned in the identity of Christ no intrinsic sociology or politics and was thus left with a puzzle.

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[132] Cf. Ibid., 177. "Far more important than the genesis of an idea is the sociology of its carriers. . . . This is a question of community, not the history of ideas."
[133] Ibid., 95.

How does one preserve Christ's identity *at the same time that one affirms* the community's role in discerning that identity through the reading of the scriptures?

I submit that Frei's puzzle is the threshold to Yoder's sophistication. For Yoder can both affirm the meaningfulness of Frei's question and expose the Constantinian fog that shrouds it. As for the question, there is for Yoder no naïve faith that the church— orthodox, mainline, radical, or whatever—will get Jesus right: "Any existing church is not only fallible but in fact peccable."[134] Nor is there an approach to Jesus that relativizes the church as community of interpretation: "The knowledge of the meaning for today of participating in the work of Christ is mediated ecclesiastically."[135] The Christian community is always for Yoder a rickety vessel on the way, constantly in need of mid-course corrections lest it lose its bearings. Frei is certainly right to point to the vulnerability of the church's fidelity. This rickety vessel is nonetheless the necessary and fitting vehicle of scriptural fidelity and christological conformity. For Yoder, that we must follow Jesus in the midst of vulnerable companions is not bad news but good.

As for the fog, Yoder helps us to see that only by putting Jesus in one box and politics in another—only by placing christological conformity in one corner and power relations in another—could Christians have entered the labyrinth of power and texts that so perplexed Hans Frei.[136] To restate Frei's question in doctrinal terms brings to light its strangeness: How do we protect Christ the Head from his Body the church? Yoder's response is not so much an answer to this question—I suspect Yoder would

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[134] Ibid., 5.
[135] Ibid., 117.
[136] Yoder explains with typical clarity how the Constantinian puzzle produces the false choice between authoritarian community and rugged individuals: "As long as the communal quality of belief is preempted by the sociology of establishment, the only social form that comes to mind with which to critique it is the lonely rebel. *Tertium non paret*" (Ibid., 24.). Though Frei showed little sympathy for modern individualism, a third option was not apparent to him—thus "the text itself" became his lonely rebel.

have seen no need to protect God from his followers—as much as it is a simple reminder. By seeking to allow the "politics" of the Body to be conformed to the "politics" of its Head, we can inhabit more naturally, which is to say less awkwardly and resentfully, the logic and reality of the incarnation.[137] "Patience" is another name for such allowance, and to practice it is already to participate in the politics of Jesus.[138] In short, the way for the believing community to preserve the identity of Jesus Christ is to embody in its own life and relations the vulnerability and openness exemplified by the humanity of Jesus. If the *sensus communis* is to do the work of preserving rather than distorting the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus, it must be the sense of a community whose social relations reflect that identity. The *sensus communis* must be a form of looping back to the humanity of Jesus, as ecclesial fidelity should be nothing less than an extension of that human *after*, a prolongation of the incarnation.[139] And the only way for this to take place among a fallible and peccable people is for it to constantly return to its unsurpassable source.[140]

We have arrived, then, at the calm eye of Yoder's historical hurricane, the cornerstone of his christological historicism. Jesus is for Yoder the "after" with no "after." The incarnation of God in Christ is *the* turning point of history. Yet observe at the same time Yoder's conviction that this is not a novel or distinctively Anabaptist

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[137] "Thus the historicity of Jesus retains, in the working of the church as it encounters the other power and value structures of its history, the same kind of relevance that the man Jesus had for those whom he served until they killed him." Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 158.

[138] Patience is one of the leitmotifs of all of Yoder's writings. The most direct treatment is to be found in Yoder, "'Patience' as Method in Moral Reasoning: Is an Ethic of Discipleship 'Absolute'?" The essay is in Stanley Hauerwas and others, eds., *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1999), chapter 1.

[139] On "looping back," see Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, chapters 1–3, esp. 69–72. The incarnation was itself, according to Yoder, a prolongation of Israel's own looping back to memories of a God who cares for a particular people: "Jesus presupposes and prolongs that understanding of the uniqueness of YHWH as the one who chooses" (Yoder, *For the Nations*, 200.).

[140] This is the heart of what I am calling Yoder's christological historicism.

theological claim. "The ecclesial Anabaptists stood with majority Protestantism (and some Catholics) in ascribing to the Incarnation a normative significance such that we do not hope to go past Christ either backward (to David or Adam) or forward (to a new, unaccountable 'Spirit' or kingdom)."[141] As we will see more fully in the chapters that follow, Yoder might have added that this broad Western consensus is unsurprising in view of its dependence on Augustine. The doctrine of the incarnation is, as much for Augustine as it is for Yoder, a doctrine of the unsurpassability of Christ. There can be no moving past, before or after, the coming of God in Christ. Christ is normative for Christian reflection, whether that reflection be doctrinal, ethical, historical, political, or philosophical. From human desire to world history to metaphysics, all must be brought before the hermeneutical watershed of the temporal mission of the Son.[142] In other words, Yoder's christological historicism is as much about the *before* as the *after* (as we will see in chapter 3). It is about judging everything *after* Christ in the light of his *prior* coming. Indeed, Yoder's historicism is more radical than that, in that it pushes strongly in the direction of Augustine's metaphysical commitments. The *after* of the incarnation is for Yoder also the key to how it was *before*, in the beginning—that is, before there could

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[141] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 125.

[142] It is important to clarify how Yoder's account of "looping back" does not present a closed hermeneutical circle. We have already noted Yoder's emphasis on fallibility and peccability. The people looping back do not return to something they already simply possess. If they had it, they wouldn't need to loop back to it. Yoder's hermeneutics do not contain within themselves the resources for their own repetition. Rather, they point to their own lack and look elsewhere on account of it. However, the openness of the hermeneutical circle has more to do with the abundance of the source than with any lack in the recipients. The Head to which the Body loops back is an inexhaustible source of life. Here we would do well to recall both Frei's desire to preserve the identity of Christ and Yoder's claim that his politics is "more radically Nicene and Chalcedonian than other views." Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 102. As I have already suggested, Yoder's "looping back" is an effort to work out in the realm of hermeneutics the implications of the one person, two natures dogma of Chalcedon. To say that there is divinity in Christ's humanity is not to posit an extra, divine layer or substance. Nor is it to distinguish moments in the life of Jesus, some of which are "merely" human, others of which are "fully" divine. It is rather to trust completely in this one man's humanity. It is to believe that the trustworthy God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has made himself known not everywhere in general, but somewhere in particular—in the genuine humanity of the one Jesus Christ. Thus for Yoder, Frei's quest to preserve the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ is ultimately a matter of the believing community reflecting in its life together the "social-political-ethical" humanity of Christ. Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 11.

have been a before.[143] One cannot speak of the suffering of Jesus as revelatory of the grain of the universe and remain locked, in typical historicist fashion, in a reductive, immanent frame.[144]

There is a good deal more to say about Yoder's christological historicism, and we shall do so by taking a closer look in chapter 3 at the importance of the *before* in Yoder and Augustine. However we must first entertain an objection to this whole manner of proceeding. We must first shift from time to space, in order to ponder a different question: the question of the *inner*. Augustine, quite unlike Yoder, is well known for his eloquent reflections on human interiority—the deep, inner reaches of human being and knowing. Yoder remains largely silent about such matters, and this difference has

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[143] I cannot resist citing a passage from Augustine's *Confessions* that also serves as the epigraph for chapter 3: "He is 'the Beginning' for us in the sense that if he were not abidingly the same, we should have nowhere to return to after going astray. When we turn back from our errant ways it is by acknowledging the truth that we turn back, and he it is who teaches us to acknowledge it, because he is 'the Beginning' who speaks to us." *Confessions* 11.9.11 (Boulding, 252). I will say more about this claim that Yoder's work is compatible with—or perhaps more strongly, requires—something like Augustine's metaphysical claims at the conclusion of chapter 3. I am grateful to Paul Griffiths for pressing critically against my proposal to align Augustine and Yoder, as his remarks in private conversation have influenced my reflections on the matter. The key issue, from the side of patristic theology, is whether Yoder's radical historicism abandons the classical metaphysical commitment to God's simplicity. Does Yoder introduce temporality into the divine being in such a way that Augustine would rejected? From the side of radical reformation theologies, the issue is whether Augustine's Platonism overwhelms his christocentrism. Does Augustine so isolate God from history that the crucifixion of Jesus can only be, at best, of secondary theological significance? The time/eternity relation is obviously crucial, as is the meaning of incarnation to our understanding of this relation. Staying with the passage quoted above from *Confessions* 11.9.11, we might ask: Is God abidingly the same, from 'the Beginning,' as the Crucified? We might also ponder whether, for Augustine, the way of Christ in time, culminating in the crucifixion, is simply the Way to the End of all things, such that the Way is not to be confused with the End. Or, rather, does Christ the Way reveal nothing less than the eternal, abiding character of the End?

[144] Yoder uses the metaphor of "the grain of the universe" in several places in his writing. The most well known is from the closing paragraph of "Armaments and Eschatology," where Yoder claims that "those who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe." John Howard Yoder, "Armaments and Eschatology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 1 (1988): 58. He also speaks of the grain of the fallen universe, revealed by the destructiveness of the arms race, in *He Came Preaching Peace*: "When you cut across a piece of wood you find a pattern of lines or circles that we call 'the grain.' The grain is not only at the end of the wood; it runs all the way through the log. You see it at the extremity where the cutting exposed it. The arms race is like that. It is the cut that exposes the grain." John Howard Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1985), 32. For Yoder, the cross of Christ is the cut that exposes the grain of the fallen universe to be an illusory one; the cross undercuts the fallen grain, revealing a deeper reality, a truer grain—one characterized not by the sort of mistrust and defensiveness that produced the doctrine of mutually assured destruction, but rather the self-giving and voluntary suffering, a love that extended even unto enemies and that gave birth to the Church.

suggested to some a fundamental contradiction in their theological orientations. Does Augustinian *interiority* not reconfigure the theological terrain, adding a layer of space to a layer of time—a layer which Yoder has, in the dogged temporality of his radical historicism, overlooked? Is the matter of interiority not reason enough to preserve the intuitive and status quo refusal to read Yoder and Augustine together?

On the contrary, I will argue that the realm of the *inner* is a crucial link to both the *after* and the *before* in the theologies of Augustine and Yoder. The genuine differences between these theologians do not go away—rather, they become more interesting and fruitful—when this link is discerned. This is the task to which I now turn.

2. Inner

"An argument aroused by an adversary turns out to be an opportunity for instruction."

— Augustine *City of God* 16.2[1]

2.1 Introduction

This chapter takes up an unexplored theological connection between John Howard

Yoder's historicism and Augustine's "interiority." I realize that in speaking of such a

"connection" I am liable to strain the reader's imagination. According to the

distinguished scholar James Turner Johnson, a fundamental incompatibility exists

between Yoder and Augustine on precisely this issue, rendering even dialogue between

the two theologians impossible.[2] Consider Johnson's dismissal of Alain Epp Weaver's

attempt at putting Augustine and Yoder into conversation:[3]

> A serious and consistent Augustinianism would, I believe, lead to a sharply
> negative critique of Yoder. It is not at all clear to me that a serious and consistent
> Yoderianism would yield any happier result when directed to a critique of
> Augustine. These thinkers simply begin in very different places, theologically.
> They are adversaries in interpreting the meaning of Christian faith, not potential
> conversation partners.[4]

The chasm that allegedly separates these theologians has to do with the question of

intention and its relationship to the morality of human acts. On Johnson's reading, "the

constant reference point for Augustine was the divine order and the place of human

action in history in relation to that order."[5] Augustine is entirely consistent, according to

Johnson, in maintaining that some forms of intentional killing can be rightly related to

that divine order, while also holding that no forms of lying can be so related. For

Augustine maintains that some forms of killing can be rightly referred to the political

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[1] The edition of *City of God* I am using is Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson, introduction by John O'Meara, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin, 1984).
[2] James Turner Johnson, "Can a Pacifist Have a Conversation with Augustine? A Response to Alain Epp Weaver," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 29, no. 1 (2001).
[3] Weaver, "Unjust Lies, Just Wars? A Christian Pacifist Conversation with Augustine."
[4] Johnson, "Can a Pacifist," 92.
[5] Ibid.

order, which in turn "reflects" a higher, divine order.[6] Killing is rightly intended and therefore licit when and only when it occurs under the limited circumstances and authority of a just political order.

Here, then, is the contrast with Yoder on Johnson's reading. For Augustine, the morality of human acts is determined by the underlying intention, which may or may not be in harmony with the divine order. Under certain limited circumstances killing can be rightly intended, and thus rightly ordered. Yoder on the other hand, according to Johnson, inhabits a frame reference that does not construe ethics primarily in terms of the agent's intention. Certain acts are objectively wrong, regardless of the subject's intentions. Pacifism in general depends upon the evaluation of human actions from an objectivist perspective. Yoder and Augustine thus inhabit fundamentally different ethical frameworks, and conversation across this divide is impossible. The theological appeals of the two rigorous ethical positions simply flow from alien starting points. Thus concludes Johnson, "Can a pacifist hold a conversation with Augustine? I think not."[7]

There are many problems with Johnson's analysis, not the least of which is the conclusion that alien frameworks obviate conversation. The claim that adversaries in interpreting the Christian faith cannot be conversation partners is extraordinary, particularly in light of the actual careers of both Augustine and Yoder. Augustine in particular seems to have been rather robustly ignorant of this barrier, as he churned out thousands of pages of letters and treatises directly engaging the Pelagians, Manicheans, Donatists, and pagans of his day. But Yoder too appears to have been oblivious of this impossibility, as for years he taught the course on the just war tradition at Notre Dame and authored numerous essays and a book interacting with this rival tradition. It would be tendentious to refuse to describe these engagements as conversations. Moreover, the

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[6] Ibid.: 89.
[7] Ibid.

concept of Christian *conversion* itself depends upon the possibility of peaceably transcending differences in theoretical and practical frameworks. If conversation across significant difference is impossible, so is conversion.

More academically, what would become of historical theology if Johnson's barrier to dialogue were true? How could there have there been so many productive conversations between *Christians* of famously different orientations? What should we make of the use of Augustine by Thomas Aquinas, for example? The latter's Aristotelianism and scholastic disputational method constitute a markedly different theological framework than Augustine's, yet Thomas displays an obvious dependence on Augustine in general, and a profound sensitivity to the question of intention in the morality of human acts in particular. Was Thomas simply mistaken to assume that Augustine could be an interlocutor in his own Christian transformation of Aristotelianism?

It is of course true at some level that Augustine and Yoder articulated and inhabited different frameworks. Yoder was the child of very different historical, ecclesial, and intellectual contexts. But this is also true of St. Jerome, Martin Luther, Karl Barth, and James Turner Johnson. Augustine vigorously interacted with Jerome to persuade him to abandon one of their significant differences on the basis of what they held in common. Luther, Barth, and Johnson likewise all interact with Augustine across their own differences, again on the basis of what they have in common.[8] It would therefore be a mistake to concede too quickly that Augustine and Yoder inhabited the opposite sides of an unbridgeable chasm. Johnson's observation is arguably true only at

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[8] One could give many examples to undercut Johnson's claim that conversation across difference is impossible. Yoder was actually a master of such conversation. While I suspect Johnson was no fan of Yoder's interaction with the just war tradition, there is ample evidence that Yoder communicated effectively with those committed to that tradition and also willing to listen. Richard Mouw writes in the foreword to Yoder's *The Royal Priesthood* of the several ways Yoder strongly influenced his thinking *without* convincing him of the truth of Christian pacifism. And Charles P. Lutz expresses gratitude to Yoder in the foreword to Yoder's *When War Is Unjust* for helping inhabitants of the just war tradition honor it by taking the claims of the tradition seriously. Such statements are evidence that Johnson's refusal might have more to do with his own unwillingness to listen than with alleged incompatible frameworks.

the expense of being trivial. Which two interlocutors do not communicate across difference of some kind? What we need to know is not *that* Augustine and Yoder inhabited different frameworks, but rather *how* these diverse frameworks are so alien as to be incompatible.[9] Johnson's argument, stripped of its anti-dialogical hostility, is that Augustine and Yoder articulated fundamentally incompatible moral-theological positions.[10]

It is important to note that while Johnson implies that the decisive issue is the question of intention, his own summary of Augustine's defense of ordered violence actually highlights a *relation*—the relation of the violence of the political order to the peace of the divine order. I quote Johnson here in full: "In killing in a just war or otherwise as an agent of the political authority, one's intention is referred to that authority, to the good of the political order it represents, and to the higher order the political system itself reflects."[11] Implicit in Johnson's own summary is that the question of intention is actually derivative—it is subordinate to an account of secular authority and the latter's relationship to divine authority. The right intention to kill is only possible, on Johnson's own reading of Augustine, insofar as political orders and their authorized violence are capable of reflecting the divine order. While Johnson is correct, then, to observe that Augustine's theopolitical vision accommodates, even as it

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[9] Of course, even in cases of incompatible convictions, conversation can take place. In fact, if enough work has been done to identify the incompatibilities, the conversation can be all the more interesting and productive. The only thing that would make conversation truly impossible would be two human beings sharing nothing in common—an idea inimical to almost any construal of the Christian doctrine of creation.
[10] Johnson gets around to where he should have started at the end of his essay, where he doubts "that Augustine would be at all happy with Yoder's Jesus-centered understanding of Christian theology," and where Johnson suspects "that Augustine would have reacted to Yoder's theology much the same way that he reacted to the position of Faustus the Manichaean." Johnson, "Can a Pacifist," 92. These are provocative and completely unsubstantiated claims. Substantiated, they would certainly bolster Johnson's critique of Epp Weaver. That it is Augustine who has the humility of Jesus Christ at the very center of his trinitarian theology, and that it is John Howard Yoder who is unwilling to see any human creature declared so evil or devoid of intrinsic goodness that s/he could justifiably be killed, is given no mention by Johnson. Rather, Johnson is content simply to drop these suspicious bombs and conclude the essay. I believe Johnson's entire response, but especially his closing remarks, manifest an unfortunate truth—namely, that Constantinian Christianity is so culturally and intellectually established that unsubstantiated claims on its behalf do not bear as much burden of proof—even in peer-reviewed academic journals like the *Journal of Religious Ethics*—as the much more careful, supported, and nuanced claims brought against it.
[11] Ibid., 89.

theologically delimits,[12] political violence, he fails to notice how Augustine's limited

defense of political violence is dependent upon, not the question of intention per se, but

rather Augustine's broader theological positioning of secular order. The question of

rightly intended political violence is embedded within Augustine's location of political

violence in the divine order of things, the latter of which is itself situated and explicated

in Augustine's mature Trinitarian theology.

However, this mature theology, particularly as it relates to the politics of earthly

cities, is far more complicated and sophisticated than the quote from Johnson suggests,

for by no means does the mature Augustine simply argue that "the political system"

"reflects" "the higher order" of God's law. Johnson himself is aware of a major shift in

Augustine's mature thinking about the place of earthly politics in God's divine order—

Johnson references Robert A. Markus's seminal work on the post-Eusebian phase of

Augustine's theology just two pages later. Yet Johnson allows for no feedback into the

question of the ethics of killing. Rather, he thinks it sufficient that Augustine himself saw

no connection between the shift in his thinking about worldly politics and the ethics of

killing: "Through all this, Augustine never spoke of the killing that takes place in war as

inherently evil; rather, that which takes place in a just war is in the service of a higher

good and takes its character from that good."[13]

Nevertheless, Johnson's summary of Augustine's political thought actually

makes Epp Weaver's interaction with Augustine on lying all the more needful. For

without qualification, Johnson's summary of Augustine's political ethic opens the door

to much more than limited forms of violence. Killing, after all, is not the only

"authorized" thing that happens in war. Lying has long been a significant part of actual

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[12] Though it must be said that the circumscription of violence in Augustine's thought is not a point emphasized by Johnson. Moreover, Johnson has been among those scholars who critique the notion that the just war tradition entails a normative "presumption against violence." For a close look at the question, including a critique of Johnson's arguments to this effect, see Richard B. Miller, "Aquinas and the Presumption against Killing in War," *Journal of Religion* 82, no. 2 (2002).

[13] Johnson, "Can a Pacifist," 91.

human wars.[14] Moreover, lying in a time of war is inevitably justified in terms of the higher good it serves. Like other forms of extremely manipulative behavior, lying is said to serve the *in extremis* needs of the political order, whose wars are said to be necessary to serve the common good, which, in turn, is itself declared to be both required by and a reflection of the divine good of peaceable human community. In other words, one could easily argue, using only a slightly modified version of Johnson's own chain of justification, that "[lying] in a just war or otherwise as an agent of the political authority, [is legitimate when] one's intention is referred to that authority, to the good of the political order it represents, and to the higher order the political system itself reflects."[15]

Such arguments would certainly not be new, and Augustine was clearly aware of them. Yet he was also thoroughly unpersuaded by them: no form of lying, whether "public" or "private," could serve the divine order.[16] Lying, for Augustine, is intrinsically disordered—which is to say, *objectively* wrong—no matter how useful it might be to anybody, including those who fight wars to protect the common good. And

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[14] As has torture and sundry other forms of extreme, coercive behavior. I suspect that Johnson's critique of Epp Weaver has more to do with defending killing than defending Augustine. At a number of places in his text, Johnson emphasizes Augustine's consistent approval of killing in war—claims that are exegetically flat-footed at best—and then explicates Augustine's theology accordingly. I fear the method of argumentation says more about Johnson than Augustine. He begins with the assumption that war is justified, and then finds backing for the assumption when a robust theological critique is pressed. The details of Johnson's authorities' theological framing of moral questions can fall away once the justification is in place.

One way to test my suspicion that Johnson is more interested in defenses of killing than in a robust Augustinian framing of the issues would be to see how vigorously Johnson has protested the Bush administration's lies in the current military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. I am unaware of any writings by Johnson that press the Augustinian critique of lying against the behavior of the Bush administration. If Johnson has remained silent about these matters, one must wonder about his own compatibility with an Augustinian "frame of reference."

I can imagine an Augustinian defense of the Bush Administration on the question of lying. It would not be a defense of lying, but rather a claim that, just because intention is so difficult to establish, we do not know enough to establish that the Bush Administration was lying to the public when it peddled false information. They may well have believed what they were saying was true. While such a defense would be perfectly Augustinian, it would have to be accompanied by a strong denunciation of every effort to justify the lie in order to be convincingly so.

[15] Johnson, "Can a Pacifist," 89.

[16] I place "public" and "private" in quotes because the contemporary use of the distinction is utterly alien to Augustine. There can be no such thing as a "public" lie for Augustine. Lying founds the private in Augustine's thought. Lying hides the self from others and thus prevents it from being shared; this privacy cuts at the heart of the City of God—the peaceable kingdom in which all will share together in the vision of God. To be sure, "privacy" is created in more ways than lying according to Augustine, but one must only note that "privation" is the ontological characteristic of evil for Augustine to see just how alien contemporary cravings for "privacy" would be to him. For a lucid explication of Augustine's exceptionless ban on lying, see Paul J. Griffiths, *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004).

why might lying be incompatible even with just wars? Why, in other words, might lying be incapable of reflecting the just order that wars are fought to secure? Augustine's answer is simple: lies cannot serve the truth, which is the very character of God.[17] As Epp Weaver puts it, Augustine "conceived of God as truth. God would not lie. God's truth, accordingly, cannot be communicated through a lie." Therefore, for Augustine, any good secured through lies cannot be a good secured with the right intention of reflecting God's divine order. We see again, then, that the question of right intention is derivative of a broader theological perspective. Augustine does not think that contradicting the mind with speech can sometimes be described as a lie, and sometimes—under proper authority and with the right intention—be given another, more legitimate description. Since we are, according to Augustine, to "love and do what we will," it follows necessarily for Augustine that in lying we are not loving; for love does not lie.[18] But then Johnson's summary of Augustine circles back around to the question he refuses to ask: How can intentional killing reflect "a greater order, one divinely purposed and defined"?[19] How does killing for a just cause reflect the love of God? How can one love and kill?

While there are certainly Augustinian answers to this question, Johnson does not provide them. He does not do so presumably because he believes such answers would be a waste of time in view of the fundamentally incompatible theological frameworks of Yoder and St. Augustine. It will be the burden of the rest of this chapter to show that Johnson's suggestion of a fundamental difference cannot stand up to scrutiny. His critique of Epp Weaver is a rather clumsy and overhasty attempt to preempt theological

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[17] See ibid. See also Stanley Hauerwas and Charlie Collier, "Review Essay: Paul J Griffiths *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity*," *Pro Ecclesia* 13, no. 4 (2004).
[18] That the logic of Augustine's famous saying is not permissive is evident from an analogous move made by Augustine in *City of God* 14.15 (Bettenson, 575), where he interprets human freedom before and after the Fall. "For in paradise, before his sin, man could not, it is true, do everything; but he could do whatever he wished, just because he did not want to do whatever he could not do." One would have to conclude strictly on the basis of this passage that Augustine cannot mean that "everything" is compatible with loving. He means, rather, that the loving person is constitutionally incapable of willing wrongly.
[19] Johnson, "Can a Pacifist," 91.

interaction that would put pressure on his reading of the just-war tradition.[20] Rather than listen to what actual pacifists have to say when they read Augustine, or to what Augustinians have to say when they read Yoder, Johnson tries to evade dialogue by definitional fiat. Nowhere is Johnson further from both Augustine and Yoder than in just such an avoidance strategy.

Nevertheless, in raising the question about the significance of intention in the ethics of Augustine and Yoder, Johnson's argument presents an occasion for two important clarifications. The work of Robert A. Markus has already been mentioned, though as we have seen Johnson believes it to be irrelevant to the question of rightly ordered political violence. This is the occasion for the first clarification, which will be to show that Johnson's judgment of irrelevance is mistaken. Markus's contribution to our understanding of the mature Augustine's social and political thought actually helps us to see some crucial points of convergence with Yoder. Importantly, Markus's work reintroduces the question of the "after" taken up in chapter 1 and demonstrates that Augustine had his own problems with the Constantinian transformation of Christianity. A closer reading of Augustine's rejection of aspects of the Constantinian theology of his day will magnify the problems with Johnson's refusal of conversation. We have already seen the weight Johnson places on the justice of the political order; but it is precisely this justice that is put in doubt by the late Augustine. And this destabilization of the earthly city's justice scrambles Johnson's own theological justification of political violence. For the right intention to kill was linked by Johnson to this earthly justice and its reflection of God's justice, and if it turns out that the earthly city is intrinsically incapable of such

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[20] Unfortunately, Johnson is not the only contemporary ethicist resorting to such careless critiques of alleged weaknesses in Yoder's position. Jean Bethke Elshtain accuses Yoder of a neo-Kantian reading of the just war tradition: "[Dan] Bell claims that my arguments are steps backwards in efforts to retrieve the just war tradition without offering us much in the way of criteria as to what counts as a step forwards or backwards. I suspect his understanding has been formed primarily by John Howard Yoder's systematic distortion of the just war tradition. Yoder distorts by turning the just war tradition into a set of neo-Kantian categorical imperatives." Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Response to Reviews of *Just War against Terror*," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* (November 2004): par. 13.

reliable reflection, then the Christian legitimation of the killing of the earthly city is on thin ice.

But I also take advantage of Johnson's dismissal to offer a clarification about the ethics of intention in the theology of Augustine. I will argue against Johnson that it is precisely a careful reading of Augustine on intention that can open up possibilities for dialogue with Yoder. Reading Augustine on intention in the way Johnson does is to make the bishop of Hippo a good deal less profound and interesting than he actually is. Arraying Augustine's "ethic of intention" against Yoder's "objective" ethics, as Johnson does, likewise impoverishes Yoder, whose pacifism is every bit as compatible with the complexities of intentional action. What is entirely lacking in Johnson's treatment is any attention to the link between Augustine's ethics and his broader, *christologically* transformed account of human interiority.[21] One of Yoder's most effective critiques of mainstream theological justifications of violence is that they set Jesus aside.[22] Johnson does Augustine no favors by giving us an Augustine without Christ. In my second clarification, I come to Augustine's defense by spending some time unfolding his juxtaposition of the *problem* of human interiority with the *solution* of a very particular *exteriority*—namely, God's enfleshment in Jesus Christ. I will argue that the gap between the surface of a human action and the "inner" intention is indeed of major significance to Augustine. There is for him no automatic connection between inside and outside; there is no reliable mechanism for correlating exterior with interior. The exact same words can

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[21] Readers of Augustine such as Johnson and Jean Bethke Elshtain seldom combine their readings of *City of God* with close readings of *On the Trinity*. I will show in chapter 4 why *On the Trinity* is absolutely crucial to any adequate account of Augustine's "political thought." The fact that Augustine has more to say about justice in a "dogmatic" treatise like *On the Trinity* than in a "political" text like *City of God* should alert us to the former's significance for any Augustinian political theology.

 Mike Hanby has gone a long way toward recovering the significance of *de trinitate* for contemporary estimates of Augustine's relation to modern philosophy. Hanby seeks to resist "a tendency, by no means universal but still well entrenched within the academic guilds, to treat the philosophical Augustine separately from the doctrinal Augustine." See Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, Radical Orthodoxy Series (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1. I suggest that we should similarly resist any attempt to treat the political Augustine separately from the doctrinal and philosophical Augustine. If *de trinitate* helps Hanby to resist contemporary efforts to trace Cartesian philosophical moves back to Augustine, the same text helps me to resist Yoder's inclination to pin the Constantinian tail on Augustine.

[22] See Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, esp. chapter 1, "The Possibility of a Messianic Ethic.".

be spoken truthfully or deceptively. Two utterances might "look" exactly the same from the "outside," even as they constitute different acts due to the different intentions of the speakers. For Augustine, one must find a way to see "deeply," inside the speech-acts, as it were, to distinguish lies from truthful speech.[23]

But to speak of needing to see "deeply," beneath the surface of an action, in order to discern what is really going on, is already to enjoy a harmony in Augustine's and Yoder's theological voices. Indeed, the question of depth illumines a connection between the two clarifications, even as it links this chapter to the next one. As we will see, Augustine's own rejection of the Constantinian "after" flows from his refusal of superficial readings of history. Augustine rejects the practice of reading God's favor off of the ups and downs of political fortune. Likewise, as we will see in greater detail in chapter 3, Yoder's quest for a theologically serious historicism is shot through with appeals to the deeper meanings of history against the unreliability of superficial narratives of effectiveness.

We have, then, twin theological critiques of superficial narratives of glory, with Yoder adding a twist by turning the critique back on the church. While Augustine argues that the pagans err in linking the rise and fall of the Roman Empire to the will of God (or the gods), Yoder argues that the Constantinian church erred in believing that God's will was clearly manifested in the surface realities of an imperially ascendant Christianity. Thus does one of the more pernicious stereotypes about Augustine and Yoder fall apart. Yoder is typically thought to have a sectarian vision—his believer's church ecclesiology allegedly implies a holy body, separate from the world and its messy concerns. Augustine is typically celebrated for abandoning Donatist rigorism and Pelagian self-righteousness—his alternative being to advance an understanding of the inevitably mixed nature of the church on pilgrimage in the world. And yet it is Yoder

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[23] For more on this aspect of Augustine on the lie, together with a critique of subsequent and less adequate reflections on lying, see Griffiths, *Lying*.

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who most powerfully focuses the critical implications of this Augustinian ecclesiology and theology of history back on the church itself. Only a sectarian, Pelagian ecclesiology would seek to resist this Yoderian "accusation of the ecclesial self"[24] and forever channel the critical energies of Augustine's theology of history "outside" the church, against the "pagans" of the day. Yoder's radicalization of the *semper reformanda* is but another turn of a basically Augustinian screw.

Nevertheless, Johnson, in arguing for an incompatibility between Yoder and Augustine, was perhaps only trying to spell out what Yoder himself seemed to have believed.[25] Though Yoder offered no sustained reflection on Augustine's thought and legacy, he provided ample evidence of a conviction that Augustine stood on the wrong side of the Constantinian transformation of Christianity. The trajectory of this chapter is therefore as much against the grain of Yoder's judgment as it is against the grain of Johnson's. One aim in what follows is thus to show why the Latin father's "Constantinianism" is not as straightforward as Yoder imagined, and to argue that Augustine's account of interiority actually opens up a horizon of interpretation that reveals more common ground with Yoder. What Augustine does so dramatically in the *City of God* is contest the surface meanings of history, including the "triumph" of Christianity that came with the baptism of Constantine. Moreover, the Augustine who repeatedly turns inward in the *Confessions* is the same Augustine who refuses Eusebian readings of Christian empire in the *City of God*. I insist that these moves are theologically related and draw on key voices in contemporary Augustinian research to argue that Augustine's contestation of an easy surface clarity should be considered central to his mature theology. In this way I seek to establish the connection to which I have alluded— namely, the theological connection between Augustine's interiority and Yoder's

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[24] Augustine summarizes the work of confession as "Accusation of self, praise of God." See Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 1st ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 175.
[25] See the passages from Yoder cited in the introduction to the dissertation.

historicism. Crucial to both, I argue, is the christological transformation of an inherited paradigm.

2.2 Augustine's Disavowal of Constantine: Rejecting the Eusebian After

Recent Augustinian scholarship confirms one of Augustine's central insights: that the stories we tell are endlessly revisable and therefore necessarily provisional. From his theological autobiography (*Confessions*) to his eschatological reading of world history (*City of God*) to the "reconsiderations" of his life's work (*Retractations*), Augustine exemplified a commitment to judging previous interpretations in light of present understanding. And so it is with contemporary Augustinian scholarship. Careful chronological studies, a proliferation of close readings of specific themes across the expanse of the Augustinian corpus, and even new discoveries of letters and sermons, have required revisions of previous portrayals of Augustine's theology. It is one of the ironies of the contemporary consensus on Augustine's legacy that it includes a lesson that Augustine appears (just now!) to have demonstrated long ago: a person's thought must be interpreted alongside the transformations of his life. Naively "synchronic" readings of Augustine will no longer do. Early Augustine cannot be casually set aside late Augustine in an exposition of "Augustine's position." Care must be given to the evolution of Augustine's thought over time.[26]

Nobody has done more to increase our understanding of Augustine's mature social and political thought than Robert A. Markus, whose *Saeculum: history and society in the theology of St. Augustine* has been described by Rowan Williams as "probably the finest survey of Augustine's political thinking in English."[27] Since Markus's revisionist treatment of Augustine's mature theopolitical vision did much to inspire my effort to

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[26] Of course, the challenge of interpreting Augustine lies not only in discerning the effects of history on the man Augustine; it lies also in becoming self-conscious about the effects of history on us, Augustine's readers.

[27] Williams, "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the *City of God*."

reconcile readings of Augustine and Yoder, an exposition of the central claims of *Saeculum* will be helpful.

Markus has two aims in *Saeculum*: 1) to bring to the fore Augustine's distinctive contribution to a Christian theology of history, and 2) to display the intersections between that theology of history and what Markus sees as Augustine's proto-modern account of secular politics.[28] Instrumental to the first aim is a careful investigation of the development of Augustine's thinking about the place of the Roman Empire in history. Markus reads Augustine's works chronologically and in the context of contemporary and earlier Christian assumptions about history to discern an important shift. Whereas the early Augustine receives the widely held view that the periods of history are revealed in the sacred scriptures, and that the christianization of the Empire is a special episode in salvation history, the turn-of-the-century Augustine is seen to move away from the latter view. Though Augustine always preserves the conviction that sacred history reveals the meaning of the full sweep of history, around the time of the sack of Rome (410 CE) Markus documents Augustine distancing himself from the notion of the *tempora christiana* and therefore from the idea that the post-Constantinian era was a special time.[29]

The phrase *tempora christiana* had carried with it key assumptions about the theological significance of the Roman Empire. The christianization of the Empire, the elimination of the persecution of Christians, and even the repression of paganism had been thought of as episodes in sacred history. Markus's careful chronological studies are

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[28] As we will see, I judge Markus unconvincing in establishing the second point. However I very much appreciate his effort to trace the contemporary implications. That move is strikingly absent from the newest treatise on Augustine's political thinking, Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Dodaro's book is as scholarly and careful as one could hope for. And yet it is striking that a book on Augustine's political thinking, published in the midst of a war being waged under the auspices of the very "just war tradition" for which Augustine is alleged to bear an originating influence, includes no reflections whatsoever on contemporary implications. He makes no mention of the debates raging about the reception of Augustine's political thinking in our context. The varying and to some degree rival appropriations of Augustine by Jean Bethke Elshtain, Oliver O'Donovan, Rowan Williams, and John Milbank are neither cited nor engaged, even though Dodaro has clearly done the leg work to instruct us on these matters. It is a peculiar silence.
[29] Markus, *Saeculum*, chapter two, 22–44.

marshaled to demonstrate that Augustine eventually abandoned the theology behind these views—what Markus refers to as the Eusebian Rome-theology of Augustine's contemporaries.[30] For Eusebius, the conversion of Constantine had represented a turning point in history—a new "after," to borrow the language from chapter 1. Decisive new things had happened in post-scriptural history. The christianization of the Empire was a fundamentally new episode in the story of God's activity, ushering in a new age. Thus Eusebius and others read the conversion of Constantine as the beginning of God's millennial kingdom. *After* Constantine, the Christian political situation was thought to have fundamentally changed.

Yet not so for Augustine, according to Markus. Slowly, but then carefully and surely, Augustine removes contemporary history from salvation history.[31] Sacred history continues to be indispensable for discerning the meaning and direction of all history, including the present, but now the final age is believed to have dawned with the proclamation of the gospel and the coming of Christ, *after* which there can be no decisive new events, no turning points, no revelatory "afters" in history. For this reason Markus refers to Augustine's late view of post-canonical history as homogenous.[32] The present age (the sixth age) is still thought to be foretold in the sacred scriptures, only now it is seen as an homogenous age, from which one must look *backwards* to glimpse the great events of salvation history. Indeed, from the last age one must look backwards to sacred history to even learn that one exists in such an age, for the key to the number and meaning of the ages lies in the narratives of sacred events that precede us. The key is that the significant contours of history—significant in the sense of prophetically meaningful—are now held by Augustine to lie entirely within the span of sacred history from Genesis to Christ. It follows that contemporary history cannot be an interesting

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[30] Ibid., chapter two, 52–53.
[31] Ibid., chapter three, 45–71.
[32] Ibid., 21.

time. Decisive new events will not happen. The truly great events of history are behind us.[33]

In construing post-canonical history as homogenous, Augustine has, according to Markus, desacralized or secularized it. The *saeculum* is the name given to this homogenous stretch of history, and we will see in a moment how the "secularity" of post-canonical history intersects with Markus's understanding of Augustine's "secular" politics. First I note that scholars have often followed Markus's lead in this reading, even as they have expanded the technical vocabulary for describing what Augustine is doing. For example, Paula Fredriksen is indebted to Markus when she speaks of Augustine's de-eschatologized theology of history, or when she speaks of Augustine's view of the historical present as "eschatologically opaque."[34] And Gerard O'Daly's claim that Augustine's method in *The City of God* is to demythologize the imperial ideology of the Roman Empire is very much in the spirit of Markus.[35]

The upshot of Augustine's abandonment of the *tempora christiana* is, according to Markus, the repudiation of "nothing less than the almost universal tradition of thinking about the Roman Empire during the fourth century."[36] In short, the Empire loses its religious significance for Augustine, as its history is removed from salvation history. The Christianization of the Empire is thereafter seen as historically accidental, not necessary, as is the historical elimination of the persecution of Christians. For the late Augustine, Christians should be prepared to face persecutions again.

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[33] This is not to deny the significance for Augustine of Christ's return, but this will be the end of history and not another turning point in it. Moreover, the return of Christ in victory will for Augustine confirm the incarnation as the "after" to all "afters."

[34] See Fredriksen's essay "*Secundum Carnem*: History and Israel in the Theology of St. Augustine," in R. A. Markus, William E. Klingshirn, and Mark Vessey, *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus*, Recentiores (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 26.

[35] Gerard J. P. O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 89.

[36] Markus, *Saeculum*, 53.

Markus goes on to claim that Augustine's disavowal of the Rome-Eusebian theology led him to develop a view of the Roman Empire as theologically neutral.[37] Neutrality is a concept for which Markus repeatedly reaches,[38] and his use of it to describe Augustine's mature theology is the right place to transition to Markus's reading of Augustine's political thinking. The central thrust of Markus's interpretation is that Augustine's revised account of divine providence—in which, as we have seen, the time between Christ's first and second comings is stripped of revelatory significance—coincides with a revised estimate of the "purpose of government." According to Markus, Augustine's revised eschatology renders all historical achievement problematic. Augustine's dividing of world history into two groups of people—inhabitants of the earthly and heavenly cities—must therefore be understood as a formal distinction that can in no way be mapped onto empirical social groupings. The two cities are eschatological realities, and the dividing line between them is invisible, as it will only be revealed at the end of time in the consummation of God's kingdom.

This blurring of the line means that the citizens of the two cities share social institutions with one another. They are mixed up in every political community of the *saeculum*, as there is no divinely ordained political order that citizens of the heavenly city physically inhabit *over against* the citizens of the earthly city. Such is the nature of Augustine's revision of the "purpose of government." Rather than construct an ideal theory of government—a society imagined as a genuine reflection of a divine *ordo* or heavenly *pax*—Augustine accepts the governing authorities that society presently offers, but thinks of them as merely provisional keepers of a worldly peace, preservers of some semblance of order amidst the disordering effects of sin. Political *ordo* is for Augustine strictly providential and provisional—a result of the fall, and not natural—and thus the

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[37] Ibid., 55.
[38] Ibid., e.g. , 65, 151 and 73. Markus's use of the concept of neutrality dovetails with his use the language of a political "sphere" and "the autonomy of the political"; see esp. 69.

relative peace and justice that are attainable must in no way be identified with the final peace and justice of the city of God.

Nevertheless, as there is only one *saeculum* in which citizens of both cities live, and as the question of heavenly or earthly citizenship is not empirically discernible, the political order is shared by members of both cities. The intermingled citizenries use that *ordo* differently, referring it to different ends. Yet that difference cannot be expressed, according to Markus, in "sociological categories." Augustine's repositioning of the political order in these ways thus serves on Markus's reading as a major source for the modern understanding of secularity. Augustine's theology of the *saeculum* is construed as the originating vision for our understanding of the political order as theologically neutral and autonomous. It is above all Augustine's rediscovery of the eschatological dimension of Christian hope that pointed the way forward, according to Markus. In attacking the "sacral conception" of the Roman Empire, Augustine liberated the Roman "state," and by implication all politics, from "the direct hegemony of the sacred."[39] In so doing, Augustine paved the way for our contemporary commitment to a "pluralistic, religiously neutral civil community." One other consequence of Augustine's political thinking is a tendency for "the state" to "dissolve into a kind of atomistic personalism," by which Markus means a public realm in which individuals pursue their various private ends.[40]

I will return to these conclusions when I take up Rowan Williams's and John Milbank's critiques of *Saeculum*. Markus acknowledged that he was venturing beyond his area of historical expertise in using Augustine to point in these directions, and Milbank and Williams amplify the limitations of Markus's extrapolations to modern politics. But before turning to the criticisms of Markus's conclusions about Augustine's

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[39] Ibid., 173.
[40] Ibid., 149.

theology of society I turn first to the *Confessions* to argue that some of Markus's central insights are anticipated by that text.

The *Confessions* of St. Augustine is arguably the most important text outside of the New Testament for the development of Western Christian theology.[41] However, this most famous of Augustine's writings is arguably neglected in contemporary investigations of Augustine's political thought. [42] *Confessions* was completed a full decade before the shift in thinking that Markus sees behind his mature political thought, and indeed a full quarter century before the completion of *City of God*. And yet there is a structural or compositional unity in *Confessions* and *City of God* that is relevant to Markus's thesis. Carol Harrison has keenly observed that in between narratives of growth from youth to old age (*Confessions*, books 1–9; *City of God*, books 11–18) and reflections about the life to come (*Confessions*, books 11–13; *City of God*, books 20–23), Augustine inserts accounts of life in the historical present (*Confessions*, book 10; *City of God*, book 19). Harrison's observation directs our attention to the places in these otherwise different books where we can observe the consistency of Augustine's eschatological critique of perfection in contemporary life.

In *City of God* 19.10, for example, Augustine sharply contrasts the "utter miseries" of the present life with the "final bliss" of the life to come. In referring to contemporary times, he describes them as "this situation of weakness" and "these times of evil," not to be confused with "that state of serenity where peace is utterly complete and assured."[43] These contrasts are of no small significance in relation to Markus's work, as they bear the marks of what Markus has called Augustine's desacralization of post-canonical

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[41] A reasonable claim made by Jason Byassee, *Reading Augustine: A Guide to the Confessions*, Cascade Companions (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2006), 1.
[42] While the continuity between *Confessions* and *City* is underemphasized in the literature on Augustine's political thought, it has certainly not gone unnoticed. Thus, for one example, John O'Meara's widely published introduction to *City* contains the claim, "It will be seen that [*City*] is an application of the theme of his own development and conversion, as described in the burning pages of the *Confessions*, to the broader, less immediate, canvas of man's destiny" (Augustine *City of God*, vii).
[43] Augustine *City of God* 19.10 (Bettenson, 864).

history. Having churned through world history and undermined every mythology that would make some particular political community *the* unique vehicle of divine justice and peace, Augustine does not hesitate to finish the job. Book 19 is the crucial text for Augustine's political thinking, and in it we meet his steadfast refusal to foreshorten the Kingdom's arrival. Augustine insists that whatever peace is experienced in this life by members of the heavenly city is merely a solace for their wretchedness (*City of God*, 19.27). The justice and peace demanded of pilgrim members of the city of God are not, and cannot be, fully realized in this secular age.

But turn now to book 10 of *Confessions*, and it is difficult to miss the foreshadowing of Augustine's subsequent eschatological critique of post-biblical political "progress." For with book 10 of *Confessions* we come to the historical present in Augustine's life, and we are once again met with a refusal: this time a refusal to spell out any achievement that has been made possible by Augustine's conversion to Catholic Christianity. Augustine makes it known that "there are many who desire to know what I still am at this time of writing my confessions,"[44] and yet he refuses to tell the story that his supplicants want to hear. Responding to this challenge is a risky affair for Augustine, as it tempts him to produce a testimony of pride. To tell the story of his personal achievement would be to succumb to some other source of strength than "that charity which builds on that foundation of humility which is Christ Jesus" (7.20.26). Augustine even worries about the ability to communicate successfully with his inquirers—how will they know that what he is saying about his inmost being is true when he can offer them no proof? Only the bond of charity, says Augustine, can unite his hearers to the truth of his confessions, and only in so far as his confessions are themselves the fruit of God's love (10.3.3–5).[45]

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[44] *Confessions* 10.3.4 (Boulding, 199).
[45] Note that the exact same point about the appropriate posture of humility and the need for divine charity is made in *City of God* 19.27, where Augustine uses the church's recitation of the Lord's prayer as proof that

Clearly, Augustine thinks talking about himself is risky business. So instead of a narrative culminating in accomplishment, we hear of "the abyss of the human conscience [that] lies naked [before God]" (10.2.2). We read of the vestiges of concupiscence that remain lodged in Augustine's memory (10.30.41), of the many sensual temptations that threaten continence (10.31.43–10.35.57), and of how even the battle against pride can be a form of it (10.38.63).[46] Above all, we are told time and again that the only path available to anyone, bishop or not, is a forsaking of self-justification and a total reliance on God's mercy, a path that cannot be blazed or grasped, but only received as a gift. It is well to remember that book 10 of the *Confessions* contains the passage that "deeply annoyed" Pelagius: "Strengthen me too, that I may be capable, give what you command, and then command whatever you will."[47]

With characteristic eloquence, Peter Brown describes book 10 as "the self-portrait of a convalescent."[48] There is no path of security for the bishop that might place him "after" the vulnerabilities of Christ's humiliation. Not in created things. Not in the "vast mansions" of his memory. Not in interior ascent. It is no coincidence that book 10 concludes with an appeal to a by-now-familiar theme of *Confessions*: the need for Christ as mediator, priest, and victim. Our hunger for security in this life will be satisfied, according to Augustine, only at the *eschaton*, only at the consummation of time, for only then will we know even as we are known. In the meantime, our lives are marked by struggle, sin, and the constant need to lay ourselves bare before God and one another.

Indeed, it is one of the not-so-subtle suggestions of book 10 that, while life in the *saeculum* is marked like everything else by the vicissitudes of history, there is one path available—the path of confession—and that there is in this path something approaching

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wordly peace is but solace for human wretchedness and not the genuine peace of the coming Kingdom. Moreover, the Lord 's Prayer "is not effective for those whose 'faith, without works, is dead' but only for those whose 'faith is put into action through love'" (Bettenson, 892).

[46] "We can make our very contempt for vainglory a ground for preening ourselves more vainly still" (Boulding, 239).

[47] *Confessions* 10.31.47 (Boulding, 227). For the impact on Pelagius, see Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 343.

[48] Ibid., 171.

the sacramental.[49] Thus in the concluding paragraph of *Confessions* 10 Augustine speaks

with Eucharistic allusion of eating, drinking, and distributing his "ransom" to others.[50]

But is "distributing to others" not what Augustine has been doing all along with his

confessions? Does this not close the circle on book 10, answering the question with

which the book began: What is Augustine to offer those who desire to know who he

now is? Is this not the fulfillment of his opening declaration: "Truth it is that I want to

do, in my heart by confession in your presence, and with my pen before many

witnesses."[51]

 To return to the argument of Markus, this reading of book 10 of *Confessions*, a text

produced almost a quarter of a century *before* book 19 of *City*, helps illumine why

Augustine will entertain no theocratic hope in his *opus magnum et arduum*. It is quite true

that Augustine approves of Christian rulers exercising the difficult, sometimes violent

tasks of political judgment.[52] Yet that possibility in no way changes Augustine's critical

estimation of life in the *saeculum*. Christian rule does not add anything new; it does not

take us "after" Christ. The mature Augustine harbors no illusions about Christian rulers

ushering in the kingdom, or securing us from the troubles of the mortal life. Though

Markus's careful research suggests that Augustine only arrives at this conclusion after

the sack of Rome in 410, book 10 of *Confessions* helps us to see the crucial theological

continuity in the later developments. For as we have seen, Augustine refuses to locate

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[49] The christological nature of confession in Augustine's thought cannot be overemphasized. Lewis Ayres shows convincingly that dispossession in Augustine's thought is about mirroring the divine gift of Jesus. The Son's visibility through faith is difficult but real, for Jesus's humiliation illumines our own failures, which makes confession one crucial way of participating in the visibility made possible by Jesus. See Lewis Ayres, "*Exemplum*, Imitation and the Confessing Identity in Augustine's Conversion," (2004).

[50] *Confessions* 10.43.69 (Boulding, 244): "Your only Son, in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge, has redeemed me with his blood. Let not the proud disparage me, for I am mindful of my ransom. I eat it, I drink it, I dispense it to others, and as a poor man I long to be filled with it among those who are fed and feasted."

[51] *Confessions* 10.1.1 (Boulding, 197).

[52] See *Letter 134* to Apringius, where Augustine writes: "I have no doubt that when you exercise the power that God has given you, a human being, over other human beings, you reflect upon the divine judgement, when judges too will stand to given an account of their own judgements. I know that you are steeped in the Christian faith." E. M. Atkins and Robert Dodaro, eds., *Augustine: Political Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Though (New York: Cambridge University Press,2001), 63.

even himself, a bishop of the Catholic Church, outside the "miseries of life" so thoroughly catalogued in *City of God*. Already in the *Confessions*, Augustine has rendered human achievement problematic. Book 10 of the *Confessions* therefore provides another window onto what Markus calls Augustine's desacralization of post-canonical history. It is a key development in Augustine's eventual refusal of the Eusebian "after."

Yet what of Augustine as herald of modern secular politics? As I have already suggested, the major theological disputes with Markus's book center around the conclusions he draws about Augustine's political thinking. Rowan Williams takes up Markus's work in his important essay, "Politics and the soul: a reading of the *City of God*." Markus's conclusions about secularity are relevant to Williams's effort to evaluate Hannah Arendt's claim that Augustine was perhaps the last to know what it meant to be a citizen, because he also happened to be the chief architect of the repudiation of the "public realm."[53] Markus's account of Augustine's theological construction of the secular is important for Williams, for Markus's work goes a long way towards confirming Arendt's suspicions.

Williams's critique is dense and complex, but the main points are simple enough. First, Williams reminds us that book 19 of *City of God* is not primarily a set of reflections about two different kinds of human association. Augustine's chief concern is rather with the different goals pursued amidst the shared vicissitudes of earthly life. Members of the two cities use the *same* temporal goods, yet to *different* ends. Augustine's business in book 19 is to think about human sociality in light of activity ordered to alternative final ends. The payoff to this teleology, according to Williams, is that it enables Augustine to so redefine the concept of the political that the *spiritual* life is shown to be the most authentically political form of existence.[54] That is to say, on Williams's reading Augustine effects a theological redefinition of the political, such that the classical

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[53] Williams, "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the *City of God*."
[54] Ibid.

assumptions about the *common* good are reversed and the "creative politics" of antiquity are shown to be atomistic or divisive in their foundations.[55] It is precisely this theological redefinition of the political that enables Augustine to simultaneously honor and deride traditional pagan virtues as splendid vices.[56] For traditional virtues turn out upon Augustine's further inspection to be laced with less-than-noble impulses, such as the fear of death and the lust for domination.[57]

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[55] A point nicely reiterated by John Milbank: "The Roman commonwealth, therefore, is actually condemned by Augustine for its *individualism*, and for not really fulfilling the goals of antique politics" (John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 405.

[56] See *City of God* 19.25. James Wetzel points out that "the phrase *vitia splendida* is nowhere to be found in [Augustine's] description of paganism in *City of God*." See James Wetzel, "Splendid Vices and Secular Virtues: Variations on Milbank's Augustine," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 32, no. 2 (2004): 271.

[57] In "Splendid Vices and Secular Virtues," Wetzel seeks an Augustinian revision of Augustine's attack on pagan virtues. Wetzel is concerned about the "confused concept" of the *civitas terrena* in *City*: Augustine sometimes defines the earthly city as the formal opposite of the *civitas Dei*, and he sometimes defines it as a *corpus permixtum*, a body holding indistinguishably members of the cities of both God and man. Yet how can a formal opposite also be a mixed body? Wetzel's conclusion is that Augustine conflates secularity with sin, and he wants to revise Augustine's account so as to retain what he takes to be one of Augustine's hardest won insights—the ambiguity of historical existence—while jettisoning the hermeneutical high ground Augustine presumes to occupy in seeing through pagan virtues to their hearts of darkness. I have learned much from this essay, especially from the clarity with which Wetzel names the difficulty in Augustine's use of *civitas terrena*. Nevertheless, I remain unconvinced of the need to revise Augustine in Wetzel's way, and for three reasons: 1) Wetzel has exaggerated Augustine's language in two significant ways: a) He writes that, according to Augustine, "human struggles for virtue" are "inescapably ambiguous." It is this inescapable ambiguity that Wetzel finds incompatible with Augustine's unmasking of pagan vice, for if every virtuous action is ambiguous, focusing on pagans would be but a form of scapegoating. However, "inescapably" is Wetzel's word, not Augustine's, and it is belied both by Augustine's critique of pagan vice (which Wetzel acknowledges and wants to revise) *and* his celebration of Christian virtue (not remarked upon by Wetzel). If Wetzel's revision were correct, Augustine would also have to give up his praise of the martyrs and his many references to Christian virtue, for they too might just as well be stalked by vice. Wetzel may be prepared to abandon Augustine's praise as well as his blame, but it is very hard to conceive of such a revision as Augustinian. For more than the witness of the martyr's is at stake: what becomes of the doctrine of the incarnation if "ambiguity" is the key Augustinian insight? b) Wetzel also reaches for an un-Augustinian extreme when he says that Augustine's critique of paganism exposes "a heart of naked vice." In point of fact, Augustine goes to some lengths to contest the sheer possibility of "naked vice." As a *eudaemonist*, Augustine is committed to the notion that even the wicked aim at genuine goods. Remove the implications of "inescapable" and "naked," and the necessity of Wetzel's revision disappears. Praising the virtuous and blaming the vicious can proceed apace precisely because no vice is inescapable and no sinner is nakedly vicious. 2) Augustine's clarity about hermeneutical difficulty in the *saeculum* is itself proof that ambiguity is *not* pervasive. Pervasive ambiguity is as oxymoronic as absolute relativism. 3) Wetzel does not mention Augustine's myriad pleas for divine help. A careful reading of Augustine on the ambiguity of historical life suggests *not* that Augustine's signal achievement is to have seen that we live in a night where all cats are grey, but that our ability to distinguish the white from the black, the good from the bad, the true from the false, the beautiful from the ugly, depends upon our willingness to receive the gifts of illumination shed abroad by God through the Holy Spirit. Where Wetzel wants us to maintain a tension, Augustine wants us to pray for wisdom.

As for the confusion in Augustine's use of *civitas terrena*—in some places, formally in opposition to inhabitants of the *civitas Dei*, elsewhere a composite entity—I suspect the different usages have to do with perspective. From God's perspective, they are formally distinguished, and there is no mixture. From our perspective, they are a jumbled mess. Our true selves may be hidden from one another and even ourselves, but never from God.

However, Williams agrees with Markus that Augustine rejected "bland theocratic ideologies of the Roman Empire." He agrees furthermore that Augustine refused to ascribe sacred worth to any particular political system. Yet Williams thinks Markus has failed to note how, according to Augustine, it is only *Christian* believers who are able to resist the temptation to ascribe ultimate loyalties to political orders. It is only the spiritually mature who are aware of the provisionality of all political orders, and this leads, says Williams, to the paradox that the only reliable political leader will be the mature Christian man (Augustine very much reflects the patriarchal political assumptions of the day) who is *indifferent* to the survival of such earthly cities.[58]

If the need for rulers to be Christian is taken seriously, it requires a revision or rejection of Markus's affirmation of a neutral, autonomous political sphere. For on Williams's reading, the very ideas of neutrality and autonomy would have to be denounced by Augustine as the brainchildren of the politically vicious—for such ideas suggest that political authority can be exercised in abstraction from the question of ultimate ends. And for Williams, it was Augustine's dogged pursuit of the question of politics *from the perspective of ultimate ends* that enabled the desacralization in the first place. With the concept of neutrality, Markus threatens to undercut the desacralizing teleology.

Williams is no doubt right to insist upon Augustine's teleological—or, more properly, *eschatological*—revision of the antique concept of "the political," as book 19 of *City of God* is Augustine's extended defense of his extraordinary claim in book 2 that Cicero's definition of a commonwealth could only be made good in Christ.[59] I have

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[58] Augustine's argument about Christian rulers is formally identical to Yoder's argument about Christian historians. Yoder argued that only the Christian commitment to cruciformity makes historical objectivity possible. See, for example, Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, chapter 6, 123–34. Much more could be said about these two moves—one presumes a nonviolent Christianity, the other manifestly does not—but it is striking that both Yoder and Augustine are led to christologically requisition social roles traditionally thought of in "secular" or at least non-christological ways.

[59] Augustine *City of God* 2.21 (Bettenson, 75): "I intend, in the appropriate place, to examine the definitions of Cicero himself in which, throught he mouth of Scipio he laid down in brief what constitutes a

emphasized Williams's critique of Markus because an eschatological/christological revision of 'the political' is at the very heart of John Howard Yoder's politics of Jesus. If, as Augustine insists, "true justice is found only in that commonwealth whose founder and ruler is Christ," Yoder is perfectly Augustinian in insisting that it is those who would use violence for the sake of justice who bear the burden of theological proof, and not the other way around. On any honest reading of the New Testament, the violence "necessary" to establish "that commonwealth whose founder and ruler is Christ" was not inflicted by the godly but rather suffered by the God-Man, and thus any defense of inflicting rather than suffering violence for the sake of justice is vulnerable, on precisely Augustinian grounds, to being a form of sub-Christian vice.

This brings to a conclusion my first clarification. I hope to have shown that Robert Markus's work on Augustine's mature theology of history and society brings into view a provocative resonance with the work of John Howard Yoder. James Turner Johnson's claim that alien frames of reference occlude the possibility of conversation between Yoder and Augustine is belied by this striking continuity. Johnson's claim is not only wrong for all the reasons mentioned above in the introductory remarks. It is also wrong because it fails to see something very much like an Augustinian frame of reference in Yoder's own theopolitical vision. Whether aware of it or not, whether directly or indirectly, Yoder paralleled Augustine's christological redefinition of the political and deployed it for the cause of Christian nonviolence. Or, to put it more accurately, both Augustine and Yoder so concentrated their theological imaginations on God's revolution of authority and power in Christ that they challenged the foundations of political violence in every age. If Yoder argues that Jesus closes the door on Christian participation in the violence of the "old aeon," he does so by harnessing the same theological critique that enabled Augustine to recognize and begin to address the

'commonwealth' and what constitutes a 'community'. . . . Now [Rome] certainly was a commonwealth to some degree. . . . But true justice is found only in that commonwealth whose founder and ruler is Christ: if we agree to call it a commonwealth, seeing that we cannot deny that it is the 'weal of the community'."

Pandora's box of the Constantinian "after." For if Augustine's theopolitical vision demonstrates and depends upon the claim that the incarnation is the "after" to all "afters," then we have come a long way towards an interpretation of Yoder's messianic pacifism as a nonviolent Augustinianism.

2.3 Augustine, Modernity, and the Inward Turn

Nevertheless, we are still in need of a second clarification. What does the "after" have to do with the "inner"? Johnson's critique of Epp Weaver dealt with Markus's work in passing, so as to acknowledge an important shift in Augustine's thought, while also deeming it irrelevant to the possibility of dialogue with Yoder's pacifism. While, as we have just seen, this judgment of irrelevance is incorrect, Johnson's more considered suggestion had to do with the allegedly contrasting ethical methods of Augustine and Yoder. The issue that I want to pursue at greater length in my second clarification relates to the gulf allegedly opened up around the question of intentionality in human action.

I will pursue the question of intention by situating Augustine's "ethics" within his broader treatment of human interiority.[60] In view of my quest for a nonviolent Augustinianism, I want to see if Augustine indeed offers an account of what we might call radical human interiority. Does Augustine so dichotomize the human internal from the human external that Yoder's theological critique of killing is, as Johnson suggests, fundamentally incompatible with Augustine's view of the moral life? An affirmative answer would go some way towards defending Johnson's judgment that the shift in Augustine's mature theology of history and society was irrelevant to the ethics of killing. For even if Augustine's eschatological redefinition of the political opens up a vista onto Yoder's politics of Jesus, doesn't his construction of an imposing wall between human interiors and exteriors serve to close it off again? If Augustine's version of radical

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[60] To speak of Augustine's "ethics" is, of course, to speak in a wildly anachronistic manner. Augustine's "ethics" are strands that "we" modern interpreters separate and lift out of his texts. Much of what we lift comes from sermons, doctrinal treatises, letters, and so forth. My aim here is actually to put a strand lifted by Johnson back into its natural habitat in Augustine's profound theological meditations.

interiority means that we are to love on the inside and then do what we will on the outside, surely Johnson is correct in judging his ethics incompatible with Yoder's.

Johnson is, however, not correct, and in order to demonstrate that no such incompatibility is entailed, I will enter into a fuller reading of Augustine's meditations on interiority. I will do so by way of two sophisticated engagements with the question of Augustine's relation to modernity. The fraught question of Augustine's relation to modernity is relevant here, for Johnson's construal of Augustine on intention is arguably dependent upon modern readings of Augustine, readings which have rightly been challenged. Thus in critically engaging first John Milbank's account of Augustine, and then Charles Taylor's, I will demonstrate that Augustine's version of interiority—which includes but is not limited to the ethics of intention so important to James Turner Johnson—is not a reason to keep my search for a nonviolent Augustinianism from moving forward. Rather, as we will see, Augustine's christological transformation of the neoplatonist metaphor of interiority actually strengthens my case by opening up yet another surprising line of connection with the theology of John Howard Yoder.

2.3.1 John Milbank

First, let us return to the first clarification and recall Markus's contested claim that Augustine's bears a positive relationship to modern secularity. John Milbank's sophisticated Augustinian response to this claim will put a number of relevant issues on the table, and in order to bring Milbank's specific reflections on Augustine to bear on this contention it is worth digressing for a moment to take into view the overarching project of Milbank's own *opus magnum et arduum*.

In *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank sets out to "overcome the pathos of modern theology, and to restore in postmodern terms, the possibility of theology as a

metadiscourse."[61] In the face of secular reason, modern theology has, according to Milbank, opted for one of two paths, each of which can be thought of as avenues of humility in so far as each involves a kind of subordination: 1) theology submits knowledge of God to some currently authorized immanent field of knowledge; or 2) theology concedes the field, as it were, and locates its concerns in a "sublimity beyond representation."[62] Both of these paths fail to become genuine paths of humility, according to Milbank, for they both make theology obedient to an alien organizing logic and thus turn it into "the oracular voice of some finite idol."[63]

To avoid the trap of false humility, Milbank thinks theology needs to step up to the challenge and serve notice to secular reason. To do so, theology must contest the narrative of the genesis of secularity and reject the notion of a secular sphere as a neutral, autonomous realm, transparent to reason. Saint Augustine looms large in Milbank's project of outnarrating modernity, as the book's prefatory quote from the *City of God*[64] and the title of the final chapter, "The Other City,"[65] should make clear. Thus it is no surprise that Milbank is forced to take up Markus's reading of Augustine before his work of outnarrating is finished. Markus's political thesis—that Augustine helped found the modern secular—contradicts a key part of Milbank's story—namely, that the roots of the modern secular imagination lie in late medieval and early modern theological *perversions* of Augustinian theology. On Markus's reading, the "problems" (and they are not actually problems for Markus) would have to be traced all the way back to the bishop of Hippo himself.

Milbank's strategy is to strip Markus's reading of Augustine of its modernist assumptions. While Milbank relies heavily on Rowan Williams's important essay,

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[61] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 1.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] "For both 'civil' and 'fabulous' theologies are alike fabulous and civil." Ibid., ix.
[65] Ibid., 382–442.

discussed above, he also goes beyond Williams in a number of ways that are relevant to my interrogation of the possibility a nonviolent Augustinianism. First, Milbank agrees with Markus about Augustine's relation to modernity to a limited degree. He thinks Augustine contributes to modern political assumptions insofar as Augustine affirms a political order that is not really the manifestation of justice, indeed whose very existence turns on the presumption of sin.[66] Second, Milbank reads Augustine against Markus, in arguing that Augustine believed true justice and peace could be partially realized on earth, though only fully in heaven.[67] Third, Milbank again breaks with Markus and

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[66] Ibid., 405–6. This claim about the *civitas terrena*'s intrinsic relation to sin is of major significance to my own reading of Augustine's political thought, and it is a claim that happens to have been advanced by Yoder. It is an ontological claim, and Yoder leverages it, much as Augustine did, to deny the existence of an ideal form of earthly government: "Since we cannot say that God has any 'proper' pattern in mind to which unbelief should conform, the Christian witness to the state will not be guided by an imagined pattern of ideal society such as is involved in traditional conceptions of the 'just state,' the 'just war,' or 'the due process of law.' An ideal or even a 'proper' society in a fallen world is by definition impossible." Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, 32. However, Milbank claims that Augustine, while never a Stoic, maintained a form of resignation to the world's evil, in that he believed "as long as time persists, there will be some sin, and therefore a need for its regulation through wordly *dominium* and the worldly peace, which takes the form of a bare 'compromise' between competing will." In many ways, this dissertation is about the precise theological status of this "need." The precise status of this "need," often appealed to by defenders of some form of political violence, deserves much closer inspection. My argument is that Yoder gives an account of this "need" that is more consistent with Augustine's refusal of the priority of evil than those accounts, represented by theologians like Milbank and Oliver O'Donovan, which allow this "need" to morph into a theological justification for violence. This latter construal of the "need" for worldly *dominium* evacuates the christological revision of politics that I am arguing is present in both Yoder's and Augustine's thought. If one can speak theologically of Jesus "needing" worldly dominium, he "needed" it in the form of subjection—that is, he "needed" to be subject to it—and not in the form of use or manipulation. I know of no standard Augustinian defense of this "need for dominion" that takes this fundamental, christological critique into account. For a reading of Augustine that displays his christological critique, see 4.4.2 below.

[67] "Worldly justice and government as *paideia* are not . . . abandoned as desirable objectives. On the contrary, Augustine explicitly claims that they are truly realized in the city of God: fully in heaven, but also partially here on earth." Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 404. Milbank offers no citation to document Augustine's "partially realized" eschatology.

It should be noted that, in the first part of the above quote, Milbank is simply reiterating a key part of Rowan Williams's argument in "Politics and the soul"—namely, that Augustine does not simply abandon Scipio's definition of the commonwealth as a community of justice. Rather, Augustine accepts the definition, argues that Rome fails to be such a community, and then tries to account for something other than justice which must have functioned to hold Rome together. For what seems to me to be a willful misreading of Augustine on just this point, see Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, Frank M. Covey, Jr. Loyola Lectures in Political Analysis (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), especially chapter 2. Elshtain is aware of Williams's important essay (she cites it in this chapter), yet she proceeds to exegete Augustine in direct opposition to Williams's reading: "Within the terms of [Scipio's] definition," Elshtain claims, "Rome was never a true commonwealth. But Cicero's definition is wanting. A people is a gathering or multitude of rational beings united in fellowship by sharing a common love of the same things" (22). And later, even more astoundingly, "A Ciceronian definition of a people as a number of persons associated by common acknowledgement of certain rules for right and the pursuit of justice is inadequate, simply not up to the task of recognizing and deepening the work of *charitas*." Elshtain has it exactly backwards: according to Augustine, Cicero's definition (through the mouth of Scipio) reveals both the true political character of the City of God and that Rome, or the *civitas terrena*, is inadequately political and therefore not up to the task of recognizing and deepening the work of charity. This perversion of Augustine's robust critique of the justice of the earthly city arguably haunts Elshtain's unfortunate embrace

insists that the church can be identified with the City of God in Augustine's *magnum opus*. That leads to, fourth, Milbank's affirmation, once again against Markus, of ecclesial visibility in Augustine's mature theology. In sum, Milbank attributes to Augustine a robust ecclesiology in which the public, political practices of the faithful can and must be construed in terms of the very sociological categories that Markus had interpreted Augustine as having set aside.

Though all of these claims represent significant points of convergence with Yoder, they remain, with the exception of the first one, undocumented assertions by Milbank. The claims about visibility and practice are critical to his overarching project, as he must (on his own terms) oppose secular reason not with a work of speculative reason but with an elucidation of an already existing and contrastive Christian social praxis. Milbank might well be able to produce a reading of Augustine that can substantiate these claims.[68] The absence of such reading is nonetheless a significant lacuna in *Theology and Social Theory*, as Milbank believes that only from within an

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of the Bush administration's "war on terror." See Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Just War against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World* (New York: Basic, 2003). It is remarkable that self-identified Augustinians embraced the Bush administration's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, particularly in view of Bush's sacral conception of the United States and his manifestly idolatrous rhetoric about ridding the world of evil. It is one thing to follow Augustine in thinking that sub-political orders like the United States have a limited role in curbing the violent passions of a disordered world. It is something entirely different to construe the United States as a light unto the world, a beacon of freedom, and a just remedy for the violence of those who oppose freedom. There is room within the pacifism of John Howard Yoder for the former. There is no room in either Yoder or Augustine for the latter.

[68] For evidence that Augustine explicitly identifies the church with the city of God, see *City of God* 16.2 (Bettenson, 652): "we all hold confidently to the firm belief that these historical events and the narrative of them have always some foreshadowing of things to come, and are always to be interpreted with reference to Christ and his Church, which is the City of God." Also, *City of God* 8.24 (Bettenson, 335): "And this is the title of the psalm just quoted: *When the house was being built, after captivity*. Indeed this house, the City of God, which is the holy Church, is now being built in the whole world after the captivity in which the demons held captive those men who, on believing God, have become like 'living stones' of which the house is being built." This passage also gives evidence that Augustine had, to speak anachronistically, a partially realized eschatology. On this matter, one should also consider the paradoxical character of confession in Augustine's thought. On the one hand, the fact that we must confess our sins is evidence for Augustine that the Kingdom in its fullness has not yet come; indeed, the sheer existence of confession bars the way to Christian theocracy. See *City of God* 19.27. On other hand, the praying of this prayer is itself, according to Augustine, the breaking in of true justice. "The beginning of our justice is the confession of sins. You have begun not to defend your sin; now you have started to work at justice." Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, trans. John W. Rettig, The Fathers of the Church, a New Translation (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 4.3 (Rettig, 175). For an extraordinary display of Augustine's theological transformation of the virtue of justice, see Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 1.9 (Rettig, 134). "How [do we walk as he walked], brothers? . . . This then, that we walk in the way of justice. In what way? I have already mentioned it. He was fastened on the cross and was walking in this very way: it is the way of love."

ontology of peace such as Augustine's, and only from within the practices of a visible

church that such an ontology entails, can we move "beyond secular reason."

This brief foray into one of the most demanding theological works of the past

several decades suggests a number of interfaces with my hunt for a nonviolent

Augustinianism. Ecclesial visibility, lost according to Yoder in the Constantinian shift, is

on John Milbank's reading crucial to Augustine. I will pick up the question of visibility

again in chapter 4, "Outer," and thus set it aside here. More to the heart of the question

of Augustine and nonviolence is Milbank's explication of an Augustinian "ontology of

peace." If for Augustine, as Milbank argues convincingly, the most fundamental reality

of all being is peace, then any theological defense of violence must itself be postlapsarian

and thus theologically contestable. Put more strongly, if we have fallen *into violence*—

and Milbank is surely right to interpret Augustine in this way—it will take a very

sophisticated—or convoluted—theological position to demonstrate that *fighting* can have

any part in our redemption from it. For Augustine does not hold that we can lie our way

out of lying, fornicate our way out of *porneia*, acquire our way out of greed, master our

way out of mastery, etc. While Milbank himself does not press his reading of

Augustine's ontology of peace in a nonviolent direction,[69] the possibility of doing so,

indeed the need for so doing, is certainly relevant to my argument with Johnson in

particular, and relevant to the trajectory of this thesis in general. I will return to

ontological questions later in this chapter and those to follow, as they are relevant to a

number of facets of the dialogue I am trying to foster.[70]

However, another reason for surveying Milbank's use of Augustine in *Theology*

and Social Theory here is to link his Augustinian critique of Markus's secularity thesis to a

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[69] Milbank is everywhere concerned about refusing ontological priority to evil, conflict, and violence. He is, moreover, committed to theoretical reason's intrinsic relation to practice, which means that in contrasting an ontology of peace to a pagan ontology of violence, he must also contrast practices. All of which makes Milbank's theological defense of violence problematic on its own terms. With ironic apologies to Napoleon: if you say you are going to refuse the priority to evil, refuse the priority to evil.
[70] The question of evil, will and interiority, the impossibility of anarchy, the status of "the state" or "the sword," etc.

different contemporary account of Augustine's relationship to modernity, and one that

pushes Augustine's discourse of interiority to the front of the agenda. For the question

of Augustine's relationship to modernity extends beyond both Robert Markus's

speculative moments at the end of *Saeculum* and John Milbank's Augustinian attacks on

modern theology in *Theology and Social Theory*. A number of other significant

contemporary philosophers and theologians have espied what they take to be a crucial

relationship between Augustine and modernity. A thorough engagement of the

positions has already been undertaken by Michael Hanby and far exceeds my task

here.[71] I turn rather to one contemporary philosopher's work, Charles Taylor's, and to

one particular interest of his—the question of interiority in Augustine—so as to bring

the insights gained from Markus and Milbank together with the challenge posed by

James Turner Johnson. As we will see, Augustine's theology of interiority, far from

instantiating a rival or incompatible theological frame of reference, actually exemplifies

what I have called Yoder's christological historicism. Augustine, like John the evangelist

before him, christologically transforms a Platonist discourse. When this christologial

transformation inherent in Augustine's interiority is brought to light and connected with

his mature political thought, Johnson's allegations of a disjunction with Yoder are

adequately rebutted.

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[71] Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*. Hanby ably demonstrates the weaknesses of aligning Augustine too quickly with modern political and philosophical theory. My single complaint with *Augustine and Modernity* is with its defensive tone. Hanby seems utterly put out by the suggestion that Augustine might bear a paternal relationship to modernity (see, for example, the first chapter, "A Grim Paternity?" 6–26). Yoder had a more charitable way of dealing with a similar concern. In reflecting on Paul's theology of the Body of Christ, Yoder writes: "There may be some long-range cultural-historical sense in which this notion of the gifted dignity of each person is at the root of Western individualism. The value of the individual is part of the gospel; *we need not disavow paternity*. Yet from our end of the evolution of the culture of individualism, we must discern that the differences are greater than the similarities." John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1992), 49, emphasis mine. To be clear, my objection is not to the polemical nature of Hanby's work, but to strikes me as an over-reaction to arguments about Augustinian paternity for modernity. Hanby responds to critical engagement with his work in Michael Hanby, "Reconsiderations: The Central Arguments of *Augustine and Modernity*," *Ars Disputandi [http://ww.ArsDisputandi.org]* 7 (2997). Some of Hanby's critics evidently believe that his tone was too polemical for "a new Augustinain theology" (ibid., par. 1) whereas I should think that a contemporary theology would have to exibit a great deal of polemical energy to be worthy of the title "Augustinian."

2.3.2 Charles Taylor

In *Sources of the Self* Taylor undertakes the "very ambitious" project of attempting "to articulate and write a history of the modern identity."[72] Yet historical foraging for the roots of modern subjectivity is only part of Taylor's task. He also seeks to place the fruits of his quest for sources of modern selfhood at the service of a contemporary philosophical agenda. Taylor is interested in helping "us" become articulate about who "we" moderns are. He wants to identify and retrieve some vital historical sources of contemporary selfhood as a way of clarifying and defending the goods constitutive of modern identity, and of avoiding the pitfalls of reductionist, anti-ontological scientism.[73]

In telling the story of the fashioning of modern identity, Taylor is quite upfront about what he takes to be the distinguishing marks of modern self-understanding. The reader knows from Taylor's starting point where the historical investigation will end up. The first mark of modernity, and the only one that concerns me here, as it is the one that leads Taylor into an engagement with Augustine, is to be found in the familiar contemporary discourse of human rights. While one can, according to Taylor, find some sense of the respect due to human beings in all cultures, the modern West is unique in accounting for this respect in terms of subjective rights and the autonomy of the individual.[74] Part of what makes modernity distinctive is this configuring of the universal respect for human beings in terms of intrinsic individual rights. In the second part of *Sources of the Self*, "Inwardness," Taylor unearths the sources of this first

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[72] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), x.
[73] Ibid., 4–8. I use the scare quotes for Taylor's use of the first person plural because I find it problematic. Taylor is undoubtedly correct that there are certain broadly shared features of modern self-understanding. And at one level this represents, rightly, a refusal to attempt to begin with what Yoder has called the prolegomenal search for scratch, i.e., a starting point free from the contingencies of history upon which he can build everything else. See Yoder, "Walk and Word," in Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey C. Murphy, and Mark Nation, eds., *Theology without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon,1994). On another level, however, Taylor's appeal to the "us" of modernity amounts to an illicit projection of unity and coherence. Who is to say that the features he identifies are the truly constitutive ones? Who is to say what the "essence" of modernity is? Surely these are sites of contestation, and Taylor's appeal to a "we" prior to argument begs precisely the question of the modern identity he has yet to elucidate. Does his "we," for example, include the scientific naturalists he is so eager to critique?
[74] Taylor, *Sources.*–200

distinguishing trait of modern identity, and it is here that Augustine emerges as an orienting blaze along the trail to modern selfhood.[75]

In Taylor's assessment, Augustine's Christian vision bequeaths two critical prerequisites to modern self-understandings: a notion of radical reflexivity and a location of certainty solely within the activity of the radically reflexive subject. In a word, Augustine contributes to Western traditions a robust and articulate account of human *interiority*. According to Taylor, Augustine makes this signal contribution by theologically appropriating and transforming the logic of Platonic illumination. The God of the scriptures takes over the role of luminary source in Augustine's thought, and an inner/outer polarity is given a soteriological priority over the Platonic dualism of lower/higher: "the road from the lower to the higher, the crucial shift in direction, passes through our attending to ourselves as *inner*."[76] Platonic ascent is made dependent upon an inward journey: "By going inward, I am drawn upward."[77] But Augustine's concern for the "inner" amounts to more than just an appeal to self-scrutiny or self-care. We are encouraged by Augustine, on Taylor's reading, not just to attend to our "inner" (and therefore individual) needs, wants, and desires. We are also called to attend to the peculiarity of our attending, thinking, feeling. We are to acknowledge the significance of self-presence, or the difference it makes to occupy the first-person point of view: "Radical reflexivity brings to the fore a kind of presence to oneself which is inseparable from one's being the agent of experience."[78] Radical reflexivity just is interiority, in the sense that the activity that is now pivotal to divine illumination is an activity directed

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[75] Taylor, somewhat late in the game of *Sources of the Self*, offers "A Digression on Historical Explanation" (chapter 12). Taylor seeks there to make clear that his project is not to be taken as one of historical explanation. He does indeed think the sources he has identified are important and have been influential in the formation of modern self-understanding and identity. Nevertheless, Taylor also wants to stop short of saying that his history of the sources of the self amount to an anything like a causal explanation of the development of modern identity.

[76] Taylor, *Sources*, 129.

[77] Ibid., 134.

[78] Ibid., 131.

not outward to objects perceived by the senses, but inward, and reflexively so: to thinking about thinking.

But perhaps more important than radical reflexivity to Taylor's larger concerns about the formation of modern identity is the use to which Augustine puts it. He uses radical reflexivity in order to refute skepticism: "Augustine makes the fateful proto-Cartesian move: he shows his interlocutor that *he* cannot doubt his own existence, since 'if you did not exist it would be impossible for you to be deceived'."[79] Augustine's interiority has in other words been used to demonstrate that thinking entails existence and that there is a bedrock of certainty that even radical skepticism cannot penetrate.

Taylor is careful not to exaggerate Augustine's proto-Cartesianism. There are a number of important differences, but here I want to highlight Taylor's recognition of the different uses to which Augustine's proto-cogito and Descartes' cogito are put. Augustine does not place an anti-skeptical argument from interiority at the heart of his theology, nor does he put it in the service of a sharp mind-body dualism.[80] Nevertheless, Taylor still holds Augustine responsible for fatefully connecting certainty with interiority: "Augustine is the originator of that strand of Western spirituality which has sought the certainty of God within."[81]

I am doubtful about Taylor's identification of certainty as the driving force of Augustine's reflections on interiority. I offer below an alternative reading of what I take to be the central theological impetus for Augustine's inner/outer distinction. Here, however, I want to note how Taylor's reading of Augustine as modern source implicates Augustine, in however careful and limited a way, with later, problematic understandings of identity. For just to the extent that Augustine founds interiority on essentially epistemological grounds—and Taylor has implied this with his emphasis on

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[79] Ibid., 132, emphasis in original. Taylor is quoting from Augustine's *On Free Will* 2.3.7.
[80] Ibid., 133.
[81] Ibid., 140.

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radical reflexivity as a basis for certainty—Augustine represents a vital source for what would become the modern picture of human beings as ahistorical, disengaged reasoners.[82] And as Taylor remarks near the end of his massive work, "much of the most insightful philosophy of the twentieth century has gone to refute this picture of the disengaged subject."[83]

One of the more pressing questions raised by this portion of Charles Taylor's walk through the sources of modern identity is how he can transition from Plato's ideal of self-mastery to Augustine's reflections on interiority without immediately confronting the latter's numerous attacks on the former, most frequently by way of *christological* contrasts. Consider this extended passage from the *City of God*, where Augustine critically and directly addresses the philosophical descendents of Plato:[84]

> You assert the Father and his Son, whom you call the Intellect or Mind of the Father; you also speak of a being who is between the two, and we imagine that you are referring to the Holy Spirit. . . . In spite of your irregular terminology you Platonists have here some kind of an intuition of the goal to which we must strive, however dimly seen through the obscurities of a subtle imagination. And yet you refuse to recognize the incarnation of the unchanging Son of God, which brings us salvation, so that we can arrive at those realities in which we believe, and which we can in some small measure comprehend. Thus you see, to some extent, though from afar off and with clouded vision, the country in which we must find our home; but you do not keep to the road along which we must travel. . . .
> The grace of God could not be commended in a way more likely to evoke a grateful response, than the way by which the only Son of God, while remaining unchangeably in his own proper being, clothed himself in humanity and gave to men the spirit of his love by the mediation of a man, so that by this love men might come to him who formerly was so far away from them. . . .
> But humility was the necessary condition for submission to this truth; and it is no easy task to persuade the proud necks of you philosophers to accept this yoke. . . .
> Now perhaps you are ashamed to have your errors corrected? Here again is the fault which is only found in the proud. No doubt it seems disgraceful for learned men to desert their master Plato to become disciples of Christ, who by his Spirit taught a fisherman wisdom. . . .[85]

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[82] I doubt that James Turner Johnson finds this account of Augustine attractive, yet it is possibly lurking behind his effort to hold Augustine and Yoder apart. Yoder's "hermeneutics of peoplehood" is certainly at odds with any epistemology that privileges the individual reasoning subject.

[83] Taylor, *Sources*, 514. Taylor points us in a footnote to the works of Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, the later Wittgenstein, and Polanyi: Taylor, *Sources*, 592.

[84] Augustine suddenly changes the form of his address, shifting to the second person and speaking directly to Platonists, in the middle of chapter 26, book 10. The address extends to the end of 10.30.

[85] Augustine *City of God* 10.29 (Bettenson, 414–16).

Similar rhetoric can be found, fittingly enough, in a homily on the Gospel of John. Only here, Augustine makes it quite clear that clinging to the external way is more important than arriving at the internal destination: "It is better then not to see with the mind that which is, and yet not to depart from the cross of Christ, than to see it with the mind, and despise the cross of Christ."[86]

Why would Augustine go so far as to set aside the goal of Platonic illumination—seeing with the mind "that which is"? Because the only way to attain this goal is to abandon all self-reliant quests to attain it.[87] Only through submission to that very external, material, humiliating path of the Son of Man might one hope to arrive on the distant shores of the beatific vision.[88] Self-mastery—including the self-mastery of inward religious certainty that Taylor finds in Augustine—cannot finally fit in a framework that so radically subordinates human activity to the divine will made know in the incarnation.

Of course it was not only Platonists, or more likely neo-Platonists, who faced this critique of self-mastery. Pelagius is known to have been "deeply annoyed" when he encountered Augustine's plea for divine help in book 10 of the *Confessions*: "Give what you command, and then command whatever you will."[89] Pelagius may have been unaware of the theological transformation of contemporary philosophical commitments at play in this passage and in the battle that was to come, but this much is clear in retrospect: if "the Platonists" had moved Augustine beyond Manicheaism, the Apostle

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[86] Augustine *Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 2.1.2 (Gibb, 17). The edition I'm citing here is Augustine, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John*, ed. Marcus Dodd, trans. John Gibb (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1873).
[87] I cannot resist a sideways glance at Yoder: "We are not marching to Zion because we think that by our own momentum we can get there. But that is still where we are going. We are marching to Zion because, when God lets down from heaven the new Jerusalem prepared for us, we want to be the kind of persons and the kind of community that will not feel strange there." John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism*, Christian Peace Shelf Series ; 3 (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1972), 165.
[88] Cite Hauerwas on Taylor.
[89] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 177. Citing *Confessions* 10.29.40.

Paul moved him beyond "Platonism."[90] Peter Brown summarizes the twin

tranformations: "if denial of guilt was the first enemy, self-reliance was the last. The

massive autonomy of Plotinus is now thrown into the sharpest relief by Augustine's

new preoccupation with confession."[91]

I have already noted that Taylor is aware of Augustine's theological

transformation of neoplatonism. He has failed, however, to pay sufficient attention to

the transformations that matter the most. For absolutely crucial to Augustine's

interaction with the neoplatonist version of interiority is a theological claim that must

ultimately be seen to reconfigure the discourse itself—a claim about the ambiguous

status of the human will in the midst of the goodness of God's creation. As we will see,

interiority inflected by Augustine's deepest theological concerns—which are thoroughly

christological ones—can only be at odds with an interiority of certainty.

2.4 The Politics of Interiority—Being Turned Inside-Out by the Gospel

2.4.1 Inner Failure

The *Confessions*, Augustine's retrospective narrative of his journey to Catholic faith, is

punctuated with memories of various attempts at Platonic ascent. Time and again we

accompany Augustine on journeys inwards and upwards only to watch him fail to

attain his goal. If we read the texts closely, we can see that Augustine is actually

undermining a particular construal of the inward way—namely, one that depends upon

divine illumination to identify the goal of human life while relying on "interior"

resources to attain it. We have seen in the above passage from *City of God* how

Augustine critiques the Platonists for embracing the goal but not the way. "It is as if," he

reiterates in a homily on the Gospel of John, "one were to see his native land at a

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[90] For a recent and fascinating reading of Augustine's theological transformation of the "Platonism" he had received, see John Peter Kenney, *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine: Rereading the Confessions* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
[91] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 176.

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distance, and the sea intervening; he sees whither he would go, but he has not the means of going."[92]

It is worth recalling that in the *Confessions* Augustine first tells of having to be disabused of a certain fascination with *exteriority* before he could move on to being disabused of a certain disordered *interiority*. In a long passage extending from the beginning of book 3 through chapter 12 of book 4—the structure of which foreshadows the later ascent/fall narratives—Augustine recalls his life of pleasure-seeking in material things and the lesson that was eventually forced upon him by the death of a close friend:

> Why follow your flesh, perverted soul? Rather let it follow you once you are converted. . . . If sensuous beauty delights you, praise God for the beauty of corporeal things, and channel the love you feel for them on their Maker, lest the things that please you lead you to displease him. . . . You know where he is, because you know where truth tastes sweet. He is most intimately present to the human heart, but the heart has strayed from him.[93]

Augustine will indeed make the Platonist turn and trade this enslavement to exteriority for an inward journey—for what he calls "that other true reality," or "that true inward righteousness"[94]—but this is a twist in the plot and not the climax. Indeed, the *Confessions* are striking for how they destabilize both kinds of quests. For the mature Augustine's critique of Platonic inwardness flows from what he claims to have experienced himself: "*I entered* under your guidance *the innermost places of my being*,"[95] he recalls of his first attempt to ascend to the heights of Platonic ecstasy. "*I entered*, then, and with the vision of my spirit, such as it was, I saw the incommutable light." This sounds promising, perhaps climactic, but not for long: "Your rays beamed intensely upon me, beating back *my feeble gaze*. . . . I knew myself to be *far away from you* in a region of unlikeness, and I seemed to hear your voice from on high: 'I am the food of the mature; grow then, and you will eat me. You will not change me into yourself like

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[92] Augustine *Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 2.1.2.
[93] Augustine *Confessions* 4.11.17 (Boulding, 65).
[94] Augustine *Confessions* 4.11.17–18 (Boulding, 65–66).
[95] Augustine *Confessions* 7.10.16 (Boulding, 134); emphasis mine. The following two quotations are all from this book, chapter, and paragraph of the *Confessions*, and all emphases are mine.

bodily food: you will be changed into me'." Augustine's first attempt at interior ascent ends in rebuke, with God chastising Augustine for attempting to reverse the order of eucharistic transformation. The connection to his account of disordered desire is clear—Augustine is suggesting that, in reversing the proper order of divine-human relation, he was trying to do nothing less than use God for personal enjoyment.[96] This exposes no minor defect in the Plotinian ascent itinerary, but rather idolatry at its heart.

That such defective inwardness is not, for Augustine, the quirky character of his own individual journey—a defect that might not pertain to other questors—is evident from other writings, where he provides the same account of failed inwardness in third person terms, often using the same vocabulary. Consider this piece of commentary on Psalm 5:

> *The wicked person will not live close by you*: that is, will not see in such a way as to cling to you. That is why it continues, *nor will the unjust remain before your eyes*. This is because their eyes, that is to say, their mind, is beaten back by the light of truth because of the darkness of their sins. Owing to their habit of sinning they cannot endure the bright light of true understanding.[97]

To be "beaten back" from contemplative proximity to God is due to moral failure, a connection made clear in a passage from *De doctrina Christiana*: "So people are beaten back from their home country, as it were, by the contrary winds of crooked habits, going in pursuit of things that are inferior and secondary to what they admit is better and more worthwhile."[98]

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[96] The attempt to use of God for earthly enjoyment is the paradigmatic activity of the wicked, according to Augustine in *City of God* 15.7, and has its political manifestation in the earthly city: "this is the characteristic of the earthly city—to worship a god or gods so that with their assistance it may reign in the enjoyment of victories and an earthly peace, not with a loving concern for others, but with lust for domination over them. For the good make use of this world in order to enjoy God, whereas the evil want to make use of God in order to enjoy the world" (Bettenson, 604).

[97] Augustine *Expositions of the Psalms* 5.6 (Boulding, 1:95). The edition of Augustine's *Ennarationes en Psalmos* that I am using is Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding, 6 vols., The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2001). The translator for my edition, Maria Boulding, was also the translator for the New City Press edition of *Confessions*, and she notes that Augustine uses the same verb, *reverberatur*, in this passage and in the passage I just cited from *Confessions* 7.10.16.

[98] Augustine *Teaching Christianity* 1.9.9 (Hill, 110). The edition of *De Doctrina* I am citing is Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, ed. Edmund Hill and John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Brooklyn, NY: New City, 1990).

So Augustine has learned something from his own failed efforts at Platonic ascent.[99] He has learned that the inward journey prescribed by the Platonists is in a sense no better than the externally-oriented journey of his youth—it can whet his appetite but not satisfy it. Indeed, the inward way seems in some ways worse, as it raises the stakes of unfulfilled desire. It gives him a glimpse of that which might truly satisfy even as it fails to show the way that leads there. Here, then, is an interiority of a most unsatisfactory kind. By looking inwards and upwards, Augustine sees "our peaceful homeland from a wooded height but fail[s] to find a way there, and make[s] vain attempts to travel through impassable terrain, while fugitive deserters . . . obstruct and lurk in ambush."[100] Augustine is clearly playing with the metaphor of human spatiality, first telling the story of being turned outside in—from Manichaeism to neoplatonism—only then to tell the story of being turned inside out—from neoplatonism to Christianity, from interior illumination to christological transformation.[101]

The retrospective accounts of failure at interior attainment are related to other accounts of failure in the *Confessions* in one key respect: they are all construed as manifestations of pride. A passage from book 5 can speak for the others: "For great are you, Lord, and you look kindly on what is humble, but the lofty-minded you regard from afar. Only to those whose hearts are crushed do you draw close. You will not let yourself be found by the proud."[102] Thus we come to the heart of Augustine's critique of interiority as the way to God. Augustine's failed interior journeys are all narrated retrospectively as emblematic of the prideful self-exaltation of the creature over the

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[99] Though he will prove a slow learner, repeatedly failing in follow-up efforts. See *Confessions* 7.17.23.

[100] Augustine *Confessions* 7.21.27 (Boulding, 144).

[101] John Burnaby has put the difference as well as anyone: "already when he wrote his *Confessions*, Augustine had put his finger on the point where Plotinus not only fell short of the Gospel but gravely obstructed its understanding. The specifically Christian ethic, as he came to see, must be an ethic based on the Incarnation, and that means an ethic divided by a great gulf from the Neo-Platonist." John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine. The Hulsean Lectures for 1938* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), 70.

[102] Augustine *Confessions* 5.3.3 (Boulding, 77); citing Exod 3:14.

Creator.[103] They are the misbegotten fruits of that basic disordered relation that proves so pervasive in his mature theology. It is this one problem—at once theological and moral—that stands at the bottom of Augustine's deconstruction of both exteriority and interiority. Sin as pride complicates the human relation to external goods and makes the journey inward necessary, even as it haunts every inward journey that seeks to secure its own remedy.[104]

If we are ever to arrive at our home country, we must, according to Augustine, undergo moral purification, something that, like the sins that warped creatures into habitually misshapen creatures, takes time and moral transformation: "We should think of this purification process as being a kind of walk, a kind of voyage toward our home country. We do not draw near, after all, by movement in place to the one who is present everywhere, but by honest commitment and good behavior."[105]

Moreover, and this move is crucial to our dialogue with Yoder, this process of moral purification has according to Augustine a definite *christological* pattern, reformation in light of which *is the way* that leads to our resting place in God: "How [do we walk as he walked] brothers? . . . This then, that we walk in the way of justice. In what way? I have already mentioned it. He was fastened on the cross and was walking in this very way: it is the way of love."[106] Augustine's critique of the interior way of the neoplatonists is thus by no means a minor modification; it involves a christological redirection of the entire discourse. Christ is for Augustine the way of divine charity. His

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[103] An excellent passage on how pride issues in a problematic interiority is at *Expositions of the Psalms* 72.11 (Boulding, 3:478): "*Therefore pride has taken possession of them*, says the psalm. What does it mean when it says that *pride has taken possession of them? They are entirely enveloped in their iniquity and impiety*. It does not say that they are covered, but that they are *entirely enveloped*; every inch of them is contaminated by their impiety. Small wonder that these wretched folk can neither see nor be properly seen. So enveloped are they that the character of their inner life cannot be discerned."

[104] "Our humbled state of mortality can reasonably be called a night, for the hearts of men and women are hidden from each other; and from the darkness arise innumerable dangerous temptations. . . . The wicked sin of pride was the reason for humanity's being plunged into this night in the first place." *Expositions of the Psalms* 118(15).8 (Boulding, 5:411).

[105] Augustine *Teaching Christianity*, 10.10 (Hill, 110).

[106] Augustine *Tractate on the First Epistle of John* 1.9 (Rettig, 134).

charitable humility is the educational path along which we must travel if we are to attain

that mystical union with God for which the Platonists so longed.[107]

The dramatic difference this christological critique makes to Augustine's

"Platonism" can be seen in Augustine's elevation of the unsophisticated Christian

believer over the philosophical unbeliever. The difference that matters for Augustine is

not intellectual sophistication, but rather moral commitment; and the moral commitment

necessary for reaching God is not found in our innermost parts, but in the life, death,

and resurrection of Christ. A stunning passage from *On the Trinity* draws all of these

themes together:[108]

> [T]here are some people who think that they can purify themselves for
> contemplating God and cleaving to him by their own power and strength of
> character, which means in fact that they are thoroughly defiled by pride. No vice
> is more vehemently opposed by divine law, no vice gives a greater right of
> control to that proudest of all spirits, the devil, who mediates our way to the
> depths and bars our way to the heights, unless we avoid his hidden ambushes
> and go another way; . . . Their reason for assuring themselves of do-it-yourself
> purification is that some of them have been able to direct the keen gaze of their
> intellects beyond everything created and to attain, in however small a measure,
> the light of unchanging truth; and they ridicule those many Christians who have
> been unable to do this and who *live* meanwhile *out of faith* (Rom 1:17) alone. But
> what good does it a man who is so proud that he is ashamed to climb aboard the
> wood, what good does it do him to gaze afar on the home country across the sea?
> And what harm does it do a humble man if he cannot see it from such a distance,
> but is coming to it nonetheless on the wood the other disdains to be carried
> by.[109]

It is worth recalling the occasion for this chapter—James Turner Johnson's claim

that Augustine's ethic of intention makes conversation with John Howard Yoder's

pacifism impossible. In this section, I am seeking to clarify how, *contra* Johnson,

Augustine's reflections on interiority actually open up dialogical possibilities with

Yoder, rather than, *pace* Johnson, close them off. Johnson has suggested that Augustine's

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[107] Once this christological definition of charity and justice is recognized, other passages in Augustine gain new significance: "Dear reader . . . whenever you notice that you have gone wrong come back to me; or that I have, call me back to you. In this way, let us set out along Charity St. together. . . ." Augustine *Trinity* (Hill, 132).

[108] The edition of *De Trinitate* I will be citing is Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. Edmund Hill and John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Brooklyn, NY: New City, 1990).

[109] Augustine *Trinity* 4.4.20 (Hill, 167). Notice that pride is the way of the Devil, and that the Devil is also a mediator. The contrast with Christian faith and practice is complete.

concern with intention locates the meaning of human action on the inside of human behavior, as it were. Such an ethic makes "charitable killing" possible, on Johnsons' reading, and thus constitutes a frame of ethical reference fundamentally at odds with the "objective" character of Yoder's messianic pacifism.

And yet, as we have just seen, Augustine mounts a christological critique of the interior way of the neoplatonists, and contrasts it with the humility of those who give themselves to "honest commitment and good behavior"—and not "good behavior" in some general sense, but rather *after the pattern of the incarnate Christ*. In other words, whatever else needs to be said about Augustine's ethics of intention and its relation to his defense of limited forms of violence, Augustine is quite clear that the moral life requires christological conformity. This alone is an important corrective to Johnson, who says next to nothing about Christ in his exposition of Augustine's defense of killing. For if at the heart of Augustine's ethics is a summons to have the ordering of our loves transformed in light of the pattern of Christ, how far from Yoder can he be?

To be sure, more does need to be said about the question of intention; Augustine's reticence to read the meaning of an act off of its surface never goes away. There is indeed an emphasis on intention in Augustine that one does not find in Yoder. However this reticence and this emphasis must be properly situated within Augustine's thought, and for that we must return to what Milbank has called Augustine's ontology of peace. I contend that Augustine's appeal to the "inside" of human acts must be read against the background of this ontology, and that when we do this, we will see that the distinction between "intention" and "act" in Augustine's thought is not a philosophical explication of an intrinsic duality in human action, but rather an aspect of his explication of the effects of sin. It follows from this that Augustine does not believe we can harness this distinction for constructive purposes. Sin, for Augustine, can never be used, only confessed. Far from creating the basis for a defense of killing, the distinction (and conflict) between the inside and outside of human acts is exactly what drives the need

for christological purification. There is no better place to see these connections in Augustine's thought than in his critiques of privacy and his reflections on the "nature" of evil.

2.4.2 Privacy as Privation

The powerful role that sin construed as pride plays in Augustine's theology is vividly displayed in his account of creation and evil, and crucial to this account is the way pride works to hide creatures from themselves and one another.[110] Nevertheless, in approaching Augustine's account of evil, one ought not to begin with his thoughts on the perversion of created being, but rather with his insistence on created being's intrinsic dignity. We should recognize, writes Augustine in a typical formulation, "that everything is good which in any degree has being, because it derives from him who has being in no degree at all, but is simply *He Is*."[111] "Anything that exists is good insofar as it exists" is axiomatic for Augustine after his conversion to Platonism, yet one must not miss how he adapts this basically Platonist ontology to Christian doctrine, specifically the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*: "Now God supremely exists, and therefore he is the author of every existence which does not claim to be equal to him; nothing could exist in any way, if it had not been created by him."[112] Augustine is quite aware that this entails a rejection of a whole host of rival accounts of creation.[113] The anti-Manichean

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[110] A passage that neatly sums up much of the exposition to follow is at *Exposition of the Psalms* 118(15).7 (Boulding, 5:411–12): "Our humbled state of mortality can reasonably be called a night, for the hearts of men and women are hidden from each other; and from the darkness arise innumerable dangerous temptations. Beasts of the forest prowl through the night, young lions roaring and demanding their food from God. From this night emerges the mighty lion that roars and hunts for people to devour; . . . Well now, this lowly condition of ours during pilgrimage, rightly called a night, works to the advantage of those who are disciplined by it on their way to salvation, because it teaches them not to be proud. The wicked sin of pride was the reason for humanity's being plunged into this night in the first place."
[111] Augustine *Confessions* 13.31.46 (Boulding, 338). My lead-in to this quote—"We should recognize"—is actually a rather significant impoverishment of Augustine's theological point at this place in the *Confessions*, as he is pointing up the role of the Holy Spirit helping us to recognize the ontological dignity of creation. For Augustine, we only know that creation is creation in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Augustine's sense of our radical dependence on the Spirit of God will be addressed again in chapter 4, where I take up the question of the visibility of the church.
[112] Augustine *City of God* 12.5 (Bettenson, 477).
[113] See books 11 and 12 of *City of God* for Augustine's rejection the eternity of the world, a cyclical theory of world history, eternal creation, etc.

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implications are most relevant here, for if everything that has being is good insofar as it has being, then there can be no substantiality, no nature, to evil. Whatever the defect of evil, it cannot be a *created* defect. "Everything that exists is good, then; and so evil, the source of which I was seeking, cannot be a substance, because if it were, it would be good."[114] Instead of naturalizing evil, Augustine attributes the perversion of evil to the choice of free creatures. But to say this much is not to explain evil; in fact, it is to say that evil *cannot* be explained, for evil does not lie within the natural order of efficient causality. "If you try to find the efficient cause of this evil choice, there is none to be found. For nothing causes an evil will, since it is the evil will itself which causes the evil act."[115] And it is precisely the self-directed character of this evil willing that leads Augustine to construe sin as fundamentally prideful: "When we ask the cause of the evil angels misery, we find that it is the just result of their turning away from him who supremely is, and their turning towards themselves, who do not exist in that supreme degree. What other name is there for this fault than pride."[116] Pride is just this act of turning away, this defection, from the supreme good. It is an act of the will that corrupts the will, turning it back on itself, indeed binding itself to itself, rather than preserving it in genuine freedom by remaining obedient to the source of its own being.[117]

Augustine makes much the same point about the pride of Adam and Eve, only now notice the new element of secrecy: "It was *in secret* that the first human beings began to be evil; and the result was that they slipped into open disobedience. For they would not have arrived at the evil act if an evil will had not preceded it. Now could anything but pride have been the start of the evil will?"[118] Augustine's insistence that human disobedience began in secret hangs together with his account of evil as non-

[114] Augustine *Confessions* 7.12.18 (Boulding, 136).
[115] Augustine *City of God* 12.6 (Bettenson, 477).
[116] Augustine *City of God* 12.6 (Bettenson, 477).
[117] See Augustine *City of God* 12.7; *Confessions* 7.3.5.
[118] Augustine *City of God* 14.13 (Bettenson, 571); emphasis mine.

being, as privation, or as a tendency away from *that which is*. For the evil will is not the

result of efficient causes. The problem, in other words, is not on the surface of things.

"To try to discover the causes of such defection—deficient, not efficient causes—is like

trying to see darkness or to hear silence."[119] An evil will is manifested in disobedient

activity, but the will must not be deemed evil on account of its objects or activities in and

of themselves.[120]

> Greed, for example, is not something wrong with gold; the fault is in a man who
> perversely loves gold and for its sake abandons justice. . . . Boasting is not
> something wrong with the praise of men; the fault is in a soul which perversely
> loves praise of others. . . . Pride is not something wrong in the one who loves
> power, or in the power itself; the fault is in the soul which perversely loves its
> own power.[121]

The ultimate theological ground for this refusal to locate the evil will among the

surface/exterior of created beings/activities is Augustine's commitment to the

fundamental distinction in theology, namely, the distinction between Creator and

creature. For Augustine, only God creates in the strict sense. All other beings participate

in God's creative activity. It follows that sin, being a matter of perverse choice and not

God's creation, can have no genuine ontological dignity. Thus while it is tempting to

read Augustine's account of sin as essentialist—his definition of sin as pride suggests

this—Augustine is actually pushing language to the limits to say just the opposite. There

is no such thing as "essential" sin, or "perfect" disobedience—only fragmentation,

dissolution, dispersal. God alone creates in the strict sense. God alone grants ontological

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[119] Augustine *City of God* 12.7.
[120] Lying might appear to be an exception that proves the rule, for lying is an activity that can never be rightly ordered. Lying amounts to a refusal to acknowledge the gap between exterior and interior as problematic. It amounts to an effort to *use* a deficiency, and thus tacitly or explicitly underwrites the gulf created by sin. If evaluated theologically as a true possibility, it would call into question the meaning of all the scriptures. But then lying is really no exception to the ontological rule, for lying and deception stand in a contingent relationship to activities unproblematic in themselves—namely, speaking, gesturing, etc. So even here the multiplicity of descriptive possibilities suggests the same interior/exterior dynamic. In other words, to call something an act of lying or deception is to have already chosen a particular description among the many available. For Augustine, the only activities that are intrinsically disordered are the ones that turn on the defection of created being. Being able to name these disordered actions can only come in and through the same power that enables us to see and name the ontological dignity of all creation. But notice how difficult and fraught the question of discerning the evil will is on Augustine's account—is must see that which is hidden; one must distinguish the parasite from the host, and not just any parasite—a parasite that *is* nothing but a movement of something that is itself intrinsically good, the human will.
[121] Augustine *City of God* 12.8 (Bettenson, 480–81).

dignity. The evil will is therefore a mysterious irreality, a kind of malignant emptiness, silence, or nothingness—hidden from the view of others precisely because it is not, and cannot be, reliably linked to the created things of this world.

The flip side of Augustine's construal of the will as secret, or hidden on the inside of the agent, is the intrinsically ambiguous character of the relation of exterior realities to human righteousness. Things good in themselves can quickly become instruments of the disordered wills of sinful creatures. Genuine created goods, and genuinely good activities, can be hijacked by sinners and put to the service of prideful graspings after self-satisfaction and self-illumination. The terrible irony of this *decision* for privacy is that it becomes an embarrassing trap: "the retribution for disobedience is simply disobedience itself. For man's wretchedness is nothing but his own disobedience to himself, so that because he would not do what he could, he now wills to do what he cannot."[122]

Augustine's account of the disordered, disobedient human will in a world of divinely given plenitude, here drawn chiefly from the *City of God*, is everywhere on display in the *Confessions*. Take for example the set of reflections following the famous pear tree episode in book 2:

> The beautiful form of material things attracts our eyes, so we are drawn to gold, silver and the like. . . . There is the same appeal in worldly rank, and the possibility it offers. . . . Again, the friendship which draws human beings together in a tender bond is sweet to us because out of many minds it forges a unity. *Sin gains entrance through these and similar good things when we turn to them with immoderate desire*, since they are the lowest kind of goods and we thereby turn away from the better and higher: from you yourself, O Lord our God, and your truth and your law.[123]

Here as elsewhere in the *Confessions*, Augustine takes the reader through the events of his life and shows how the objects that might rightly have deserved his affection quickly became the objects of his obsession and addiction. The problem, for Augustine, lies neither in our stars nor in our more immediate surroundings, but indeed in our selves.

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[122] Augustine *City of God* 14.15 (Bettenson, 575).
[123] Augustine *Confessions* 2.5.10 (Boulding, 31); emphasis mine.

One of the peculiar experiences of reading the *Confessions* comes from encountering an Augustine, someone obviously in rare control of his faculties, who nonetheless insists upon reading his entire life, from childhood up to the present, as a kind of powerless, dissolute, muddle-headed grasping. It is tempting to read this fragmented young Augustine as the theologically useful projection of the mature Augustine—Augustine the Bishop. Yet the mature Augustine claims to be the same fragmentary mess. To have noticed this puzzling feature of the *Confessions* is to have drawn near to Augustine's point. As he puts it so concisely in the *City of God*: "a man will have mastery over his sin if he does not put it in command of himself by defending it, but subjects it to himself by repenting of it. Otherwise he will also be its slave, and it will have the mastery, if he affords it encouragement when it occurs."[124] The life of repentance, the path of confession, the way of humility—this is the only safe road for those whose wills have been bound by their own disobedience. No amount of self-discipline, no amount of introspective rigor, will ever free one for obedience. The very will that is complicit with evil in having turned away from God cannot will itself back into obedience. Another way must be made for human beings. For Augustine, pioneering such a path is precisely the work Christ:

> Whom could I find to reconcile me to you? Should I go courting the angels? With what prayer or by what rites could I win them to my cause? *Many have there been who tried to make their way back to you and, finding themselves insufficient by their own powers, had recourse to such means as these, only to lapse into a fancy for visions that tickled their curiosity.* They were deservedly deluded for they sought you in arrogance, thrusting out their chests in their haughty knowledge instead of beating them in penitence. . . . What we needed was a mediator to stand between God and men who should be in one respect like God, in another kin to human beings. . . . In your unfathomable mercy you first gave the humble certain pointers to the true Mediator, and then sent him, that by his example they might learn even a humility like his.[125]

The only remedy for sinful creatures is to embrace this low road of humility.

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[124] Augustine *City of God* 15.7 (Bettenson, 507).
[125] Augustine *Confessions* 10.42.67–10.43.68 (Boulding, 242–43).

Which is precisely why care must be given to Augustine's specific deployment of the neoplatonic metaphor of interiority when the subject is broached in contemporary scholarship. For in the end it is the perfect obedience revealed in the humility of the Word-made-flesh that utterly transforms the nature of any faithful journey towards God in Augustine's thought. It is the humility of Christ that reveals the futility of seeking God in the things of this world.[126] And it is the humility of Christ that reveals the futility of self-confident intellectual assaults on God.[127] The journey must in one sense be inward, for "Not with our feet or by traversing great distances do we journey away from you or find our way back."[128] The far places to which prodigal sinners travel "are not literally places into which we plunge and from which we emerge: what could seem more place-like than they, yet what is in reality more different? They are movements of the heart, they are two loves."[129] Again, "Many go forth in a hidden way, for the feet on which they go forth are the affections of their hearts."[130] Augustine's insistence on the non-spatial nature of the journeys from God and to God, which he describes as movements of the heart, is simply an implication of his anti-essentialist treatment of sin and evil. The way of humility before God is the only way for a soul/heart/will that is trapped in the disobedience of a false and secret security.

But in a more profound sense, the journey inward is really an exercise in being turned inside-out. We are to be purified after the very exterior pattern of the incarnation of God in Christ. But which is it: outside-in or inside-out? Actually, there appears to be method in Augustine's mad mixing of spatial trajectories. From the very first passages of the *Confessions* Augustine delights in playing with the notion of God's location:

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[126] Augustine *Confessions* 4.12.18.
[127] Augustine *Confessions* 7.18.24. See also *Expositions of the Psalms* 121.5 (Boulding, 6:18): "You cannot take it [i.e., Being-Itself] in, for this is too much to understand, too much to grasp. Hold on instead to what he to whom you cannot understand became for you. Hold onto the flesh of Christ, onto which you, sick and helpless, left wounded and half dead by robbers, are hoisted, that you may be taken to the inn and healed there."
[128] Augustine *Confessions* 1.18.28 (Boulding, 21).
[129] Augustine *Confessions* 13.7.8 (Boulding, 309).
[130] Augustine *Expositions of the Psalms* 64:3 (Boulding, 3:267).

Is there any place within me into which my God might come? How should the God who made heaven and earth come into me? Is there any room in me for you, Lord, my God? . . . No, my God, I would not exist, I would not be at all, were you not in me. Or should I say, rather, that I should not exist at all if I were not in you? . . . Yes, Lord, that is the truth, that is indeed the truth. To what place can I invite you, then, since I am in you?[131]

Can it be any wonder, then, that Augustine's journeys inward produce the strangest results? God is indeed for Augustine, as Charles Taylor recognizes,[132] "more intimately present to me than my innermost being, and higher than the highest peak of my spirit."[133] Yet Augustine asserts this as a matter of confession, not as a conquest of interiority, as Taylor implies. What Augustine finds "in the intimacy of my self-presence"[134] (to borrow Taylor's phrase) is neither certainty nor God, but finitude and struggle: "In the most intimate depths of my soul my thoughts are torn to fragments by tempestuous changes until that time when I flow into you, purged and rendered molten by the fire of your love."[135]

Interiority cannot really be for Augustine a quest for God, as Augustine and all that has being are already in God. Interiority is rather for Augustine about facing the mysterious "roots" of his perversion. From everything that we have seen so far, facing these "roots" cannot mean looking at others, some part of creation, or God more properly. It can only mean facing the roots of one's own perverted, fragmented self, and even that only by a power that is not one's own. It can only mean "accusation of oneself, praise of God."[136] Journeys inward are demanded of those who have been confronted by Christ's humility. Interiority for Augustine is about spiritual prostration, being turned inside-out before God and the community of believers lest pride get the upper hand,

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[131] Augustine *Confessions* 1.2.2 (Boulding, 4).
[132] Taylor, *Sources*, 136.
[133] Augustine *Confessions* 3.6.11 (Boulding, 44-45).
[134] Taylor, *Sources*, 136.
[135] Augustine *Confessions* 11.29.39 (Boulding, 271).
[136] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 175, citing Sermon 67.2. Cf. *Sermon* 29B: "So turn back to him, confess to him, and by accusing yourself and praising him, you will be straightened out. Warped, perverse people, you see, do the opposite: praise themselves, accuse God."

leaving sinners blinded,[137] shipwrecked in the bitter sea of "earthly, temporal happiness,"[138] far away from our heavenly home.

2.5 History's Interior

We are now at a place to draw several themes of this chapter together. We are beginning to glimpse just how profoundly Yoder and Augustine shared a theological commitment to revising previous interpretations through the light shed on them by a living engagement with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yoder could even speak of hoping that there might be future, startling, corrective discoveries of what the scriptures have always meant.[139] While I have produced no such reading of scripture in this chapter, I have produced a reading of Augustine that I hope would have surprised Yoder. As already noted, when it came to Augustine, Yoder's sympathy was less than one might have expected from such an otherwise sympathetic and careful reader. At best, Yoder mustered a condescending gratitude towards Augustine;[140] at worst, he offered historically inaccurate criticisms.[141] Though Yoder was in distinguished company in thinking of Augustine as the theological handmaiden to the Constantinian reversal,[142] Augustine deserved a more careful reading from one so committed to rigorous historical thinking and dialogical generosity. For Yoder was always willing to upset, and in some

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[137] Just as Augustine undermines the notion that some distance needs to be traversed in order to find/rejoin God, he also undermines the notion that blindness under the condition of sin needs to be remedied by God shining his light on us, as if God's light were not already shining brightly: "But perhaps the slow hearts of some of you cannot yet receive that light, because they are burdened by their sins, so that they cannot see. Let them not on that account think that the light is in any way absent, because they are not able to see it; for they themselves are darkness on account of their sin." What is needed is, again, self-accusation and purification: "Dust, rheum, and smoke are sins and iniquities: remove then all these things, and you will see the wisdom that is present; for God is that wisdom, and it has been said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God'." Augustine *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 1.1.19; citing Matt 5:8.
[138] Augustine *Confessions* 13.17.20 (Boulding, 317).
[139] See John Howard Yoder, *To Hear the Word* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 10.
[140] John Howard Yoder, "War as a Moral Problem in the Early Church: The Historian's Hermeneutical Assumptions," in *The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective*, ed. Harvey L. Dyck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 104. "Augustine's mood was a 'mournful' pastoral adjustment to a world of which we cannot in any case ask that God's will be done."
[141] See Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 69ff.
[142] No less a scholar than Peter Brown has said of Augustine that "he appears as the theorist of the Constantinian revolution." Cited by Markus, *Saeculum*, 114.

cases reverse, standard accounts: "Far from constituting an embarrassment for those who follow Jesus' nonviolence," Yoder insisted in a typically provocative revision of one area of common understanding, "Hebrew holy war is the historical foundation of the same."[143] One aim of this chapter has been to suggest that far from constituting an embarrassment to Yoder's christological critique of Constantinianism, Augustine's mature theology is an important precursor of the same. The theologies of Yoder and Augustine run in closer parallel than is typically acknowledged.

Yoder's urgent eschatological posture is bound up with his basic christological affirmation. The *telos* of history, the final horizon or *eschaton* in light of which human activity is meaningful, broke into the world in a decisive way when the Word was made flesh in Jesus. Constantinianism, having superseded the nonviolent enemy-love of the incarnate Son, takes its hermeneutical cues from some other horizon—notably the sinful (and violent) present of a fallen order. "History" then becomes the story, not of the decisive triumph of the nonresistant Lamb, but of the bloody episodes of the conqueror's sword. Battles and kings are the paradigmatic subjects of Constantinian history. Even when the subjects of history change—from emperors to kings to democracies—the assumption remains the same: only those events, people, and institutions that wield transparent efficacy are the bearers of history's meaning. Stories of these actors are therefore crucial to the maintenance of the orders which tell them. The finality of the incarnation meant for Yoder that Christians must resist such readings of history.

But so it did for Augustine, a truth Yoder clearly failed to see this. The Pauline influence on Augustine led to a *disruption of the surface* in his mature theology. To live in the *saeculum* meant for Augustine the bishop to struggle under the confusing, concealing, and distorting conditions of sin. Life in the *saeculum* is marked by ambiguity, ambivalence, lack of transparency, and hidden depths of meaning. While there is for

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[143] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 85.

Augustine no *easy* place to which one might retreat from this life of struggle, there is a *reliable* place to which convalescent sinners can go to glimpse the "deep meaning" of the world's happenings. They can turn to the Word of God—in the threefold sense of Christ, the scriptures, and the church.[144] And here is the resonant key: there can be neither for Augustine nor for Yoder getting past this three-fold world of the Word. The ambivalence and messiness of history has precisely to do with the fact that there can be no getting "after" the humility of the Word in this life of pilgrimage.

In Yoder's estimation, Constantinianism is a christological problem—it betrays precisely the definitive "after" of the incarnation, amounting to a form of "internal supersessionism."[145] In the events that led to the "christianization" of the Roman Empire the witness of Jesus was eclipsed—superseded by a different vision of social wholeness and political righteousness. Yoder's constructive project, while indeed quite radical, was offered as neither more nor less than tracing the implications of Chalcedon.[146]

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[144] Indeed, strictly speaking, the Word of God reveals both the mess and the meaning. For Augustine we know the true extent of the difficulties we face only in and through God's gracious disclosure of our predicament. The knowledge of our ailments is every bit as elusive for Augustine as the remedies. Even the reliability of God's Word, consistently affirmed by Augustine, does not obviate the hermeneutical challenge. Augustine is all too aware of the many contradictory readings of scripture by Catholics, heretics, schismatics, and pagans.

[145] The phrase is my own, and it is not without problems. I suspect Yoder would have at least demanded qualification. My use of "internal" suggests that the more familiar form of supersessionism was "external," whereas Yoder went to great lengths to challenge readings of early Christian history that projected the later schism back into the early history. See John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, ed. Michael Cartwright and Peter Ochs, Radical Traditions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). Yoder insists that the separation of Christians from Jews began as an "internal" (i.e., Jewish) matter and that the Constantinian transformation of the churches played a significant role in finalizing a schism that "did not have to be." Thus to imply as I have that the break with "Judaism" is the "external" form of supersessionism is to signal one's ignorance of the Jewish character of the Christian faith. I do not wish to make such implications. I retain the phrase "internal supersessionism" out of the conviction that both forms of developments in the life of the church share something in common: the willingness or desire to go beyond something which on theological grounds is nonnegotiable.

[146] Cf. Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 102. Elsewhere, Yoder insists that "the view being proposed here is more radically Nicene and Chalcedonian than other views. I do not here advocate an unheard-of-modern understanding of Jesus. I ask rather that the implications of what the church as always said about Jesus as Word of the Father, as true God and true Man, be taken more seriously, as relevant to our social problems, than ever before." Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 102. Summarizing his work in *Politics of Jesus*, Yoder writes: "There my point was that that book's emphasis on the concrete historical-political humanity of the Jesus of the Gospel accounts was compatible with the classic confession of the true humanity of Christ (i.e., the core meaning of 'incarnation'), whereas those who deny that humanity (or its normative exemplarity) in favor of some more 'spiritual' message are implicitly Docetic. Secondly I argued that the New Testament's seeing Jesus as example is a necessary correlate of what later theology called his divine sonship (the other side of 'incarnation'), in such a way that those who downgrade the weight of Jesus' example, on the grounds that his particular social location or example cannot be a norm, renew the counterpart of the old 'Ebionitic'

Yoder naturally had good reasons to be concerned about Augustine's legacy—

the latin father was no advocate for the politics of Jesus. There can be no mistaking

Augustine's complicity with imperial violence. I wait until the fourth chapter to offer a

more careful criticism of Augustine's "Constantinianism." Here the point has been to

show how crucial components of Yoder's critical vision were already deployed in the

mature thought of Augustine. The finality of the incarnation, the refusal to "go past" the

example of Christ, the acute awareness of the ways in which memory / history suffer

from the distorting effects of power, the theological critique of arguments from efficacy,

the tendency of ruling elites to produce self-justifying narratives—all of this and more is

common ground in the theologies of John Howard Yoder and St. Augustine.

2.5 Intention, Ethics, and the Politics of Jesus

Having surveyed Yoder's christological historicism and its crucial intersections with

moments in Augustine's mature theology, we can return to where we began. As we saw

at the outset, James Turner Johnson denies the possibility of dialogue between a pacifist

theologian like Yoder and a theologian of intention such as St. Augustine. The priority of

"intention" is allegedly the conversation stopper. However it is fitting, particularly in

view of Yoder's claims to Chalcedonian fidelity, to register another of Johnson's worries:

"I doubt that Augustine would be at all happy with Yoder's Jesus-centered

understanding of Christian theology." There are then two elements blocking the

conversational way according to Johnson: the relative importance of 1) intention and 2)

Jesus in the thought of Yoder and Augustine.

I believe I have already offered readings of Augustine sufficient to refute

Johnson's claims. Jesus is for Augustine, no less than for Yoder, the pattern after which

we are to be morally purified, rendering our intentional actions public, just, and

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heresy. This is a small sample of a wider claim: the convictions argued here do not admit to being
categorized as a sectarian oddity or a prophetic exception. Their appeal is to classical catholic Christian
convictions properly understood." Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 9.

charitable. Augustine's discourse of interiority is political—we must be turned inside-out by the humanity of Christ, an inversion that makes possible a genuine publicity and justice.[147] The politics of Augustine's interiority are no less christological than Yoder's politics of Jesus.

Moreover, my reading of interiority as destabilized and anything but an untroubled realm of certainty—a reading meant to undercut Johnson's deployment of "intention" in his refusal of a Yoder-Augustine dialogue—is confirmed by contemporary scholarship. William Mann makes this evident in his essay on "Inner-life Ethics" in *The Augustinian Tradition*.[148] Mann shows that Augustine's genuinely distinctive inner-life ethics depends heavily on his hierarchical metaphysics and ontology. Lower things should be subordinate to higher things, indivisible things are superior to divisible things, soul takes precedence over body, and so forth. Augustine's fascination with the insides of human action flows from his understanding of the way sin perverts the proper recognition of the world's rightful ordering. While it has been often been suggested that Augustine invented the concept of the will, Mann's essay suggests rather that Augustine believed it was *sin* that did this mysterious work of invention. It is sin that renders human behavior suspect, making the distinction between the outer and inner man necessary. It is sin that founds "the private," sin that fragments human life and agency, sin that obviates transparency, sin that hides ourselves from ourselves and others.[149]

Yet it is important to recognize what Augustine's account of the sin of the world must mean for his Christology. Christ's humanity, being *without* sin, must be without

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[147] That privacy is a political vice, and genuine publicity a political virtue, is evident from passages such as the following, found at *Expositions of the Psalms* 44.33 (Boulding, 2:308–9): "This is why we are warned by the apostle to pass no judgment prematurely, before the Lord comes to light up all that is hidden in darkness, and lay bare the thoughts of all hearts; then each one will receive due commendation from God. That holy city will in some sort confess to herself, for the peoples who form her will confess for ever [sic] to the city. No part of her may remain hidden from herself, for nothing in any one of her citizens will be hidden from sight."

[148] William E. Mann, "Inner-Life Ethics," in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[149] For further confirmation of this reading, see Phillip Cary, "Interiority," in *Augustine through the Ages*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald and John C. Cavadini (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). "The privacy of the individual soul is therefore not natural or inevitable but rather a consequence of the fall. . . ."

fragmentation, secrecy, and privacy. Quite unlike ours, Christ's humanity must be reliable. Any difficulty we have in seeing the goodness of his action, in imitating the beauty of his life, or in participating in the truth of his way, cannot be because such goodness, truth, and beauty are lurking privately behind Christ's unreliable exterior. The fault in such failed recognition would lie in our selves, not in our Lord. Once this Augustinian christocentrism is acknowledged, the relevance of John Howard Yoder's christological pacifism is much closer to hand.

And yet, after all of this has been said—after the question of intention has been theologically situated within Augustine's broader discourse of interiority—it cannot be denied: at times, Augustine appears to completely sever the surface of an act from its inner intention. Augustine comes close in certain passages to describing acts and intention as entirely separate things.[150] It is not difficult to understand how Augustine's dichotomizing rhetoric has been taken to entail a radically subjectivist ethics. It is this subjectivism in Augustine's ethics that is presumably what Johnson believes to be fundamentally at odds with Yoder. However, from what we have already seen in Augustine's mature theology, we must reject this reading as itself a superficial distortion of Augustine's mature intentions. Interpreting the hiddenness of "intention" in Augustine in a way that completely severs exterior from interior is to do the Doctor of Grace a double disservice.[151] It, first, occludes his christological transformation of the neoplatonist topography of the soul (from which Augustine has borrowed the metaphor), thereby, second, rendering his mature moral theology vulnerable to

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[150] See, for example, chapters 19 and 20 of book 1, *Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount* (NPNF First Series, vol. 6:24–26). The most famous/notorious passage is to be found in Augustine's *Tractate on the First Epistle of John* 7.8, which contains the famous phrase *dilige et quod vis fac*, often translated as "love and do what you will." The interpretation of Augustine that I am rejecting is on display in Joseph F. Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 79ff.

[151] In his chapter *recovering* the significance of the social in Augustine, Milbank puts the critique succinctly: "A real perfection of character cannot be something locked away in an inviolable interiority, else there would be no reason to talk about it." Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 399.

devastating philosophical critique.[152] In Augustine's mature theology, the humility of Christ chastens the prideful interior ascents of the neoplatonist and points instead to the radical exteriority of God—to what Augustine calls the temporal mission of the Son and on which Augustine hangs the entire doctrine of the Trinity.[153] According to Augustine, if we would have our loving, willing, and remembering be anything but a parody of the Triune communion of love, we must have our lives transformed according to the pattern laid down in the temporal footsteps of the Son. Thus interpreted, the *City of God*, the *Confessions*, and *The Trinity* present a unified witness to Augustine's disruption of our myriad impatient efforts to secure our own lives—whether on the basis of the surface events of some worldly power's latest victory or in some inner region of intelligible light.

Augustine's alternative to such impatience is bound up with this disruption of our impatience. For the late Augustine, there can be no easy wholeness, no politics

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[152] The definitive philosophical takedown of the notion that intention lurks mysteriously behind and apart from everyday action-descriptions is still G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957). For an elegant interaction with the way problematic accounts of intention shape theology, see Herbert McCabe, *What Is Ethics All About?* (Washington DC: Corpus, 1969), especially chapter 1. It is relevant to my argument in this chapter that, in order to present his alternative to ethics construed primarily in terms of either loving intention on the one hand, or law-abiding on the other, McCabe the Wittgensteinian Thomist develops a richly Augustinian account of "deep" desire (see 60ff). It is also relevant that McCabe links his Augustinian account of deep desires with an account of the visibility of Christian faith—a move that many think Augustine makes impossible: "Participation in the revolutionary movement of liberation is the social visibility of the life of faith" (170).

[153] This is a strong claim, but one that I believe is born out by a close reading of *Trinity*. In book 8, which stands at the very middle of Augustine's long reflections on God's triune life, Augustine sounds a Feuerbachian alarm: "naturally the spirit which believes what it does not see must be on its guard against fabricating something that does not exist, and thus hoping in and loving something false. If this happens, then it will not be charity from a pure heart and a good conscience and an unfabricated faith, as the same apostle puts it." Augustine *Trinity* 8.6 (Hill, 246). Just two paragraphs later: "since we desire to understand as far as it is given us the eternity and equality and unity of the trinity, and since we must believe before we can understand, we must take care our faith is not fabricated." Augustine *Trinity* 8.8 (Hill, 247). Augustine is very careful to resist speculative theological efforts that are structurally idolatrous, in that they are human projections rather than the fruit of divinely enabled reflection. The alternative path to knowledge of God? Consider this passage from book 4, dedicated as it is to the temporal mission of this Son: "First we had to be persuaded how much God loved us, in case out of sheer despair we lacked the courage to reach up to him. Also we had to be shown what sort of people we are that he loves, in case we should take pride in our own worth, and so bounce even further away from him and sink even more under our own strength. So he dealt with us in such a way that we could progress rather in his strength; he arranged it so that the power of charity would be brought to perfection in the weakness of humility" (4.1–2; Hill, 152–53). In between these two claims is the passage that I have already cited—a passage which shows that the road to contemplating God's triunity is nothing other than the path taken by Jesus Christ: "But I am struggling to return from this *far country* (Lk. 15:13) by the road he has made in the humanity of the divinity of his only Son." In short, according to Augustine "the humanity of the divinity" of Jesus Christ is *the* trail that has been blazed into the mystery of the triune life.

simply redeemed, no form of discipleship that simply escapes the ongoing challenge of conversion and dispossession. Augustine's "disruption of the surface," as I am calling it, is about unsettling precisely those premature certainties that underwrite uncharitable forms of politics. It is crucial to note how Augustine's deeply personal and psychological reflections in the *Confessions*—all his worries about the fragmentation of his innermost being—dovetail seamlessly with his world-historical and theopolitical reflections in the *City of God*.[154]

Nevertheless, this disruption—Augustine's demonstration that the surfaces of the world do not in any simple way bear their own meaning—is not an end in itself. Elucidating the world's hermeneutical complexity, while crucial to Augustine, cannot be set against the possibility of genuine discernment. To make of the world's ambiguity *the* central Augustinian insight is to call into question Augustine's regular unmasking of other meanings—quite often deeply odious ones—beneath the surfaces of popularly lauded actions.[155] For Augustine the ability to discern the deeper meaning of the world's

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[154] This is my central problem with Paula Fredriksen's important article on Paul, Augustine, and conversion narratives. Paula Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37, no. 1 (1986).

[155] See my extended remarks in footnote 56 above, in which I critique James Wetzel's gestures in this direction of interpretation. One must also note that Augustine refuses to tolerate "open disobedience." When ill intentions, sometimes hidden before our eyes, become visible, the church must discipline them.

John Rist, "Faith and Reason," in *Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 26–39. Rist suggests that Augustine often uses *voluntas* interchangeably with *amor*, and that the perfect form of *voluntas* is actually identified with *amor*: in the person of the Holy Spirit. "In God, as we have seen—and therefore in our fully purified and unified selves—genuine love and the 'will' are identical" (ibid., 37). Thus it can be said that what I am calling the problem of interiority is something Augustine believes can, and ultimately will, be overcome by God, in and through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that works to turn us inside-out, recreating our will so as to reunite it with the love that first made it. If we speak of God as an immanent and economic Trinity, this is not to introduce metaphysical dualism into God's life, but rather to register God's freedom. Creation (God's economy) was a gift of Trinity (God's immanent life), neither a need nor an emanation. Thus in no sense should we say that God's immanent "self" lurks in mysterious disconnection, and perhaps even contradiction, to God's economic "self." To speak of a human interior as opposed to a human exterior is something completely different. It is to speak of the fractured nature of humanity after the fall. The role of the Spirit in God's economy is to renew this fractured humanity into the unity made visible in Christ Jesus, for *Jesus Christ just is the visibility of God's trinitarian love*. Only when Augustine's reflections are kept within this Trinitarian framework can we rightly understand the phrase *dilige et quod vis fac*. To "love and do what you will" is not to suggest that any action can be baptized with a proper, loving intention. It is rather to insist, quite rightly in light of the unity of God's loving and willing, that a creature redeemed/remade by the power of the Holy Spirit can literally do no wrong. One who has been re-created by the love of God will necessarily (and yet freely!) live in Spirit and Truth. The only way Augustine's thought could be at odds with Yoder here is if Augustine were suggesting that one remade by the Spirit could live and act in a way that does not conform to the full humanity of Christ. This, of course, would be a violation of Augustine's

movements is first and foremost a statement about God's power and not our own. In the

final analysis, Augustine's willingness to discern hidden meaning amidst the ambiguity

of the surfaces—to unmask and cast blame on, for example, the vices that shadow pagan

virtues, but also to elevate and shower praise on the virtues of the martyrs—is a

statement about the presence, power, and work of the Holy Spirit. Augustine's frequent

pleas for divine help are ample testimony to his conviction that it is God alone who

illumines our darkness, and that God's illumination is always *gift*, never simple

possession, and thus never something easily specifiable in advance of the gift's giving

and receiving.[156]

Augustine's sense of the pilgrim's utter dependency on the presence and power

of the Holy Spirit once again brings us back to Yoder. Never the systematic expositor of

any church doctrine, Yoder was perhaps never more Trinitarian than in his appeals to

the church's dependence on the Spirit for its ongoing life of christological conformation.

This convergence around the Spirit and the church's powers of discernment is

noteworthy in light of our conclusion to the material on Frei in chapter 1. What Hans

Frei was moving towards in his mature work, but never quite achieved, was an

adequately pneumatological ecclesiology[157]—an understanding of the church as a living

tradition of scriptural interpretation that neither guarantees its own authority nor is

guaranteed by a text, but is rather breathed to life in every age by the power of the Holy

Spirit.[158]

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rigorously Trinitarian thought. Cf. Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*, Christian Theology in Context (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[156] Note this important passage in *Sermon* 13, par 3: "If, then, it is God who is at work in us, why does it [Phil 2.13] say *work for your security*? For this reason: he is at work in us in such a way that we too are at work: *be my helper* [Ps 27(26).9, LXX]. By invoking a helper, the speaker marks himself as also a worker." Atkins and Dodaro, eds., *Political Writings*, 121.

[157] For more on the roles of Spirit and Church in Frei's evolving theology, see "The Church as God's New Language," originally contributed to the Festschrift for Hans Frei, now available in Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael G. Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 143–70.

[158] Yoder also insists on the unending/open-ended nature of the life of the church: "I could properly argue that the hermeneutic task is never done, by appealing to the New Testament teaching about the continuing presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit." Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 10.

But there are additional resonances with Yoder opened up by this exploration of

Augustine's theological elucidation of the problems and challenges of human interiority.

One benefit of this work is to see how obviously Augustine departs from

consequentialist forms of reasoning. Augustine's fascination with the hidden

movements of the heart does not translate into an indifference to material consequences;

it does, however, prevent the measuring of harms and benefits from having the

dispositive role they do in consequentialist modes of ethical reasoning.[159] To put it

differently, consequentialism turns on a presumed linkage between results and praise or

blame. Augustine, no less than Yoder, offers a theological critique of precisely this

calculating link.[160]

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[159] See Mann, "Inner-Life Ethics," 156.

[160] Yoder's most eloquent and devastating assault on "the calculating link" is found in "The War of the Lamb," the final chapter of Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 228–47. Every opportunity should be taken to emphasize the importance of this chapter. It is arguably the single most important text ever penned by John Howard Yoder. To hear the resonance with all that I have been arguing in the first two chapters, consider the following passage: "What medieval Christendom, with its vision of the divine stability of all the members of the *corpus christianum*, has in common with post-Enlightenment progressivism is precisely the assumption that history has moved us past the time of primitive Christianity and therefore out from under the relevance of the apostolic witness on this question [i.e., meaning of history]" (231). In the introduction to chapter 1, I claimed that, like Augustine, Yoder had his own doctrines of interiority, illumination, deconstruction, etc. I have yet to say much about illumination, but Yoder's version is on display in this same chapter of *Politics of Jesus*, where he argues that Jesus illumines both the deepest reality of the cosmos and the irreality of the Constantinian disjunction of obedience and effectiveness: "the most appropriate example of the difficult choice between effectiveness and obedience, and the most *illuminating* example, is that of Jesus himself. What it means for the Lamb to be slain, of whom then we sing that he is 'worthy to receive power,' is inseparable from what it meant for Jesus to be executed under the superscription 'King of the Jews'" (233–34, emphasis mine). It is no exaggeration to claim that christological illumination was for Yoder the key to an objective historiography: "Which facts we perceive and how we weight them are matters of theological insight; history does not read itself" (247 n. 10). Claims like this one must be kept in mind whenever it is either lamented or celebrated that Yoder has constrained theology to an "immanent frame." It may well be that Yoder would want to call into question the immanence/transcendence dualism that animates so much debate in contemporary theology and philosophy. It is certainly a dualism that complicates contemporary fidelity to the doctrine of Chalcedon, with the latter's refusal of "confusion, separation, change," etc. At any rate, I think Yoder would have resisted any choice *between* immanence and transcendence. One could argue that Yoder resisted this choice precisely in and through his pacifism: in other words, the "immanent frame" is in constant need of the interruption and reconfiguration (i.e., the transcendence) that can only come by way of reconciliation with the enemy, the outsider, the excluded.

2.5 Conclusion

I have now teased out a number of parallels within the otherwise very different theologies of St. Augustine and John Howard Yoder.[161] The most important argument of this chapter is that Augustine's christological transformation of the neoplatonist metaphor of interiority bears weighty theological fruit and that precisely this Augustinian legacy should be kept in mind when considering Yoder's attack on the surface readings of history. Yoder and Augustine both argue for the importance of depth and power in approaching the meaning of historical events.[162] They warn readers of the odious forms of power lurking behind smooth narratives of human achievement, be such narratives autobiographical or world-historical. They both espy violence in memory's covering over of the unsavory libidinal forces that too often set us, or keep us, in motion against one another, and even against ourselves. They both believe that deeper truths about ourselves and our world are threatened by the desire, however understandable, even legitimate, to tell a good story.

In doubting the possibility of an Augustine–Yoder conversation, James Turner Johnson went further to "doubt that Augustine would be at all happy with Yoder's Jesus-centered understanding of Christian theology."[163] While it is true that the name

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[161] I borrow the language of "parallelism within difference" from Yoder. This borrowing should not be thought to prejudice my reading, since discerning such parallels requires that I break with Yoder on the matter at hand, i.e., Augustine's importance. In one of Yoder's most extraordinary essays, "But We Do See Jesus," he uses the concept of parallelism within difference to describe a common theological maneuver in five very different New Testament texts. He writes, "I propose to look schematically at five New Testament texts, chosen not arbitrarily but because of parallelisms within their differences. In very different language forms, they have in common the evident fact that in the process of organic expansion into the Hellenistic world, the particularity of the Jesus story, previously borne by predominantly Jewish communities into whose world that story had first irrupted, must encounter the call of believers (and perhaps also of doubters) for a higher level of generality." See Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 50. For a lengthier display of what is meant by "parallelism within difference," see John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method*, Edited by Stanley Hauerwas and J. Alexander Sider ed. (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002).
[162] Another crucial passage from Yoder demonstrates clearly how eschatology is central to the concern for the deep meaning of history. What Yoder says here about the meaning of eschatology is an excellent description of Augustine's thinking in *City of God*: "'Peace' describes the pacifist's hope, the goal in the light of which Christians act, the character of Christian actions, the ultimate divine certainty that lets the Christian position make sense; *it does not describe the external appearance or the observable results of Christian behavior*. This is what we mean by eschatology: a hope that, defying present frustration, defines a present position in terms of the yet unseen goal that gives it meaning" (Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 145.
[163] Johnson, "Can a Pacifist," 92.

"Jesus" appears relatively infrequently in Augustine's writings, I have already demonstrated that Augustine is nevertheless thoroughly christocentric in orientation, and that Augustine's christocentrism impinges directly on his mature treatment of history and politics. Rowan Williams, in writing about nothing less than the importance of *history* for Christian theology, evokes the christological underpinnings of Augustine's mature theology:

> The controversies about Christ in the fourth and fifth centuries are in their own way debates about what it is to be citizens of that city whose supreme court is that of the Divine Word, what it is to claim that the ultimate legitimacy and coherence of human life together lies in Christ and that human history converges upon him; they are also about how sacred power is conveyed through him to the body of believers.[164]

Williams's remarks suggest an uncomfortable truth for those who would use Johnson-like arguments to force a strong separation between Augustine and Yoder: The only way to entertain Johnson's doubts about the relevance of Yoder's focus on Jesus is to entertain a morally significant breach between the humanity of Jesus and the divinity of Christ.[165] While such a breach has indeed been entertained, not least by modern theologians and historians, such a breach flies in the face of both Augustine's own proto-Chalcedonian Christology[166] and Yoder's explicit invocation of Chalcedon. My

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[164] Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past?: The Quest for the Historical Church*, Sarum Theological Lectures (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), 40.

[165] There is, to be sure, a difference between Christ's particular form obedience and human obedience in general: though we can learn what it means to be human by imitating Christ, we cannot learn what it means to imitate Christ from Jesus, for Jesus had no Christ to imitate. But this gap only serves to remind the disciple that the point of the moral life is not to focus on a concept of imitation, but rather to focus on the one who is to be imitated. All of which is to say that Jesus's inimitability does not open up a morally significant breach between his humanity and divinity. This gap does, however, point up the necessity of a robust ecclesiology and pneumatology, for only God the Spirit working in and through Christ's Body the Church could make the difference between vain human striving, on the one hand, and obedience on the other. In short, imitation of Jesus can only really be imitation of Jesus when it is the undivided work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[166] Augustine's Christology is complex and by no means identical to Yoder's. Moreover, Augustine died before the formula of Chalcedon was formulated. I refer to Augustine's Christology as "proto-Chalcedonian" for one specific reason: his reflections on Jesus Christ refuse the kind of separation between the "two natures" that is necessary if "a morally significant breach" is to be entertained. That Augustine believes the humanity of Jesus is divinely appointed as the key to our salvation is evident from passages such as the one already cited: "I am struggling to return from this *far country* (Lk 15:13) by the road he has made in the humanity of the divinity of his only Son." *Trinity* 4.1 (Hill, 153). In the entry on Augustine's Christology in *Augustine Through the Ages*, Brian Daley notes that perhaps relatively little attention has been paid to Augustine's Christology because it "seems simply to anticipate, in an unproblematic way, the definitions of the later councils." Brian Daley, "Christology," in *Augustine through the Ages*, ed. Allan

argument, in short, and *contra* Johnson, is that this common refusal of a breach—or

better, this common *affirmation* of the unity of the person of Jesus Christ—opens up the

promising possibilities of a nonviolent Augustinianism.

Fitzgerald and John C. Cavadini (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 165. For a survey of scholarship on
Augustine's Christology, see Basil Studer, *The Grace of Christ and the Grace of God in Augustine of Hippo:
Christocentrism or Theocentrism?* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1997). See also Lewis Ayres, "The
Christological Context of Augustine's De Trinitate Xiii: Toward Relocating Books Viii-Xv," *Studies in
Patristic Christology* (1998), Lewis Ayres, "The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology,"
in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (New
York: Routledge, 2000), Lewis Ayres, "Augustine, Christology, and God as Love: An Introduction to the
Homilies on 1 John," in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J.
Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), Ayres, "*Exemplum*."

3. Before

"He is 'the Beginning' for us in the sense that if he were not abidingly the same, we should have nowhere to return after going astray. When we turn back from our errant ways it is by acknowledging the truth that we turn back, and he it is who teaches us to acknowledge it, because he is 'the Beginning' who speaks to us."
— Augustine[1]

3.1 Introduction

In chapter 1, I argued that Hans Frei's postliberal narrative theology failed in light of its central concern—the preservation of Christ's identity. In remaining deaf to the politics of interpretation, Frei produced an historical narrative eerily disconnected from the sociopolitical realities of historical subjects in general, and the events of the New Testament in particular. Concerned with the way modern interpreters elevate general theory over the particularities of Christ's identity, Frei sought to preserve the church's ancient commitment to the identity of Christ by summoning theologians to a renewed appreciation of the literal sense of scripture. The "text itself" was Frei's first line of defense against the achristological allegorizing of modern theology. If we would but return to the text we would discover a "realistic narrative" capable of resisting our tendencies to have our way with Jesus, encountering instead the saving importance of Christ's having his way with us.

It turns out, however, that "realistic narratives" do not fall from the sky; nor do they read themselves. Texts have historical, sociopolitical contexts, just as theories about them do. Frei thus abandoned his early strategy of resistance and turned instead to the community of interpretation—if not in "the text itself," then in the continuity of a community's readings of those texts over time. Here, in the consensus of a tradition of

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[1] Augustine *Confessions* 11.8.10.

readers, Frei re-located the literal sense of scripture, the anchor of the bible's distinctive realism, and thus the resource for resisting modernity's hermeneutical conceits.[2]

Yet, as I showed, even this more sophisticated position remained open to serious questioning. While Frei was aware that the literal sense, now defined in relation to readers and not a "text in itself," was vulnerable to stretching and even breaking, he offered no insight as to how the reader is to identify and negotiate the various powers at play *within the tradition*, within the twisting and pulling of interpretations, here leading readers this way, there that, now construing the literal sense of scripture this way, now that.

I suggested that John Howard Yoder's critique of Constantinianism exposes this absence in Frei as a fatal flaw. For what I have called Yoder's "Augustinian" awareness of the politics of historical interpretation enables the critique to boomerang on Frei. What if the *sensus communis* of Christendom was compromised by the very problem Frei diagnosed? What if, by accommodating persecution, war, and lethal punishment, the Constantinian consensus on the literal sense of scripture effaced the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ, contradicted the unity proclaimed at Chalcedon, and thus *pioneered* the way in relativizing the significance of the particular shape of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection?

Yoder's critique of Constantinianism suggests that the challenge before today's churches is inadequately addressed by thinkers like Frei who discern in modernity the most pressing threat to contemporary faithfulness. I have juxtaposed these two twentieth-century theologians for this very reason. Frei and Yoder shared a common,

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[2] It would be fruitful to juxtapose Frei's theological development with the philosophical development of one of Frei's chief inspirations—Ludwig Wittgenstein. The early Frei's formalism is paralleled by Wittgenstein's early tendencies in the *Tractatus*. Frei's turn to the community's reading habits is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's turn to forms of life. But the questions I have put to the late Frei also apply to the late Wittgenstein. How do we account for the powers at play in the bewitching of a community's understanding? An Augustinian is going to want to know more about the nature of our confusions than either Frei or Wittgenstein seemed willing to provide.

indeed an ancient, concern: the preservation of Christ's identity.[3] But they diagnosed the obstacles to that preservation differently. While the critics of modernity are legion and growing, the heralds of nonviolent suffering servanthood are few. Frei's critical historiography—which on its own terms should be open up to the kind of challenge presented by Yoder—is insufficiently precise. Being a critic of modernity does not adequately distinguish a theological position today. Fundamentalists and postmodernists, theocrats and relativists, pacifists and just-warriors—theologians from these diverse quarters all share in some way the aspiration to shed the dreaded modern legacy, even as they all claim Christian inspiration.

This is not to deny Frei's contribution to contemporary theology. It is useful and necessary to trace the complex legacy of theology's transformation in the wake of modernity, just as it is useful and necessary to notice how certain attempts to leave modernity behind merely reproduce it. Frei was certainly among the most sophisticated of modernity critics, willing as we have seen to subject even his own work to scrutiny for reproducing the problems he meant to avoid. I have drawn Frei's contribution into this dissertation on Yoder and Augustine because I think so highly of Frei's contribution to contemporary theology. His work inspired a generation of talented scholars committed to thinking beyond the boundaries imposed on theology by the false certainties of modernity.[4]

Moreover, Frei's concern was, like Yoder's, deeply christological. His scholarship on biblical narrative implied that certain forms of historical consciousness—certain forms of recollecting—amounted, despite themselves, to forms of forgetting. He showed that certain kinds of historically oriented projects subvert in principle the church's ancient witness, as they are committed methodologically (and unaccountably) to the

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[3] Of course, exactly what is meant by "preserving Christ's identity" is complicated. For more on what might be meant by preserving "the historicisty" of Christ, see chapter 1 above, esp. n. 112 on Dawson and the figural reading of scripture.

[4] Cf. Paul J. DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).

notion that the past cannot offer meaningful alternatives to the present. Frei learned well from Barth that such forms of recollection underwrite a tyranny of the contemporary: they demand that all "historical" figures pay tribute to the *hegemon* of present understanding.

Furthermore, John Howard Yoder was certainly like Frei in being critical of the shortcomings of modernity. He could write, for example, of his "post-modern acceptance of the particularity of the Christian story without subjecting either to the claimed objectivity of general consensus or to that of some specific 'scientific method.'"[5] In a similar vein, Yoder renounced what has come to be called epistemological foundationalism and instead embraced "the confession of rootedness in historical community."[6] He was also concerned to reject the distinctively choice between particularity and universality, which continues to function to keep the gospel at arm's length: "Having a particular identity and making sense to one's neighbors, serving their well-being, are not disjunctive alternatives. In fact there is no reason to want to make sense to your neighbors if you have no identity worth sharing with them."[7] Again like Frei, Yoder was ready to expose the hidden continuity in positions advanced in the name of making a clean break with modernity. For example, protestant scholasticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and fundamentalism in the nineteenth, remained in Yoder's view overly beholden to modernity's epistemological strictures.[8]

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[5] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 9.
[6] Yoder developed his own idiom for the intellectual tradition of securing knowledge by anchoring it to allegedly indubitable foundations. He called it the "prolegomenal search for 'scratch'". See Ibid., 7. See also Yoder's essay "Walk and Word" in Hauerwas, Murphy, and Nation, eds., *Theology without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth*, chapter 4, 77–90. Also Yoder, *For the Nations*, 19ff.
[7] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 41. The most important essay on the relationship between particularity and universality is "But We Do See Jesus," in Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, chatper 2, 46–62.
[8] See Yoder, *Preface to Theology:* , 339–40. Yoder makes a similar move with regards to contemporary evangelical apologetics. He notes their focus on "epistemology and reason," and writes: "From where we stand today, under the claim of a liberating Lord calling us to be servants of our neighbors, that preoccupation seems to represent a concession to Enlightenment and not a victory over it. It looks like an acceptance of the scholastic notion that we seek a truth system with which to defend ourselves as those who possess it, rather than being claimed by a Lord who calls us to join him in his condescension." Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 60–61.

Yoder also had a keen eye for the unacknowledged contradictions of modern theology: "There is a kind of paradox involved when people who prefer not to have a 'high' view of Jesus nevertheless espouse the radically skeptical understandings of historical criticism so as not to believe anything but what Jesus himself indubitably taught. That is a modern paradox."[9] And he deftly showed the door to critiques of classical Christian doctrines that turned on uninterrogated modern sensibilities: "[Vincent] Taylor . . . insists that the idea of punishing the innocent is immoral, and that the idea of imputed righteousness is nonsense. These arguments tell us more about Taylor's prejudices than about the problem at hand. God can punish the innocent and impute righteousness if God wants to; the question is whether that is God's intention or what God did in Christ."[10]

Nevertheless, despite these several affinities with Frei, I remain skeptical about attempts to align John Howard Yoder's legacy with the contemporary theological movement known as postliberalism[11] for which Hans Frei is arguably the chief

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[9] Yoder, *Preface to Theology:* , 139.

[10] Ibid., 304. Further examples of Yoder's critique of elements of Enlightenment influence are easily proliferated. Yoder writes, for example, that "it is clear in the New Testament that the meaning of history is not what the state will achieve in the way of a progressively more tolerable ordering of society, but what the church achieves through evangelism and through the leavening process. This 'messianic self-consciousness' on the part of the church looks most offensive to the proponents of a modern world view, but it is what we find in the Bible." Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 83.

[11] A mistake I feel is made in three otherwise excellent books: Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, esp. footnote 117 on p. 62.; Carter, *The Politics of the Cross*.; and Douglas K. Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003). Charles Campbell quite rightly sees the continuity between Frei's christologically focused work and Yoder's own project. He fails to mention, however, that Yoder's critique of Constantinianism poses a serious challenge to Frei's typological analysis of the theological landscape. Craig Carter compares the hermeneutics of Frei and Yoder on pages 101–11. His central argument is that both Frei and Yoder follow Karl Barth's pioneering narrative Christology in *Church Dogmatics* IV. Yet Carter overstates the case for harmonizing Frei and Yoder when he claims that Yoder "has no interest in historical reconstructions of a reality behind the text" (102). Yoder engages just such reconstructions in his chapter on "Revolutionary Subordination" in *Politics of Jesus* (162–92). The truth is that Yoder had a very different appreciation for the tools of historical criticism than did Hans Frei. I attempt to show why below. Finally, Douglas Harink's book is an important contribution to our understanding of the Pauline roots of the most interesting forms of contemporary theological renewal. Harink footnotes Carter's work in linking Yoder with postliberal theology (19 n. 16), about which I have already expressed my reservations. Harink is certainly right that "Yoder eschews the foundationalism of liberal and conservative theologies alike" (19). But Harink accepts Jeffrey Stout's famous definition of postliberal theology as "The quest, initiated in recent years by the most interesting American followers of Karl Barth, to get beyond all forms of modernism in theology; either a *cul de sac* or the harbinger of a new theological age (too soon to tell)." Stout, *Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents*, 301. Cited in Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals*, 18. As we will see, however, Yoder's problem with foundationalism is not its modernism but

inspiration.[12] The very name, *postliberalism*, suggests a need to transcend a tradition that Yoder frankly did not spend that much time worrying about. To speak in terms of the vocabulary of chapter 1, liberalism just was not the "after" that focused Yoder's concentration. There is a real danger of ignoring significant differences between postliberals and Yoder in the name of gaining for Yoder a wider hearing, or in an effort to array forces against a common foe.[13]

Indeed, there may be no such common foe. Liberal modernity did not represent for Yoder the root of our present theological problems. In fact, three constructive features of Yoder's engagement with modernity are overlooked if he is too quickly lumped together with critics of modernity (postliberal or otherwise). These features are of major significance to this dissertation, so I will spend the rest of the chapter expanding upon them. The first has to do with Yoder's positive relationship to modernity, the second with Yoder's alternative critique of it, and the third with Yoder's distinctive construal of the task of theology. This last feature is crucial, for it enables much of my effort to read Augustine and Yoder together. Yoder and Augustine rejected the Constantinian/Eusebian "after" because it betrayed theology's commitment to the "before" of the incarnation. Theology's task is always to summon the church to return to Jesus, in whom has been made known the character of the God who is abidingly both the beginning and end of all that is.

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its Constantinianism. Any relationship between Yoder's work and postliberalism must therefore be read as a rather ad hoc alliance.

[12] DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology*. contests this genealogy of "postliberalism" by arguing that George Lindbeck's more hardened anti-liberalism in *The Nature of Doctrine* did more to forge the categories that inspired the movement of postliberalism than did the work of Hans Frei. This is not the place to assess DeHart's argument that Frei's work harbors the resources for a more generous orthodoxy than does Lindbeck's. Whether or not DeHart is right in his discernment of a gap between Lindbeck and Frei, the several postliberal readers of Yoder just named have not done so, and it is this reading that I am seeking to correct for.

[13] Of course, this is a danger that I face in my present efforts to read Yoder and Augustine in some kind of continuity. Whether or not I have successfully avoided the danger is a judgment I leave to others.

3.2 Sympathy for Modernity

In the ongoing work of receiving Yoder's contribution to theology, we must begin to take the measure of Yoder's sympathy for modernity. There are specifically modern aspirations, peculiar modern intellectual aims, about which critics of modernity never tire of complaining, yet which Yoder not only tolerated but celebrated. Nowhere is this more apparent than in features of what I am calling Yoder's christological historicism. I have already located Yoder and Frei as joint heirs of the nineteenth-century battle between faith and history, and I have argued that it is unfair to Frei to construe his contribution as chiefly negative. Frei's aim was constructive: he wanted to articulate the contemporary relevance of Chalcedon. Nevertheless, when Frei was done knocking down the conceptual props of modern critical historiography, one was no longer sure what it might mean for Christian faith to be related to history. In other words, Frei did not so much as suggest a fresh answer to the question of how faith relates to history, as reject the question itself.

And yet time and again Frei availed himself of the tools of critical historiography in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. He concerned himself with authorial intent, with ostensive reference, with "wie es eigentlich gewesen ist," in the early modern hermeneutical transformations. Indeed, Frei examined the many minute historical details of early modern hermeneutics in order to establish that a dominant form of biblical interpretation was progressively eclipsed throughout the gestational period of modern historicism. He used the tools of modern historicism to call into question the then-emergent, now-dominant, historicist readings of the bible.

But why this protectionism from Frei? Why subject the history of biblical interpretation to a form of scrutiny that one rejects in the case of the bible itself? Frei was convinced that the concern for ostensive or extra-biblical reference, central to historicism in general (including Frei's) and historical-critical readings of the bible in particular, threatened a faithful understanding of the Christian scriptures. Just here, then, the

difference with Yoder could not be starker, as Yoder sees in critical historicism an ally, not an enemy. "The acids of historicism that have weakened [the older confidence in tradition/scripture as univocal]," he writes, "are not challenges to the precise historicity of particular Gospel accounts, or to naïve traditions about authorship and redaction."[14] The "corrosive" powers of historicism have, rather, clarified the renewing power of Christian faith:

> The God-language of the Bible does not point inward to the renewed heart alone, nor upward to the 'higher power,' nor forward to the 'hereafter,' but backward to the salvation story, outward to the claims of the rest of the world, the enemies to love and the slaves to free, and forward to a city not of our own making. Of these, *it is the historical reference from which we stand to learn the most. Only* it *will stand still to be counted. The irreducible historicity of Abraham and Moses, Jeremiah and Jesus, and the demonstrable wrongness of Constantine and Charlemagne and the Crusades* . . . these are the memories that can best give substance to our hopes.[15]

Though Yoder is best known for his pacifism—a commitment on display in this passage—it is rather his peculiar argument for historicism to which I want to draw further attention in this section. I do so in large part because Yoder himself does so, albeit in his characteristically ad hoc way. Consider these scattered gestures to the creative power of evangelical historicity: "the claims of Christ, by virtue precisely of their historical objectivity and distance, enable a genuine catholicity."[16] "Jesus participates in localizable, datable history, as many religious figures do not"[17] "The irreducible historicity of Jesus' servanthood protects us from . . . misinterpretations of

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[14] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 72.
[15] Ibid., 188, emphasis mine. Note Yoder's precision in the first sentence: "does not point inward to the renewed heart *alone*" (emphasis mine). This is typical of Yoder's effort to correct for previous imbalances without simply negating the earlier emphasis. For the most extraordinary example of such correction-without-negation, see the passage about the difference between the kingdom and its benefits in Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 32-33. At times Yoder was less careful: "The challenge to which the proclamation of Christ's rule over the rebellious world speaks a word of grace is not a problem within the self but a split within the cosmos." Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 161. How the self could be separable from the cosmos, and thus unaffected by a split within it, is left unexplained. For a reading of Paul that does not simply oppose cosmic and subjective implications, see Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 26. As was already apparent in chapter 2, where I read Augustine's reflections on interiority in concert with Yoder's reflections on the deep meanings of history, it is important to my effort to read Yoder and Augustine together that I reject any strong self/cosmos dualism.
[16] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 130.
[17] Ibid., 57.

historical responsibility."[18] "The ordinariness of the humanness of Jesus is the warrant

for the generalizability of his reconciliation."[19]

This last claim might be considered Yoder's positive, historicist gloss of the

patristic axiom—"that which is not assumed has not been healed"[20]—and thus a defense

of "the tradition." However, Yoder remains unperturbed when historicist

reconstructions of biblical events cut the other way, namely against the grain of older

readings: "It is perhaps significant . . . that *any* such serious effort at hypothetical

reconstruction does move toward taking more seriously the economic-political threat

Jesus posed to the Romans than does the traditional ecclesiastical interpretation."[21]

Of course, this willingness to subject tradition to critique does not mean that

Yoder approved of every historical reconstruction, that he affirmed the various quests

for the historical Jesus, or that he elevated historical questing above dogmatic

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[18] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 243. I have elided the phrase "two quite natural," as for present purposes the substance of the "two quite natural misinterpretations" is irrelevant. For the larger argument of the dissertation, they are germane: "One of them moves from substance to form, considering as right that which is rightly intended. 'Love' is a positive subjective intention, which may be called upon to justify any action done in its name. The other moves from deeds to goals. 'Intentions' in an objective sense is then the goal sought, justifying any means claiming to reach it. Whether the 'benefaction' claimed by those who lord it over the nations be objective or subjective, Jesus' servanthood undercuts the claim to justification by intention. His call is not to 'intend' well in either sense, to will the good or to achieve it, nor to be justified, so much as to be present as servant" (243–44).

[19] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 62.

[20] Gregory Nazianzen, *Epistle 101*, *PG* 37.181C. It is striking that Yoder rephrases the axiom in a positive idiom and in a way that presses the implications for nonviolent discipleship. Furthermore, Yoder's linkage of "the ordinary humanity of Jesus" to "generalizability" is a demonstration of the non-reductive nature of his historicism. We will return to this question in chapter 4, where we take up Oliver O'Donovan's work. O'Donovan argues that historicism spells the end of the natural kind, which is the only legitimate basis for a universalizing moral teleology. Yoder's historicism, on the contrary, involves the christological reclamation of the natural. His universalizing pacifism is a strong indication that a version of Christian historicist ethics need not culminate in relativism.

[21] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 50, emphasis in original. Yoder thus holds together what many assume must be put asunder: i.e., modern historical scholarship on the one hand and comfort with the received canonical texts on the other: "The following studies [of the church's body politics] reach back to the texts of the New Testament, as they stand. The words of Jesus, the narratives of Acts, and the instructions of the Apostles are taken straightforwardly here for what they seem to say in the text as it has come down to us. This should not be misunderstood as a 'fundamentalist' disregard for the awareness, heightened by scholarship in recent generations, that all of those ancient texts probably underwent change in the process of oral transmission and rewriting through the early decades of the church. . . . Seldom however will variant scholarly perspectives on those matters throw any seriously different light on our understanding of the early Christian practices. *I could say it more strongly: Only modern scholarship, with its more careful concern for reading ancient texts in their setting and liberating them from the assumption that what they are about is the same as what all Christians have already been thinking, has made possible the straightforwardness with which the readings at the core of the present study will proceed. Only the awareness of diversity and change has made it possible to ask where the trajectory of a given idea began and what the Good News at its core was then*" Yoder, *Body Politics*, x–xi (emphasis in original).

formulations. As we will see, Yoder viewed historical questing as internal to dogmatic

confession, and he is thus very far from the spirit of many historical questors.[22] It must

be emphasized, however, that where he left specific reconstructions and quests behind,

it was not on account of their greater historical seriousness. Rather, Yoder believed that

modern historical critics were often oddly ahistorical, just to the extent that they failed to

acknowledge the dogmatic basis of their own critical pursuit of "the real historical

Jesus."[23] He argued, relatedly, that the tendency of modern critics to filter "high

christology" out of their reconstructions betrayed a similar refusal of historical

seriousness, in that the judgment stemmed not from an honest handling of the sources

but rather from a prior commitment to modern epistemological strictures:

> "high Christology" is present in the *oldest* documents we have. . . . The Gospels
> were not written to give us a Christology less ambitious than that of the Epistles;
> they were rather written to clarify and hold fast the concrete human content of
> the faith in Jesus of whom the most exalted things were already being said.
> This is a statement about history and about documents, of course. It is
> not a logical proof. Anyone is still free to believe that the notions of preexistence
> and ascension are nonsense in terms of a modern world-view, and to choose to
> tailor a Christology to fit a modern cosmology. *But then that should be done on the
> basis of the truth one ascribes to modern cosmology, and not on the grounds of pretended
> historically critical recourse to the oldest texts*.[24]

Notice what Yoder has achieved in a passage like this: he has dislodged critical

historicism from epistemological foundationalism, demonstrating the latter to be hostile

to the former.[25]

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[22] Who frequently shield their commitment to contemporary social and political norms from scrutiny even as they tallow them to control their reading of "the history." See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

[23] See Yoder, *Preface to Theology:* , 139. "There is a kind of paradox involved when people who prefer not to have a 'high' view of Jesus nevertheless espouse radically skeptical understandings of historical criticism so as not to believe anything but what Jesus himself indubitably taught. That is a modern paradox." It might appear that Yoder presumes historical criticism will always confirm nonviolence, which is certainly not the case. I think Yoder's conviction was more that historical critical scholarship has only strengthened our understanding of the human life of Jesus and his socio-political context. His openness to new readings was a requirement of his nonviolence, but that did not mean Yoder would accept any and every handling of the sources.

[24] Ibid., 139–40.

[25] Yoder has arguably demonstrated, to borrow the language from chapter 1, that the problem is not holding theology and historicism together, but rather Troeltsch's earlier presumption that an adequate historical consciousness flowed necessarily from a foundationalist epistemology.

Thus did Yoder free himself up to affirm quite explicitly the benefits of critical historiography for the work of Christian theology and ethics: "on the level of the general structure of Christian ethical deliberation, all Christian thought has been renewed by the last few generations of biblical studies, reaching past the traditions to the text and reading it afresh with sharpened instruments of grammatical, historical, and literary interpretations, so that it is more clear than before how the whole canon centers upon the ministry of the human being Jesus."[26] Yoder not only resists the temptation to protect the scriptures from the critical gaze of historians—he argues that historical criticism is now, and has been since its inception, vital to the task of renewal. "Only after the rise of protestant biblicism and its offspring critical historicism can we see clearly the difference between where things began and what had come of them."[27] One should note how thoroughly Yoder has reversed Frei's narrative of reversal in *Eclipse*. It is on Yoder's reading precisely protestant hermeneutics and critical historicist approaches to the bible that have made it possible to take the measure of present faithfulness to the identity of Jesus Christ—an evaluation that Frei himself was attempting. From Yoder's perspective, Frei stood on the very branch he was attempting to saw off.

And yet what about Yoder's appeal to "the text" in the passage above—his advocacy for "reaching past traditions to *the text* and reading *it* with sharpened instruments"? Is this not an instance of the mistake I criticized above in Frei's early work? Is Yoder not similarly guilty of being seduced by the New Critical imagination?[28] To answer these questions adequately is to again learn something significant about Yoder's theological exchange with modernity, for Yoder offers an account of the priority

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[26] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 121.

[27] John Howard Yoder, "Helpful and Deceptive Dualisms," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 10 (1988): 73–74.

[28] Cf. Yoder's account of "biblical realism," in Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 125–44. Yoder used the phrase frequently early in his career, but then he seems to have abandoned it. One should not that what Yoder seems to like most about Enlightenment doubt, which underlies much historical criticism, is that it prevents the Church from assuming that it "posseses" in any easy way the real meaning of the Scriptures: "Enlightenment's methodical doubt freed the reader from equating what the text itself says with what our appropriation of it within our system had previously said it meant" (123). Thus does historical criticism supply, at least in Yoder's version, an openness to the future that is too often foreclosed by inadequate appeals to "the tradition."

of "the text" that is at once non-protectionist, historically serious, and theologically

robust. It is, in other words, an account that refuses the kinds of reductive hermeneutics

that have for so long animated the faith and history debate. In short, Yoder's

christological historicism amounts to a hermeneutics of plenitude, and, as such, a way

out from the twin dead ends of reductive historicism and protectionist traditionalism.

As a way into Yoder's account, I note first that Yoder defends a notion of

intrinsic textual meaning. He stops short of the postmodern plunge into a world in

which the distinction between readers and texts disappears:

> One's "hermeneutical matrix" is like the microscope in microbiology. You cannot
> see the tiny organisms without the microscope, but the microscope never
> becomes the microbe. The use of the microscope might impose upon the microbe
> certain very severe conditions before it can be seen. The microscope will need to
> be put on a slide. It may need to be killed or dyed, but it still remains distinct
> from the microscope.[29]

The otherness of the text may be difficult to acknowledge because of our own interaction

with it, but that there is an "it" to the text Yoder never doubts. Indeed there is for Yoder

a fertility to this otherness that is always present, even or perhaps especially when we

begin to take note of the historicity of every reading. The task of "looping back" to the

biblical witness is for Yoder never finished, a point he was fond of reinforcing by

quoting the puritan John Robinson: "the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth

from his Holy Word."[30] Yoder is engaged here, however, in more than pious

proclamation or dogmatic assertion. He is arguing that the repeated instances of looping

back to Jesus have themselves enabled the measuring of our own historicity. Only the

historical reference stands still to be counted, is how we saw him putting it. In returning

again and again to the witnesses in order to test the community's conformity to biblical

faith,[31] the exegete inevitably confronts the diversity—the "timefulness," the

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[29] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 66.
[30] Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 10, 79. See also Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 133. And Yoder, *For the Nations*, 88.
[31] This is what Yoder means by "looping back." With the epigraph to this chapter, I am suggesting that Yoder's radical historicism makes for a fascinating companion to Augustine's Trinitarian summons to perpetual revision. "Looping back" is reminiscent of what Augustine suggests must be done at the beginning of his elucidation of Trinitarian doctrine: "But first we must establish by the authority of the holy

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historicity—of biblical interpretation. In so doing, Yoder argues, the space is created for discerning the line between treason and tradition.[32] Affirming the power and difference of "the text" is thus in Yoder's estimation basic to any historically serious form of Christianity. Without such an affirmation, we are sealed off from the difficult yet liberating work of self-criticism and carefulness generated by genuine historical reading. Without some such affirmation of "the text," the very idea of reading is illusory—the activity morphs into a peculiar form of monologue. An appeal to the text's recalcitrance is thus central to the project Yoder referred to as "biblical realism."[33]

It is nonetheless crucial to appreciate the modesty of Yoder's position. Two features of his account are worth highlighting. First, in contrast to Hans Frei's early work, Yoder denies that appeals to the biblical "text in itself" either guarantee or adequately account for the ongoing challenge of preserving Christ's identity.[34] Speaking of the bible's priority for the catechetical ministry, Yoder writes,

> at two points the Bible is clearly not sufficient or self-expositing. It can replace neither the contemporary charisma of the teacher who makes that selection [i.e., the relevant passages] in a given circumstance nor the substance of the encounter with the world in which the particular catechumen has been nurtured and to which the corrective and informative impact of the message must be directed.[35]

The invocation of the "charisma of the teacher" echoes Yoder's account of practical moral reasoning in one of his most important essays—"The Hermeneutics of

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scriptures whether the faith is in fact like that" (*On the Trinity* 1.4). And such "establishing" is exactly what Augustine does in his ferocious exchange with Jerome over the latter's exegesis of "apostolic deception."
[32] "What is at stake is not whether there can be change but whether there is such a thing as unfaithfulness. Is there a difference between compatible extrapolation and incompatible deviation? The linguistic line between treason and tradition is very fine. Both terms come from the same root. Yet in substance there is a chasm between the two, a chasm which the modern debate about tradition has not helped to survey. The semantic puzzles are enormous when we try to distinguish between faithful organic development on one hand and a sell-out on the other. Both are formed in historical continuity. Both are explainable within historicist axioms of causality and analogy. Both use the same words. Yet if the notion of fidelity is not to fade into a fog where nothing is verifiable, the notion of infidelity as a real possibility must continue to be operational." Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 67.
[33] See Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 57, 68ff, 79ff, 90ff, 125ff.
[34] "There is a sense in which the objectivity of the scriptural text in its unchanging wording can be appealed to as a corrective against the most highly fanciful flights of redefinition, but it would be part of the naiveté against which the Apostle [he cites Timothy 2:14] warns us if we were to take that objectivity as a guarantee." Ibid., 76.
[35] Ibid., 72.

Peoplehood."[36] There, in noting the church's dependence on charismatic agencies, Yoder

offers a redefinition of Protestant identity—"a critical principle of appeal to the

sources"[37]—that maximizes the temporal, unfinished nature of the critical ministry. The

upshot of the next clarifying loop back to the scriptures is never given in advance: "The

only way to see how this will work will be to see how it will work,"[38] is how Yoder puts

it in his most striking formulation, forcing his language to yield to the ongoing and

future work of charismatic renewal.[39] This is not a mental operation that can currently be

undertaken; and to the extent that one can think about it, one must think through the

fact that what awaits us in the future will be beyond what we currently think: "One

must assume as possible, and I would hope as likely, that there could be yet other such

clarifications ahead of us."[40] Such a need for hermeneutical openness is itself testified to

in the scriptures: "I could properly argue that the hermeneutical task is never done, by

appealing to the New Testament teaching about the continuing presence and guidance

of the Holy Spirit."[41]

Second, Yoder carefully avoids ascribing foundational status to the scriptures;

that place is reserved for Christ and the new humanity he incarnated: "The real

foundation, both formally and materially, for Christian witness is the historic objectivity

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[36] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 15–45.

[37] Ibid., 17.

[38] Ibid., 45.

[39] I believe it is this passage from "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood" that once convinced me Yoder must have read Wittgenstein on the continuation of a series. Wittgenstein's rejection of scientist presumptions about necessary entailments, latent in logical positivism, yielded a brief for openness to surprising future continuities. I think Wittgenstein's philosophy is well summed up by Yoder's dictum: "The only way to see how this will work is to see how it will work." However, as far as I know there is no evidence that Yoder ever read Wittgenstein. It would seem, rather, that Yoder's argument is entirely dependent on his anti-constantinian ecclesiological commitments.

[40] Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 84.

[41] Ibid., 10. Yoder's reading of the import of the Spirit's presence is important both in the context of the contrast I am making with Frei, who never quite articulated a fulsome pneumatology, and also in the broader context of the dialogue I seek to foster with Augustine: "The context of the covenant community represents a radical alternative to both the theocratic and the spiritual views of historical movement, first of all, because the community is a *discerning* community. The promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit is clearly correlated in the New Testament with the need for the church prophetically to discern right and wrong in the events of the age. Not all visible events are God at work, not all 'action' is divine, not every spirit is of Christ (1 Cor. 12:3; 1 John 4:1)." Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 94. "The agent of moral discernment in the doxological community is not a theologian, a bishop, or a pollster, but the Holy Spirit, discerned as the unity of the entire body." Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 139.

of Jesus and the community he creates. Any other kind of 'foundation' we can seek to make in a particular world is the footing for a bridge between that world and first-century Palestine."[42] One implication must not be missed: even the scriptures are for Yoder such a bridge: "let us remember that the early Christians lived without the texts in the New Testament. The efforts we make have to get back through the text, behind the text, to the nature of their early life, rather than assume that they were living around the New Testament the way we try to do."[43] Yoder has a point: if we assume, as the early Frei did, that the texts themselves, or features of the text like realistic narrative, are the *sine qua non* of the church's witness to Christ's identity, we have betrayed the actual history of the Christian movement just insofar as we have failed to remember the historical life of the church that gifted subsequent Christian communities with the scriptures. Yoder, here as elsewhere, pushes the historicist move all the way back to the beginning, refusing precisely the kind of protectionism Frei himself eventually came to criticize; the late Frei nicely describes his earlier problematic tendency as "the claim to the self-subsistence or self-referentiality of the text apart from any true world."[44] For Yoder, there never was a need to protect the text from the historical and hermeneutical flux in this way:

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[42] Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 80. Also: "Scriptures are appealed to as a critical instance in the controversies about reformation and change. The church is not built upon a canon. Scripture comes into being with status as 'canon' in midstream, as a believing community needs to illumine and adjudicate choices among alternative futures in order to be true to the common past" Yoder, *For the Nations*, 90. In "The Christological Objectivity of History," Robert Jenson makes his own defense of historical objectivity on strikingly similar grounds: "The anchoring object of historical knowledge is the body of Christ." Robert W. Jenson, "The Christological " in *Story Lines: Chapters on Thought, Word, and Deed: For Gabriel Fackre*, ed. Skye Gibson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 66. That a defense of historical objectivity might, however strangely, relate to Augustine's confession is supported by Jenson's appeal to Augustine on the very next page: "Augustine's 'Dear Lord, let me rightly say what happened' at the beginning of a history may doubtless often remain implicit, but a historiographical culture that does not assume it must be in permanent epistemic crisis." Equally interesting is Jenson's suggestion that "Our difficulties with objective historical knowledge result . . . from modernity's *mechanism*, which persists in 'the humanities' even as it is driven out from the sciences" (65). Yoder would agree, I think, although the force of his critique of Constantinianism is that the "mechanism" of modernity has more ancient theological roots. Augustine played his part in the birthing of "the mechanism" by imagining Christian rulers executing God's sovereign control over disobedience. If modernity is the story of sovereign subjectivity, the root of that error is arguably not in modern mistakes around subjectivity but in much earlier Christian mistakes around sovereignty.
[43] Yoder, *Preface to Theology:* .
[44] "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative," in Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 141.

> What we then find at the heart of our tradition is not some proposition, scriptural or promulgated otherwise, which we hold to be authoritative and to be exempted from the relativity of hermeneutical debate by virtue of its inspiredness. What we find at the origin is already a process of reaching back again to the origins, to the earliest memories of the event itself, confident that that testimony, however intimately integrated with the belief of the witnesses, is not a wax nose, and will serve to illuminate and sometimes adjudicate our present path.[45]

The scriptures, while not the foundation—not the "event itself"—are rather like the first floor of a house that rests on that foundation: "To ask how the Bible functions in theology is like asking how the ground floor functions in a house."[46] Yoder chooses his metaphor carefully, since the first floor, though not the foundation, offers structural support for the upper floors, even as it receives the most traffic and is a necessary through-point for the rest of the building.[47]

Yoder thus reinterprets the scriptures and their authority in historical terms: "Scripture comes on the scene not as a receptacle of all possible inspired truths, but rather as witness to the historical baseline of the communities' origins and thereby as link to the historicity of their Lord's past presence."[48] Thus redescribed, the scriptures provide authority by being the crucial resource for tying together our histories with the histories of Jesus and Israel. They aid in such linking operations by enabling contemporary Christians to see where they have gone astray. The scriptures thereby inspire a genuine awareness of particularity and an authentic historical criticism: "The critic whose criticism is rooted in the Bible, far from denying the risks, identifies them by putting the question of faithfulness in historical terms."[49]

Yoder thus leaves little room for doubt about his relationship to modern critical historiography: "the biblical realist position is only possible as a post-critical

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[45] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 70.
[46] Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 71.
[47] One need only read *Preface to Theology* to discover that, far from flattening tradition out to a single historicist "floor," Yoder's christological historicism supports a vast mansion of memories of the church's diverse readings of the Bible. Of course Yoder rules some readings out. However, this hardly distinguishes his critical historicism from other interpretive strategies.
[48] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 69.
[49] Ibid., 87.

phenomenon."[50] "It is a school of thought in which the scholarly methods of the liberal

epoch are all accepted. . . . It is based on full acceptance of the methods of modern

critical analysis."[51] "My entire work has been nourished by the agenda and the methods

of historical and literary critical scholarship."[52] "We owe it to the Enlightenment that we

have been enabled to rediscover the Bible's ancient Near Eastern specificity, both within

and over against its environment. . . . Thereby, Enlightenment strengthens, rather than

weakens the objectivity of the Bible over against our previous appropriation of it."[53]

These are not the claims of Yoder that get most widely cited in the secondary

literature, especially by those who align Yoder with postliberalism. Yet on my reading of

Yoder's "nonviolent Augustinianism," they fit together seamlessly with the rest of his

work. Removing the thread of Yoder's critical historicism from the other facets of his

work would, I believe, unravel the entire garment. I shall turn in a moment to Yoder's

alternative critique of modernity. Here I have emphasized his affirmations as a way of

highlighting the insufficiency of the postliberal affiliation. Yoder did not see in critical

historicism a threat to the preservation of Jesus's identity. He saw rather an opportunity

to summon contemporary Christians to an even greater appreciation of the contours of

that identity. In fact, as we have seen, it is for Yoder the otherness of Christ's historicity

that makes possible both a serious historicism and a disciplined orthodoxy.[54]

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[50] Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 79.
[51] Ibid., 128.
[52] Ibid., 51.
[53] Ibid., 124.
[54] A final supporting passage: "It was only when the reading of the Bible was freed by enlightenment's methodical doubt from the assumed orthodox identity between what it says and what we believe, that the readers could discover its internal diversity, its ancient Near Eastern specificity, first of all within its own environment but then also over against later theological systems and our present preaching patterns. Enlightenment enhances the objectivity of the Bible over against our previous appropriation of it. Combining evangelical Biblicism and the sobering discipline of enlightenment objectivity locates the structural meaning of a scriptural canon operating in a community confessing an historically rooted faith. 'Scripture' is now operationally defined as witness from/to a norming past, of such quality that the voices from that thus-recognized past can stand in judgment upon later betrayals of their story." Yoder, *For the Nations*, 82. In a footnote on the first sentence of this passage Yoder acknowledges the naïveté of certain deployments of a meant/means distinction even as he insists that the basic point of the distinction is crucial to "the original notion of canonical critique." The point should not be missed: certain contested historicist instruments are defended by Yoder as necessary to the church's ongoing reformation in light of scripture. To

This is why I find it important to emphasize Yoder's christological historicism. As we saw in the preceding chapter, Constantinianism names for Yoder those forms of Christianity that either assume or assert that the church can discern the meaning of history by means of some other light than that shed by Jesus's exemplary humanity. In yet another important essay in *The Priestly Kingdom*, "Anabaptists and History," Yoder— in a passage cited above in chapter 1—provides greater specificity to the critique by recalling that "the ecclesial Anabaptists stood with majority Protestantism (and some Catholics) in ascribing to the Incarnation a normative significance such that we do not hope to go past Christ either backward (to David or Adam) or forward (to a new, unaccountable 'Spirit' or kingdom."[55] Christological historicism is for Yoder but a gloss on the doctrine of the incarnation: Christ is the meaning of history.

The notion of refusing the temptation to "go past Christ" brings Yoder's christological historicism back into conversation with what I have described as Augustine's rejection of "the Eusebian after." Augustine saw clearly that pagan critiques of Christianity hit the mark all too forcefully if Christians naively identified God's will with the temporal success of a particular political order. His corrective was something very much like renouncing the temptation to transcend Christ's exemplary humility. The point here is to note how Yoder sees in the ecclesial Anabaptists' refusal a point of contact with a much older christocentrism. Yoder may not have made the connection with Augustine's own form of looping back to the exemplary humility of Christ, but that should not prevent his readers from doing so.

Above I spoke of the unity of history, dogma, and ethics in Yoder's defense of intrinsic textual meaning. I hope that unity is now visible. An "adequate" historical consciousness names for Yoder the ongoing, deeply ethical challenge that flows from the very center of Christian dogma—from the church's proclamation that Jesus of Nazareth

completely reject the validity of the meant/means distinction is to give up the possibility of "looping back," as there would then be no "back" to which one might loop.
[55] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 125.

is Messiah and Lord. An adequate historical consciousness is thus in Yoder's estimation integrally related to Christian ethical and political commitments. It is no doubt provocative to suggest that a Mennonite historian of the radical reformation pushed through the nineteenth-century debate about faith and history to a new horizon, transforming the concern for historicity into a position that avoided the limitations of the older oppositions.[56] Yet perhaps a very different voice, the voice of the late Dominican Herbert McCabe, will lend a measure of credibility to the suggestion that Yoder's "sympathy for modernity" enabled just such an achievement.

According to McCabe, the point of the doctrine of the incarnation is not that we can see the divinity of Christ as one more element in the life of Jesus, one more attribute on the biographical sheet. The point of the doctrine of the incarnation is, rather, to affirm the saving significance of the humanity: "The doctrine points me to where I can find God, in Jesus, and I can think of no more urgent motive for a careful, critical, historical study of the New Testament."[57] Here, McCabe makes precisely the dogmatic argument for the kind of historicism that Frei sought to chasten but which Yoder embraced. Whereas McCabe only offered hints and suggestions in this direction, Yoder placed this dogmatic link to critical historiography at the center of his life's work. Moreover, Yoder was willing to explicitly own the modern aspects of the commitment.

Above I asked if Frei provided a fresh answer to the faith and history question or if he rejected the question itself. In fairness to Frei, I should acknowledge that his later

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[56] Several of the writings of Yoder that deal most carefully with those historical rivalries that predate and follow the nineteenth-century faith and history debate were either published only as essays or post-humously in books like *To Hear the Word*. The exceptions are "But We Do See Jesus" and "The Authority of Tradition" in *The Priestly Kingdom*. Others important texts are "The Authority of Canon" in *To Hear the Word* and Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel."

In "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel" Yoder includes a footnote on the *magnum opus* of James Gustafson that demonstrates clearly how Yoder's historicist interpretation of the Christian tradition challenges those heirs of Troeltsch who presume historicity to be at odds with a serious commitment to ancient Christianity: "Gustafson points repeatedly [Yoder cites pages in both volumes of *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*] to the plurality of strands within scripture, and the plurality of modes of reading scriptures, as if that fact were somehow to refute the notion of historicist accountability. Only against the scholastic fundamentalist would that argument have any cogency. To posit univocality as a condition of coherence is an anti-historical hermeneutic." Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 300.
[57] Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (London: Chapman, 1987), 71–72.

work moved increasingly in the direction delineated by McCabe and Yoder. As observed above in chapter 1, Frei acknowledged in his important late essay, "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative," that his early approach had been too close to Anglo-American New Criticism in sealing the text off from the flux of history.[58] He notes that New Criticism has been shown by literary theorists to be nothing but a recasting of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation into a general hermeneutical theory: "Endowing the text with the stature of complete and authoritative embodiment of 'truth' in 'meaning', so that it is purely and objectively self-referential, is a literary equivalent of the Christian dogma of Jesus Christ as incarnate Son of God, the divine Word that is one with the bodied person it assumes."[59] Frei immediately brings the hammer down: "Here is a general theory about texts of which the paradigm case is not only in the first instance not textual but, more important, is itself the *basis* rather than merely an *instance* of the range as well as the cohesion of meaning and truth in terms of which is articulated."[60] Frei thus frankly acknowledges that classical christological dogma is about Jesus Christ, with only derivative implications for how Christians ought to think about scripture. Moreover, he goes on to assert that the meaning of the dogma, if held consistently, "is a matter of faith, and therefore of reason strictly in the mode of understanding."[61] He is moving clearly in the direction of Yoder and McCabe: the doctrine of the incarnation is a confession of faith in the priority of the human Jesus for the life of believers.[62]

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[58] Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, chapter 4, 117–52.
[59] Ibid., 141.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Craig Carter misreads Yoder on this point: "It is my contention that Yoder's historicism is thoroughgoing *except* at the crucial point of the incarnation and that this essentially Barthian methodological move is what often causes interpreters great confusion." Carter, *The Politics of the Cross*, 74, emphasis in original. For Carter, a thoroughgoing historicism would mean something like absolute relativism. Yoder, on the other hand, finds the concept of absolute relativism incoherent (see Yoder, "Absolute Relativism is an Oxymoron") and could thus not have entertained the possibility of a corresponding historicism. Moreover, as we have seen, Yoder finds the very particularity of Jesus to be not the exception to a thoroughgoing historicism but its basis. Every historicism, however thorough, gets its leverage from some historical location, and a historicism that denies its contingency is to that degree anti-historical. Yoder's claim is that the humanity of Jesus is the vulnerable historical basis for the most thoroughgoing historicism imaginable. In characterizing Yoder's historicism as exempting the incarnation, Carter presupposes precisely what

Nevertheless the insensitivity to Constantinian distortion remains in Frei's late essay. Frei speaks repeatedly of *the* tradition of Christian biblical interpretation in ways that occlude the conflicts within diverse Christian movements about the very nature of the faith. [63] The less-theory-driven account of the literal sense in Frei's later work is indeed an advance: he shows a great awareness of the fluidity of the church's readings of scripture over time. "[The literal sense] changes so much—actually it doesn't mean one thing—that I'm not at all sure that I want to try and give a specific definition. It can't be done."[64] Yet in drawing together a number of rules for discerning continuity or agreement amidst such fluctuation, Frei holds together two affirmations that on Yoder's reading have very demonstrably been in tension: first, "the literal meaning of the text is precisely that meaning which finds the greatest degree of agreement in the use of the text in the religious community. If there is agreement in that use, then take that to be the literal sense."[65] And second, "The point here is that the greatest degree of agreement on the applicability of the literal sense, whatever it might be, was in regard to the person of Jesus in the texts."

To confront the tension we need only inquire about the literal sense of Romans 13 and interrogate the relationship between traditional readings of *that* text and the ascriptive priority of Jesus. When we turn to the consensus of the majority Christian community on Romans 13 we encounter a tradition of reading to which serious christological objections can and have been made. We encounter, saliently enough, a family of Augustinianisms that, on the one hand, minimize or restrict the political implications of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, and, on the other hand, maximize an

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Yoder denies: an ahistorical ground to historical consciousness. The decisive essay is "But We Do See Jesus": Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, chapter 2.

[63] Get passages from *Types* and *Theology and Narrative*

[64] Frei, *Types*, 15.

[65] Ibid.

alternative doctrine of political authority.[66] Frei quite rightly emphasizes that the literal sense "applies primarily to the identification of Jesus as the *ascriptive* subject of the descriptions or stories told about and in relation to him."[67] He failed to see, however, just this point ought to have elicited a more complex treatment of "the" Christian tradition.

In sum, there is a sense in which Frei's postliberalism continued to be haunted by the legacy of Troeltsch. He writes, "I am persuaded that historical inquiry is a useful and necessary procedure but that theological reading is the reading of the *text*, and not the reading of a *source*, which is how historians read it."[68] The foregoing summary of Yoder's work suggests that even this modest distinction between theology and history is contestable on theological grounds, indeed on the very christological basis of Frei's mature work. Frei continues to rely on a contrast between traditioned reading (texts) and modern historical reading (sources), and thus remains haunted by Troeltsch's quest for an adequate historicism. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that even the mature Frei remained overly protectionist in his thinking about history. I turn now to showing why, according to Yoder, the problem with the many varieties of critical historicism is not that they treat the scriptural texts as sources, but that they fail to acknowledge their own contingency and thus remain blind to the ways in which they underwrite the sinful status quo.[69]

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[66] Which arguably then gets projected back onto Romans 13. There can be little doubt that Augustine's own writings, and their reception and repetition by subsequent generations, were central to the standard, and thus on Frei's terms "literal sense," reading of Romans 13 and related texts in Western Christendom. The argument, to be made at greater length in chapter 4 on the work of Oliver O'Donovan, is that Yoder's critique of the standard reading is itself a move within a basically Augustinian frame of reference and that Augustine was the first to demand such frank theological criticism of his own work.

[67] Frei, *Types*, 5.

[68] Ibid., 11.

[69] I have relied largely on Yoder for this critique of Frei, but I could have as easily turned to Augustine. Frei's preference for subject-manifestation over subject-alienation ontologies is open to the Augustinian rejoinder that it is precisely in light of the fleshly manifestation of God the Word that we are exposed as profoundly alienated selves. The "ghost in the machine" assumptions of modern epistemology retain a measure of truth, however problematic it might be to attempt to construct an epistemology on the basis of sinful effects (arguably the same problem that pervades "the dismal science," with its efforts to harness the "power" of self-interest and scarcity). Furthermore, Frei's opposition of a hermeneutics of suspicion to a hermeneutics of restoration is vulnerable to Augustine's entire witness. The restoration for Augustine can only be arrived

3.3 Nevertheless: The Constantinianism of Modernity

That brings us to the second reason to object to the characterization of Yoder as a postliberal: it obscures his genuinely alternative critique of modernity. Ironically, Yoder's misgivings with modernity often go hand in hand with his sympathy. That is to say, Yoder often faults modernity for failing to live up to its best insights. Sympathetic with the search for an adequate historicism, Yoder discerns in a number of distinctive modern philosophical and political habits evidence of a failure to take seriously the fragility of life in history. His arguments are never against modernity or liberalism per se; they are rather against various failures to live most fully into the genuine insights of modernity.[70]

But this is to rush past Yoder's much deeper objection. Yoder's most interesting critique of modernity is not that it fails in light of its own novel ideals, but that it uncritically and unawares incorporates the older ideals of Christendom. "One of the most regrettable outworkings of the Constantinian vision," Yoder laments in *For the Nations*, "is its success in 'brainwashing' its adversaries, so that even when they react against it they do so in the same terms."[71] Having already observed Yoder's historicist account of the Christian canon as the historical baseline of the *ekklesia's* memory of Jesus, we are in a position to appreciate how Yoder interprets Christendom as supplanting precisely the canonical function: "The common *historical baseline* from which we come to

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at—it can only be the fruit of—the suspicion. The opposition is thus false. What is needed is not a non-suspicious hermeneutics but rather a theologically accountable suspicion. The echoes with Yoder's view of critical historicism ought to be obvious.

[70] Something analogous could be said with regard to Augustine's critique of "Platonism." As mentioned in the second chapter, Augustine argues time and again that "the Platonists" have espied the destination off in the distance, but they remain ignorant about how to arrive there.

Here is a sample of Yoder demanding a greater historical consciousness than those who claim to possess it: "The vision of 'reading the Bible on its own terms' is not naïve, as if it were claiming that there could be any reading free of presuppositions. The point is rather that the presuppositions which are brought to a text can become, by virtue of sustained self-critical discipline, increasingly congruent with the intent of the text's author. Such self-critical discipline is not a given. It is a product of historical consciousness and of demanding post-scholastic study, moving beyond the early skeptical certainties of the 'historicists'." Just two paragraphs later Yoder again shows why he cannot be so easily aligned with Frei: "Although 'the text' can never be read 'purely,' with no contribution at all from the reader, it is possible to get much closer to the authorial intent, precisely by using the critical skills of the scholar." Yoder, *To Hear the Word*, 69.

[71] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 107.

[reflection about 'the public good'] is the legacy of 'Christendom,' according to which the authority to speak of the public good belonged to the king, who had that role by divine right and graciously shared some of it with his noble cousins of the aristocracy, and some of it with his noble cousins in the clergy."[72] Shaped by Constantinian assumptions about political legitimacy, the Renaissance and then the Enlightenment produced on Yoder's reading but new forms of "royalism":

> In this setting an intellectual elite claims to have in hand a sure set of criteria of reasonableness, which everyone would recognize, if everyone had the same educational privileges. . . . This is however still a variant of the 'royal' approach, in that the way to obtain the validation awarded by 'the people' was to lead them into the streets and seize power.[73]

Yoder also espies such latent royalism at work in modern theologies. In their aspiration to *guarantee* universal validation by escaping the messiness and vulnerability of historical particularity, the architects of modernity have done their part, however unwittingly, to prolong the Constantinian baseline.

> Since Augustine called on Caesar to bring the Donatists back into the fold, the ability to impose assent was assumed to be a mark of the truth. Only grudgingly have the leaders of Christendom yielded their ability to coerce. The constructive theologians of our academic establishment would be horrified by the notion of assent's being imposed *by the state*; yet their definitional moves still project the assumption that they want to be able so to restate the claims for belief that every reasonable reader will have no choice for belief.[74]

When Alasdair Macintyre reviewed Frei's *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, he located at least part of the power of Frei's argument in the way it historicized the modern critics under investigation. Macintyre's summary of Frei's argument is arguably *more* applicable to Yoder's critique of modern theologians, which in this instance would have to include Frei:

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[72] Ibid., 19.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel," 293. This strong objection to thinking and writing in such a way as to guarantee universal assent throws light on several places where Yoder insists that not following Jesus is a genuine possibility. One particularly eloquent passage comes at the conclusion of "But We Do See Jesus," and it demonstrates Yoder's abiding concern to hold together Christ's condescension and exaltation: "The real issue is not whether Jesus can make sense in a world far from Galilee, but whether—when he meets us in our world, as he does in fact—we want to follow him. We don't have to, as they didn't then. That we don't have to is the profoundest proof of his condescension, and thereby of his glory." Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 62.

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none of these [modern] critics perceived their own shared framework of interpretation. They did not see that the questions to which they gave rival and competing answers logically presupposed the acceptance of one particular set of disjunctive categories to the exclusion of other possible schemes of interpretation.[75]

For Yoder, of course, "the shared framework of interpretation" is what he calls Constantinianism, and the alternative is not "tradition constituted rationality" per se,[76] but rather the particular rationality displayed in the cruciform body politics of the Christian community. Yoder's alternative critique of modernity shares with Frei and Macintyre this exposure of a shared-yet-unacknowledged framework of interpretation, but it goes beyond them in arguing that this framework is not yet visible when the critical horizon is chiefly anti-modern or anti-liberal.

Consider, for example, Yoder's exposure of the peculiarly modern mythology around questions of power:

> Does not our culture's univocal commitment to power as the essence of human dignity, and to empowerment as the cure for indignity, set aside the possibility that a statement like the one Paul said he had heard from God, "my power is made perfect in weakness" (2Cor. 12:9, RSV), could ever be even understood, to say nothing of being accepted?. . . . The notion that "power" is univocal and unilinear is one of the mythical dimensions of modernity.[77]

It should be clear by now that Yoder traces this modern *mythos* about power and its effects back to their more ancient roots in the great Constantinian reversal explored in chapter 1. Like everything else in time, the wedding of piety to power undergoes historical transformation; Yoder does not believe there is a single Constantinian form. Yet he does believe family resemblances can be traced, down through the post-

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[75] MacIntyre, "*The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*: Interpretation of the Bible."

[76] See Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

[77] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 34. Attacks on "univocity" are popular among "radically orthodox" critics of modernity. However, it must be noted a) that they do not share Yoder's sense of the Contantinian roots of the problem, and b) that Yoder's critique of Constantinianism is arguably an alternative genealogy to the problems espied by Radical Orthodoxy. To the extent that they do not deal with Yoder—either to receive his contribution or to demonstrate where he has gone wrong—they risk inventing but a new form of the root problem. Interestingly enough, as we will explore at greater length in chapter 4, Augustine goes after the univocal conception of power: "If is the correction administered by a just God that has reduced a person to such weakness, there is a certain kind of strength that is simply vicious. Human beings displeased God by a show of that kind of strength, and therefore needed to be corrected by weakness; they displeased him by their pride, and therefore needed to be disciplined by humility. All proud people claim to be strong." Augustine *Expositions of the Psalms* 38.18 (Boulding 2:188–89).

Constantinian ages, in societies that have failed to disavow the Constantinian dream. In a classic essay, first delivered as a lecture in Buenos Aires in 1966, "Christ the Hope of the Word," Yoder identifies a whole series of Constantinianisms, adding the prefix "neo" to successive historical iterations of the Constantinian wedding of piety and power.[78] Each iteration is but "a new phase of unity or a new kind of unity between church and world."[79]

When Yoder does subject modern theological or political aspirations to critique, he spends most of his time tracing the Constantinian family ties. "The entire thought pattern which we recognize in various 'social contract' or 'original position' phrasings," Yoder declares in one of his anti-Rawlsian moments, "is a logical outworking of Constantinian assumptions. It asks, 'if we had the power to set up the situation so as to be as fair and as foolproof as possible, how would we set it up?' It assumes that it is in our power to state the rules of the game."[80] This critique of Rawls is thus a recognizable extension of his disavowal of Constantine.

Elsewhere, Yoder manages to combine a note of appreciation for modern political arrangements with a more fundamental note of rejection, using language that immediately calls to mind the metaphors of surface and depth explored above in chapter 2:

> Certainly a great originally of the great American system is disestablishment. The exercise of religion is constitutionally defended against infringement by governmental authority. . . . Does this not amount to a resolution of our problem? . . . We can better locate our present problem by observing how it is that this apparent step forward was on a more fundamental level a step

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[78] Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 148–82.

[79] Ibid., 150. Yoder was always willing to reckon the benefits of positions he does not like, even the benefits of Constantinianism. Consider the sentence that follows the one just quoted: "This unity has lost the worldwide character of the epoch of Constantine, yet the fusion of church and society is maintained." Much of the rhetorical power of Yoder's *Nevertheless: The Varieties of Religious Pacifism* comes from Yoder's reckoning of the benefits of twenty-some-odd varieties of pacifism just *after* he has already subjected each to serious theological criticism. This is of course the reason for the book's title. See John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless: The Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism*, Revised and expanded ed. (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1992).

[80] Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 169.

sideways: i.e., *an avoidance of the problem on its deeper level by means of a reformulation on the surface.*[81]

Moreover, Yoder's more expansive critique of modernity—expansive in the sense of extending our sense of what is problematic in modernity by showing it to be less novel and more traditional—enables him to address problems not touched upon by Frei and Macintyre, such as the rupture between Christianity and Judaism. Yoder's provocative revision of the history of "the Jewish-Christian schism"[82] is made possible by his alternative critique, and he frequently makes it clear that the contrast that interests him most is not pre-modern/post-modern or pre-critical/post-critical, but rather Jeremiah and Jesus/Christendom and its many children.

It is significant that Yoder thinks of the "great reversal" in Christian history as entailing a betrayal of the Jews. "God's pattern of Incarnation," wrote Yoder nearly a decade before *The Politics of Jesus*, "is that of Abraham, and not of Constantine."[83] In an essay penned still a decade earlier, Yoder recalls how the ancient Middle Eastern reliance on tribal deities, though rejected by the true prophets of Israel, was perpetuated by the false prophets, who, by "making God to be a handyman rather than a judge, thus inaugurated the line of those who seek to sanctify nationalism with the name of God."[84] From the beginning of his career to the end,[85] Yoder opposed anti-Jewish bias as much as christological betrayal. Indeed, for Yoder it would betray traces of the great reversal to construe these as unrelated phenomena.[86]

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[81] Ibid., 177.

[82] The posthumously published *Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* contains Yoder's most developed thoughts on the subject. However, one can find the basic outlines of the developed argument there throughout his earlier writings.

[83] Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 119, original in italics.

[84] Ibid., 68. Yoder makes much the same point two decades later in "The Disavowal of Constantine": "paganization . . . and establishment . . . cannot ultimately be thus separated since the notion of the sacral king or chieftain is itself a pagan concept of great power." Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 250.

[85] And beyond. See the posthumously published *Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*.

[86] As I have already suggested, Yoder left hints of this way of reading Jesus in continuity with diaspora Judaism across his early writings. He makes the case much more explicitly and forcefully in Yoder, *For the Nations*, especially chapter 3.

It is thus appropriate when approaching Yoder's account of Constantinianism to foreground his consistent effort to link the effacing of Jesus's particularity with the de-Judaizing streams of early Christian tradition. By rethinking Christianity's relationship to Judaism, and especially by integrating that concern with his analysis of the effects of an imperially established church, Yoder produced a trenchant counter-argument to those who trace the demise of robust Christian faith and practice to late medieval or early modern developments: Christianity's betrayal of the Jews—a culminating failure in modern Christianity—did not begin with Ockham or Descartes.[87]

Thus when Yoder critiques modernity, he often reaches back behind Christendom, and even behind early Christianity, to anticipatory voices in Israelite/Jewish tradition:

> There is in the Jeremiah vision no counterpart for our regretting the loss of the univocality of the age, which in Christendom stretched roughly from Eusebius to Hegel (but lingers on in philosophical foundationalism), when European intellectual elites could claim to prescribe one unified meaning system for the world. [Jeffrey] Stout does not say he bemoans the loss, yet the way he shapes the story signals a kind of wistfulness, as if the exercise of his profession had been more rewarding, or at least simpler, before somebody moved the landmarks.[88]

It must therefore be observed that Yoder's dogged insistence on the negative significance of Constantinianism was related to his aspiration to get to the bottom of anti-Judaism in the church. Just as I judged Frei's early appeal to the text in itself inadequate to the task of scriptural interpretation, so did Yoder judge critiques of modernity to be inadequate to the task of discerning where the church lost her way. Yoder located the unity of the Old and New Testaments in the common challenge of embodying the "peoplehood" of God. Yoder's Jesus is unavoidably Jewish, and the church's loss of contact with the identity of Jesus was for him more than a failure to read

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[87] "The two ancient turning points represented by Jeremiah and Constantine have become…the two most important marks outside the New Testament itself for clarifying what is at stake in the Christian faith. They are more basic than the more recent turns, which Western Christians call 'the Reformation' and 'the Enlightenment.' It is because of what those earlier changes meant that Reformation and Enlightenment have meaning." Ibid., 8.

[88] Ibid., 70–71.

texts rightly—he saw it as symptomatic of the church's loss of contact with the Jews and

their peculiar struggle to live the faith of Jeremiah under the conditions of *diaspora*. Thus

did Yoder gloss Constantinianism as a Christian form of the false prophesies of Israel.[89]

When Yoder spoke of Constantinianism as the most basic challenge confronting

contemporary Christianity,[90] I suggest that he spoke in historical terms, not logical or

exegetical ones.[91] In other words, Yoder's account of Constantinianism is not offered as

an alternative to, or a replacement for, an exegetical explication of sin, such as

Augustine's treatment of sin as pride. For Augustine, the biblical accounts reveal that

there is an element of pride in every sin—there is necessarily an element of undue self-

regard in every act of sinful disobedience.[92] Yoder on the other hand was historicizing

on a very large canvass. One must address the error of Constantinianism today, Yoder

suggested, because contemporary Christians stand within the streams of its historical

effects.[93] Constantinianism's "basicality" was thus for Yoder about its shaping power on

the contemporary Christian imagination, and while it may indeed be a new form of

older false prophesy, Yoder discerns distinctive traits in the way Constantinianism

undermined the gospel proclamation about Jesus and the "increasingly precise

definition of the nature of peoplehood"[94] that Jesus's life, death, and resurrection had

summoned forth. Israel's tradition had itself been one of growth and setback, prophetic

discernment of God's will and stubborn disobedience. Constantinianism for Yoder is the

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[89] Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 69.
[90] See John Howard Yoder, "The Unique Role of the Historic Peace Churches," *Brethren Life and Thought* 50, no. 3–4 (2005): 85. See also Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 129.
[91] Cf. Gerald W. Schlabach, "Deuteronomic or Constantinian: What Is the Most Basic Problem for Christian Social Ethics?," in *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and others (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).
[92] In passing I should note that I think Augustine's account of sin as pride can be defended against feminist theological critique. Genuine oppression removes agency from the oppressed, and on Augustinian grounds suspicion is thereby warranted for doubting, not whether a victim is prideful, but rather whether certain acts which look sinful in others are in fact *sin* in the one being victimized. This is to say: Augustine's account of sin as pride is directly related to his theology of the will, and it is to be doubted that any *theology* of liberation can ignore the cogency of his account of sinful willing.
[93] He thus speaks of the Constantinian transformation of Christianity as a series of "consciousness-changing events" and seeks to "identify their effects on our view of history." "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," in Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 138.
[94] Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 108.

name for a particular form of disobedience that was only possible after the coming of Christ, only after the reception of Christ's person and work by the early Christians.[95]

In sum, Yoder's genuinely alternative critique of modernity as a species of Constantinianism is an important part of his legacy that is arguably obscured whenever his work is characterized chiefly as postliberal.[96] I am not arguing against the observation of genuine affinities or commonalities. Yoder was unhappy with many of the features of modern liberal thought that inspired, and continue to inspire, postliberals. If Karl Barth was the great inspiration for postliberal theology, Yoder certainly drank from the same well. Moreover, if postliberalism represents an attempt in American theology to transcend the limitations of the protestant liberalism of the brothers Niebuhr, Yoder was indeed an intellectual brother-in-arms. Yet we miss Yoder's distinctive contribution to contemporary theology if we fail to appreciate the way he used his critique of Constantinianism to change the old questions and to raise new ones.

3.4 The Task of Theology

The third and final reason to resist too easy an identification of Yoder's work with postliberalism is that it obscures Yoder's historicist construal of the discipline of Christian theology, a construal not easily assimilable to the postliberal ideal of "absorbing the world."[97] One could in fact argue that the postliberal reception of Yoder

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[95] "The normativeness of Jesus, in other words, created the possibility that a new heresy could be identified over against it; namely, that of making Constantine, rather than Jesus, the norm of political humanity under God's sovereignty." John Howard Yoder, "Politics: Liberating Images of Christ," in *Imaging Christ: Politics, Art, Spirituality*, ed. Francis A. Eigo (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1991), 159.

[96] Yoder was convinced from very early on in his career that Constantinian assumptions were deeper than many other theological differences. "The church-society identification is a deeper matter than the differences between schools of theological thought." See "The Anabaptist Dissent: The Logic of the Place of the Disciple in Society," in Virgil Vogt, ed. *The Roots of Concern: Writings on Anabaptist Renewal 1952–1957* (Eugene, OR: Cascade,2008), 29–43, at 32.

[97] See Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 29–43. Williams's reflections are concentrated on the work of George Lindbeck, but one comment is relevant here: "I am both interested and perturbed by the *territorial* cast of the imagery used here—of a 'framework' within whose boundaries things—persons?—are to be 'inserted.' . . . The 'world of scripture', so far from being a clear and readily definable territory, is an *historical* world in which meanings are discovered and recovered in action and encounter" (29–30). See also Miroslav Volf's critical engagement

must obscure Yoder's distinctive historicist construal and performance of the task of theology, just in so far as the latter exposes the insufficiency of the former. Put in a more positive way, I want to suggest that Yoder's christologically mandated theological patience freed him up for a more constructive engagement with modernity, especially modern historicism, and that this engagement provided him with the resources for articulating a more supple, less protectionist account of the theological task. The challenge put before the theologian is, on Yoder's reading, not to trade a dominant and problematic language in one world for the allegedly pure or "traditional" language of another; rather, theology's task is to find a way to proclaim the good news about God's revolution in Christ Jesus in whatever language is at hand. Yoder believed, for example, that we should emulate the performance of John the Evangelist, whose proclamation about Jesus in terms of the *logos* of God demonstrates how he "requisitioned the intellectual property of the adversary. He takes terms which were meant to safeguard a too concrete presence of God, and uses them to affirm that presence."[98] Such a performance is inevitably risky, according to Yoder: "The danger is that we may adopt the language of our doubting audience in order to say what they want to hear. The test of faithfulness will be whether we can use the language of the crowd or the fad to say just the opposite."[99]

And yet as we have already seen, the risks undertaken in looping back to Jesus so as to proclaim the gospel in a new language are the very same risks that enable a future pregnant with possibility. There is in Yoder's view no way to celebrate the gospel without becoming vulnerable to such risks, for intrinsic to the good news Christians have received is that, in one of Yoder's most striking claims, the world is half of the

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with the metaphor of "absorption," in "Theology, Meaning, and Power: A Conversation with George Lindbeck on Theology and the Nature of Christian Difference," in Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, eds., *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals & Postliberals in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity,1996), 45–66.
[98] Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace*, 79.
[99] Ibid., 79–80.

reconciling event.[100] It follows that the world's contemporary and future languages bear within themselves resources for enlarging our sense of the fullness of the gospel, *and* that the gospel-already-received contains the resources for embracing and redeeming worlds-yet-to-be-encountered. Indeed, reconciliation is Yoder's name for this mutual enrichment. The gospel we already know mandates an openness to expansions of the same gospel's content. There is no way to "conserve" this gospel without hazarding the risks of transformation that attends any genuine encounter with a new world. The only way to be a "conservative evangelical" on Yoder's terms is to live a life of radical destabilization at the edge of the church's risky engagement with the world.[101]

My contention is that Yoder's appeals to objectivity and impartiality should be understood in light of this argument about theology's unsettling task. Yoder's peculiar historiography amounts to a performance of the task of theology thus construed, for he engages the enormously influential ideals of modern historicism in an effort to clarify and gain a hearing for the gospel. The engagement is, Yoder would insist, mutually enriching: our understanding of the gospel expands even as historicism is reconfigured. The theologian is enabled to press the concepts of historicism into the service, not of abstracting and securing the modern reader, but of something like the opposite: freeing the messiness of historical interpretation from the abstractions and security of the modern reader. For however much Yoder flirts with danger in speaking the language and embracing the ideals of modern historicism, he also presses the theological advantage by arguing that the concepts of objectivity and historicity, if they are to be

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[100] "The message cannot remain in the ghetto because the good news by its very nature is for and about the world. The good news is not information which will remain true even if people in a ghetto celebrate it only for themselves; it is about a community-building story for which the world beyond the ghetto is half of the reconciling event." Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 55.
[101] In a chapter, already cited, which critically engages Lindbeck's work, Rowan Williams provides an account remarkably similar to Yoder's of the mutually enriching way in which the gospel encounters the world. Consider this point about openness to future faithful proclamation: "At any point in its history, the Church needs both the confidence that it has a gospel to preach, and the ability to see that it cannot readily specify in advance how it will find words for preaching in particular new circumstances." Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 31. Again, the insights of theology and the philosophical work of Ludwig Wittgenstein seem to converge.

more than tools for safeguarding the status quo, entail nothing less than an eschatology: "Noneschatological analysis of history is unprotected against the dangers of subjectivism and opportunism and finishes by letting the sinful present situation be its own norm. History, from Abraham to Marx, demonstrates that significant action, for good or for evil, is accomplished by those whose present action is illuminated by an eschatological hope."[102]

Yoder's success in demonstrating the power of evangelical historicism problematizes, or at least complicates, claims about "the superiority of pre-critical exegesis."[103] The modifier "pre-critical" simply does not serve up a usable criterion for picking out faithful from false forms of exegesis amidst the great diversity of pre- and post-critical traditions. Yoder's careful unpacking of the heresy of Constantinianism forces the pre- or post-critical exegete to confront at least *these* questions about the pre-critical tradition: Can we really continue to construe as of secondary historical significance the transformation of the meaning of the gospel under establishment power? Is it really true that everything that plagues contemporary Christianity began to emerge in early modernity? Does modernity's hunger for explanatory power bear no relation at all to the wedding of universal piety with political power in the experience of Christendom? Yoder's critique of Constantinianism makes questions like these unavoidable. Finally, Yoder's own critical exegesis funds an astonishingly generous reading of the history of Christian theology. In *Preface to Theology*, Yoder arguably surpasses pre-critical exegetes in holding together and affirming a vast constellation of interpretations of the gospel, thereby demonstrating in another way the insufficiency of the pre-critical/post-critical contrast.

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[102] Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 75.
[103] Cf. David Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Precritical Exegesis," *Ex Auditu* 1, no. 1 (1985).

3.5 Conclusion

"Put as briefly as possible," writes Rowan Williams in his essay on "Historical Criticism and Sacred Text, "a doctrine of Scripture requires a doctrine of God."[104] The aim of this chapter has been to tease out how Yoder's christological historicism relates to his doctrine of Scripture, which in turn stems from his doctrine of God. Yoder's historicist take on scripture and the history of Christian doctrine is, on this reading, integrally related to his Christology, which of course is determinative of Yoder's "doctrine" of God. The invocation of Williams here is not incidental, as Williams is alone among contemporary theologians in combining a vision of a "difficult" theology remarkably similar to Yoder's with a profound appreciation for the legacy of St. Augustine. I therefore want to conclude this chapter by bringing my portrait of Yoder's historicism into conversation with Augustine's lasting legacy, once again with the assistance of Rowan Williams.

In introducing his remarkable "theological history" of Christian spirituality, *The Wound of Knowledge*, Williams writes:

> The problem was, is and always will be the Christian attitude to the historical order, the human past. By affirming that all 'meaning', every assertion about the significance of life and reality, must be judged by reference to a brief succession of contingent events in Palestine, Christianity—almost without realizing it— closed off the path to 'timeless truth'. That is to say, it becomes increasingly difficult in the Christian world to see the ultimately important human experience as an escape into the transcendent, a flight out of history and the flesh.[105]

To appreciate Williams's point about the interrelation of history and Christianity, one need only recall how, until quite recently, the events of history were located, or dated, in the Western world with respect to *anno domini*, "the year of our Lord." According to the

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[104] Rowan Williams, "Historical Criticism and Sacred Text," in *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom: Scripture and Theology*, ed. David F. Ford and Graham Stanton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

[105] Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), 1–2. According to Robert Jenson, this is what Barth learned from Wilhelm Herrmann. See Robert W. Jenson, "Karl Barth," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David F. Ford (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 25–26. "If all assertions about God—metaphysical propositions in their apparent form—are in fact meaningful only as value judgments, and if Christians make their value judgments in converse with Jesus, then it is only in converse with Jesus that Christians can speak meaningfully about God. Barth learned this argument from Wilhelm Herrmann, and retained its conclusion even as he modified its premises."

scholarly conventions of Christendom, things happened, nations came and went, wars were fought, kings reigned, philosophers made their contributions, *before or after* the coming of Christ. As an axis around which circled the flux of time, stood the solid center—the advent of God in Jesus Christ. The incarnation was considered the fixed reference point in relation to which everything else was positioned and measured. In fact, fixing things in relation to that "brief succession of events in Palestine" arguably served to break the old habit of construing the flux in terms of cycles and repetitions. Time was rather stretched out from the shape of a circle or spiral into something more like a line. Thus the doctrine of the incarnation meant that the coming of Christ was understood more as mid-point or hinge of history than axis; and the confession that "Christ would come again" was, rather than a reaffirmation of the eternally cyclical character of being, the ultimate expression of the stretching of time. The enfleshment of the Word of God in Jesus of Nazareth was considered to be the unrepeatable key to the meaning of all time. To await the coming of Christ was to look forward to a revolutionary consummation—an end—to history, and thus it also entailed a disavowal of perpetual recurrence.

We in the postmodern West—we of the Contemporary Era—are ostensibly *after* the time in which "the year of our Lord" was part of the civilizational consensus that underwrote such a dating scheme. Rowan Williams would no doubt agree that we are in a real sense *after* Christendom. Yet his remarks about the importance of "the historical order" for Christianity hint at more pervasive implications. Williams is suggesting continuity between the beginnings of Christian faith and matters that continue to command contemporary, secular interest—matters such as the difficulties of historicity, contingency, and particularity. Williams is suggesting, I think, that the very impulse to discern the order in history—to map it all out with dates on a single timeline, to understand one phenomenon by virtue of its relation to others, to locate ourselves *after* Christendom (to wit, the impulse *to historicize*)—is but an echo of Christianity's peculiar

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demand to organize everything—time, space, memory—in relationship to the history of the man Jesus. Williams invokes a claim by Henri de Lubac in his book *Why Study the Past?: The Quest for the Historical Church*: "Christianity is not one of the great things of history; history is one of the great things of Christianity."[106]

Interestingly, Williams traces the explosive impetus to the Christian transformation of time to the crucifixion, rather than the birth of Jesus, as my example from the Christendom practice of dating might have suggested. Williams insists:

> The final control and measure and irritant in Christian speech remains the cross: the execution of Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity is born out of struggle because it is born from men and women faced with the paradox of God's purpose made flesh in a dead and condemned man. Without the cross there would be no New Testament. . . . What is at issue is that the first Christians were painfully aware that God's chosen one and God's chosen people had come into open and tragic conflict: that God seemed to be set against God. If God is to be seen at work here, he is indeed a strange God, a hidden God, who does not uncover his will in a straight line of development, but fully enters into a world of confusion and ambiguity and works in contradictions. . . .[107]

Echoes of the themes of chapters 1 and 2 are, I hope, easy enough to hear. For Williams, the Christian life is one of struggle, not least *hermeneutical* struggle, because the gift of God's self in the death of his Son Jesus graciously destabilizes human certainty and forces us to come to terms with the ambiguities of life and the complexities of historical meaning. That God's will does not run in a straight and predictable line is one of the crucial upshots of the crucifixion of Jesus, an upshot I have argued both Yoder and Augustine aim to take utterly seriously.

Surely the story of the emergence of historicism is complex, with many lines of influence. Nevertheless, what Williams describes as the closure of the path to timeless truths—an implication of the historicizing imperative to interpret all phenomena contextually—cannot itself be a timeless truth. Historicism is itself intelligible only in terms of its contingent emergence in history. In other words, if historicism is to be taken

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[106] As cited by Williams, *Why Study the Past?* , 6.
[107] Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, 3–4.

seriously, it must itself be historicized.[108] Whatever the relationship between the history of Christianity and modern historicism, it is relevant to my present concern that Williams includes a chapter on Augustine in *The Wound of Knowledge*. He writes there, "Augustine's greatest legacy to Christian spirituality is the affirmation that the life of grace can include not only moral struggle and spiritual darkness, but also an awareness of the radically *conditioned* character of human behaviour."[109] Williams is here invoking Augustine's sensitivity—as we have seen, everywhere apparent in *Confessions*, *City of God*, and *De Trinitate*—to the time-bound character of the life of grace. In chapter 2, I showed in greater detail that for Augustine it is only by being humbled by the humility of Christ that we can be turned inside-out and set upon the path of confession, the doxological way of foraging into the complex depths of human stories—be they individual/psychological or social/political, local or global.

Yet Williams helps to make clear something that Yoder seems largely to presume, and it is a point that ought to make those sympathetic with Yoder receptive to the more metaphysical and speculative moments in St. Augustine: "If Jesus is *constitutive* for Christian language about God and for the present reality of the believer's relation to God, in such a way that what is said, done, and suffered is strictly unintelligible without continuing reference to Jesus in a more than historically explicatory way," Williams writes, and in a manner Yoder would have no doubt affirmed, "doctrine will be an attempt to do justice to the way in which the narrative and the continuing presence . . . of Jesus is held actively to shape present horizons, in judgement and grace."[110] "Continuing reference to Jesus" sounds very much like Yoder's looping back; notice, however, that doctrine, in Williams's view, tries to account for—to "do justice to"—this phenomenon of perpetual recurrence to Jesus, and not the other way around. What is it

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[108] See Arne Rasmussen's chapter in Hauerwas and others, eds., *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*, 213-48. Also, Sider, ""To See History Doxologically"", chapter 2, 82–133.
[109] Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, 86, emphasis in original.
[110] Rowan Williams, *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 295.

about this man that makes such perpetual recurrence, such repeated instances of looping back, both possible and rewarding?

Nothing that Williams says here contradicts Yoder's own practice of giving critical leverage to the life of Jesus. Williams makes the claim just cited about the constitutive nature of the life of Jesus in the context of an essay honoring and critiquing the account of doctrinal criticism advanced by the late Maurice Wiles. Williams's concern is that Wiles tends in the direction of construing the life of Jesus as merely "illustrative" of truths known by other means, thereby undercutting the priority of *krisis* over *Kritik*:

> The disagreement is not over whether doctrinal utterances are or are not to be received uncritically, but over whether any kind of critical method can settle the legitimacy of the distinctively *doctrinal* enterprise itself as generally conceived by Christians, an enterprise resting as it does on the conviction, variously and often very confusedly articulated in our primary texts, that our world of speech and corporate life has been comprehensively remade, so that new conceptualities are brought to birth. *Kritik* can look hard at those conceptualities, with a wide variety of suspicions; but not all Wiles's reasoned eloquence should persuade us that it is in a position to disallow the underlying unsettlement of our thought: the question, "What is it that is true of Jesus of Nazareth that would make some sense of the Church's commitment to new imaginings of God and humanity and of the possibility of new relation to God and humanity?"[111]

Yoder's christological historicism is no stranger to the unsettling of history unleashed by Jesus. He was certainly interested in the manifold ways in which the life of Jesus, God's "original revolution" as he put it, generates "new imaginings" and "new conceptualities" in the life of the church in time. But Yoder ought to have been more willing, at least as willing as Rowan Williams, to consider the relation between his radical historicism and the classical Christian metaphysical tradition, for the latter represents an attempt to answer Williams's question: What is it about Jesus that makes this perpetual recurrence possible, productive, even obligatory? It is worth at least considering the degree to which Yoder's rejection of the Eusebian "after" turns on the metaphysical affirmation of the christological "before" found so clearly in Augustine:

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[111] Ibid.

"He is 'the Beginning' for us in the sense that if he were not abidingly the same, we should have nowhere to return after going astray. When we turn back from our errant ways it is by acknowledging the truth that we turn back, and he it is who teaches us to acknowledge it, because he is 'the Beginning' who speaks to us."[112]

I do not mean to suggest that Yoder was shy of metaphysics. The idea that the cross is natural,[113] or that those who bear crosses work with the grain of the universe,[114] or that the relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is a relationship not of cause and effect but of cross and resurrection[115]—these are strongly metaphysical claims. The concluding thought to this chapter, therefore, is not that Yoder should have added metaphysical speculation to his christological historicism; Yoder did that all the time, or, better yet, robust metaphysical claims were intrinsic to the christological historicism. The "return of metaphysics" in contemporary philosophy and theology is an odd thing to consider in relation to Yoder, for from his own radically historicist theology metaphysics never departed.

The concluding point is rather that Yoder, had he taken the time to look, might have noticed a kindred spirit in Augustine's peculiar inflection of Neoplatonist metaphysics through God's turning of the world upside-down and inside-out in Jesus Christ. More than that, Yoder might have elaborated on the fact that the sort of christological historicism he was advancing was bound up in a relationship of mutual implication with the metaphysics of the classical tradition.

This last point requires explication, and here recent discussions of the "return of metaphysics" are instructive. In his very lucid, if by necessity brief, presentation on "The Return of Metaphysics" at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, John Betz laid out what he sees as the three contemporary metaphysical

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[112] Augustine *Confessions* 11.8.10.
[113] Yoder, *For the Nations*, 212.
[114] Yoder, "Armaments and Eschatology," 58.
[115] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 232.

options in theology now that the Enlightenment pretension to ban metaphysics has been

exposed and metaphysical reflection has returned in earnest:

> (1) either the traditional position of the Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican
> churches; or (2) the traditional Lutheran and Reformed positions (allowing for a
> more liberal attitude toward natural theology on the part of Calvin); or (3), a
> modern permutation of the Lutheran-Reformed position, namely, the possibility
> of a specifically *theological* metaphysics, which takes God's self-revelation in
> Christ as a starting point of metaphysical speculation.[116]

Betz critiques the last two options as leading dangerously in the direction of idolatrous

and/or fictive accounts of God, and he argues forcefully for the contemporary retrieval

of the first option, which he paraphrases as "metaphysics as a prolegomena, in which

case metaphysics is perfected, not destroyed (*non destruit*)."[117]

Betz names Karl Barth, Eberhard Jüngel, and Robert Jenson under the third

option, and he suggests that the theological inspiration for a specifically *theological*

metaphysics flows from a Lutheran worry that traditional *prolegomenal* metaphysics

amounts to a "'theology of glory' that would attempt to arrive at the divine or

predetermine what can be said of the divine—and of the relation between God and

creation—independently of God's self-revelation in Christ."[118] However, the *theological*

metaphysical option has its own problems, in that, once we head down that path,

> we soon find ourselves talking about a God who is not truly God—or at least
> what anyone means by God—but instead something more like a mythological
> hero who encounters and overcomes nothing or, what is perhaps worse, a
> heavenly existentialist who is somehow unsure about his being and finds himself
> from eternity in the position of having to make decisions about it—even if this
> decision is expressed so piously as the decision to be the God of Jesus Christ.[119]

Why does this follow? Because a doctrine of the incarnation without a prolegomenal

metaphysics "threatens to become mere mythology. . . . to become utterly fanciful, the

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[116] John Betz, "The Return of Metaphysics," (2008), paragraph 8. I am grateful to Prof. Betz for sharing a copy of his remarks with me. It was in hearing them delivered that I finalized my thoughts for this chapter. Nothing in what follows should be taken as a criticism of Betz's position. With only twenty minutes to deliver a paper, Betz's presentation was more of a sketch than a considered argument. I use Betz's sketch as a springboard and not as a target.
[117] Ibid., paragraph 9.
[118] Ibid., paragraph 4.
[119] Ibid., paragraph 10.

stuff of poets—and so too Christ's death and resurrection (which would be indistinguishable from pagan myths.)"[120]

Betz did not have space in his brief panel paper to fill out his typology, nor to substantiate his particular reading of the theologians he named; nor is this the space to do so, or to evaluate Betz's brief characterizations of "Lutheran" theological metaphysics. I want rather to conclude this chapter by leveraging Betz's way of framing the issues, yet in order to move to a rather different conclusion. I do so because Yoder looks to be a theologian of the third type, the one that Betz is most eager to see abandoned for the first option.

The first thing worth emphasizing is that, at least in Western Christendom, the original critic of a "theology of glory" was not Martin Luther but St. Augustine. *City of God* is a *tour de force* of "glory criticism," and as we have already seen, the critique of pagan efforts to secure divinity apart from the humility of Christ is present throughout the corpus of Augustine's mature writings. However, my interpretation of these writings and the critiques of pagan glory contained therein, supplied in chapter 2, makes it difficult to entertain the notion that Augustine did his metaphysics prolegomenally. If, as I argued, the doctrine of the Trinity in Augustine's thought hangs entirely upon the temporal mission of the Son, then metaphysics cannot be prolegomenal in any simple way. Would we even have the Christian doctrine of God if theologians like Augustine knew the answers to the "questions about being *qua* being, and the ground and end of nature" *prior* to reflection about revelation—prior to wrestling with the specificity of God's redemption of the world in Christ? The epigraph to this chapter encapsulates Augustine's refusal to make the choice between "classical metaphysics," on the one hand, and the particularities of the revelation of God's Word, on the other.

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[120] Ibid., paragraph 17.

Yet surely Betz is right: neither would we have the Christian doctrine of God if the particularities of Christian revelation were reflected upon independently of, or with indifference to, the questions of classical metaphysics. Again, the epigraph displays the fruit of holding the particularities of revelation together with the metaphysical challenge: the Word of God in Christ may be reliably turned to for our correction, for the this is the Word that was "in the Beginning," and in such way that it is abidingly the same.

Where does this leave Yoder? I suggest that we read Yoder as a radicalized Augustinian. Where Augustine exposes pagan narratives of glory and opposes them with the humility of Christ, Yoder turns the critique of glory back on the Church, exposing the Constantinian "glory" of imperial Christianity and opposing it with the cruciform politics of Jesus. Yoder's christological historicism should be read as flowing from nothing less than the metaphysical confidence of Augustine: "When we turn back from our errant ways it is by acknowledging the truth that we turn back, and he it is who teaches us to acknowledge it, because he is 'the Beginning' who speaks to us."[121] Yoder is Augustine radicalized, yet not for the sake of being edgy, but rather for the sake of keeping faith with the Root to which we should always return: the Cruciform Word, spoken to us by God in the power of his Spirit, from eternity. In other words, Yoder would have us recognize that only a metaphysics inflected by the revelation of God's power in the weakness of Jesus can avoid the temptations of a theology of glory. The claim that the cross is natural, that those who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe, and so forth: far from entailing a rejection of the classical metaphysical tradition, these claims represent its revolutionary transformation.

And with "revolutionary transformation," I have anticipated the final chapter. The metaphysical challenge raised by Betz can also be put in terms of the question of the

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[121] Augustine *Confessions* 11.8.10.

continuity of nature and grace, or the continuity of creation and redemption. As we will see in chapter 4, this challenge has significant implications for contemporary political theology. Oliver O'Donovan places a demand for continuity at the heart of his work, and engaging O'Donovan's work will be the final occasion for demonstrating the superior promise and power of Yoder's nonviolent Augustinianism.

4. Outer

But the hearts of mortals, perverse and contrary as they are, think that human life is happy . . . if massive theaters are being constructed—while the foundations of virtue are being undermined. . . . If God allows that sort of thing to flourish, it shows that he is seriously displeased. *By letting it go unpunished he inflicts a more savage punishment.* **. . . But for the cross of Christ, where would the dreadful torrent of humanity's wickedness have carried us? . . . By grasping this solid support, we could steady ourselves, and avoid being snatched away and engulfed by the immense whirlpool of persuasion, of compulsion to evil, that this world contains.**
—Augustine, letter to Mercellinus[1]

4.1 Introduction

"Our minds should remain open," Yoder once insisted, "to the possible rational or biblical arguments of those who might claim that the attainment of a privileged social position by the church in the fourth century called for changes in morals, ecclesiology, and eschatology; thus far it must be admitted that clear and cogent arguments for this have not been brought."[2]

Or have they? In the present chapter I attempt to raise the theological bar on my initial efforts to harmonize the political theologies of Augustine and Yoder by taking up the extraordinary work of Oliver O'Donovan, arguably the preeminent English political theologian of our time.[3] For it must at once be admitted that O'Donovan's appreciative reading of the political significance of Christendom represents a genuine alternative to Yoder's pacifism of the messianic community. Moreover, O'Donovan's political theology is much more openly indebted to Augustine, a fact which raises questions about my effort to construe Yoder as an intriguing theological relative of the Latin Father. In short, in Oliver O'Donovan we find a most worthy and challenging adversary

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[1] See Augustine, "Letter 138 to Marcellinus," in Atkins and Dodaro, eds., *Political Writings*, 38, 40, emphasis mine.
[2] I have lost track of the source for this passage from Yoder.
[3] Travis Kroeker has written two essays that overlap with the themes of this dissertation in general, and this chapter in particular. See Kroeker, "Is a Messianic Political Ethic Possible?.", P. Travis Kroeker, "Why O'donovan's Christendom Is Not Constantinian and Yoder's Voluntariety Is Not Hobbesian: A Debate in Theological Politics Re-Defined," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 20 (2000).

to the theological option I am seeking to keep open—namely, the possibility of receiving the work of John Howard Yoder as a radical form of Augustinianism.

O'Donovan's work in moral and political theology is among the most interesting to have appeared in English in a generation. In *Resurrection and Moral Order* (1986; revised ed. 1994),[4] *The Desire of Nations* (1996),[5] and *The Ways of Judgment* (2005),[6] O'Donovan has offered a trilogy on theological ethics, political theology, and political ethics. One can scarcely exaggerate the significance of the achievement. The arguments of the three volumes are as tightly argued and as fascinatingly interrelated as they are open and evolving. O'Donovan always manages to be at once predictable and surprising.[7] His three major works have, moreover, been supplemented by an ever-expanding group of important and closely related materials, the most important being *Common Objects of Love* (2004),[8] *The Just War Revisited* (2003),[9] *From Irenaeus to Grotius* (1999),[10] and *Bonds of Imperfection* (2004),[11] the latter two volumes co-edited with Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, containing essays and source materials designed to complement the systematic argument of the trilogy. Taken together, O'Donovan's writings constitute a formidable body of work that deserves the careful attention of anyone interested in the ethical and political significance of Christianity.

But there is another reason to take this body of work into consideration here. O'Donovan has turned out to be that rarest of birds: a contemporary theologian of

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[4] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

[5] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[6] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures, 2003* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

[7] An admirable combination of traits demonstrated again recently in Oliver O'Donovan, *Church in Crisis: The Gay Controversy and the Anglican Communion* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008). It took the witty insight of John Milbank to capture O'Donovan's distinctive intellectual style. In his endorsement of *Church in Crisis*, Milbank noted O'Donovan's "tones of characteristically elusive profundity."

[8] Oliver O'Donovan, *Common Objects of Love: Moral Reflection and the Shaping of Community : The 2001 Stob Lectures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

[9] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Just War Revisited*, Current Issues in Theology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[10] Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought, 100–1625* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[11] Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

international renown who is both profoundly engaged with the classical thinkers of Christendom *and* willing to engage in Yoder in print. In a context in which most theological ethicists and political theologians simply avoid Yoder and his robust brief for the normative status of nonviolence,[12] O'Donovan's published remarks on Yoder are refreshing: they help to start a conversation long overdue.

As the reader will discover in what follows, I find O'Donovan's critical engagement with Yoder deeply unsatisfying. Yet my disappointment with O'Donovan's critique stems in large part from the fact that so much of O'Donovan's work is reminiscent of Yoder's. There are a great many commonalities with Yoder that, if they have been noticed by O'Donovan, are simply passed over in silence in the course of his dismissal of Yoder's position. Aside from O'Donovan's embrace of the use of force by Christians, his theopolitical instincts are in many places indistinguishable from Yoder's. Indeed, I suspect O'Donovan found it necessary to address Yoder in light of his awareness of their deep agreements.[13] O'Donovan seems to recognize that Yoder operates on common terrain, and he has the scholarly honesty to venture a much more modest interpretation of their disagreements than the curt and superficial dismissal by James Turner Johnson, which I addressed in chapter 2.[14] It is also worth noting, in light

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[12] This is true even of people who are largely sympathetic with Yoder's project. For example, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, a volume co-edited by one of Stanley Hauerwas's students, William T. Cavanaugh, contains no chapter dedicated to Yoder, even though his influence has already been considerable and will arguably surpass several of the other theologians under consideration. See Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004). It is also true of Rowan Williams, whose "difficult gospel" contains, as I have already indicated by way of several citations of Williams's work, many affinities with Yoder's theology. However, to my knowledge Williams never deals directly with Yoder's writings.

[13] One such point of commonality is noted by Stanley Hauerwas and James Fodor: "Because [O'Donovan] refuses the sequestering of the theological into the transcendental offered by modern political arrangements, his political theology is unreservedly scriptural in its content and orientation. Scripture provides the narrative for the church to read rightly the world in which we live. . . . In spite of their differences, O'Donovan and John Howard Yoder are allies in this last respect, since unlike most contemporary theologians they think Scripture matters." See "Remaining in Babylon: Oliver O'Donovan's Defense of Christendom," in Stanley Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century Theology and Philosophy*, Radical Traditions (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), 199–224, at 00.

[14] O'Donovan's decision to engage Yoder at the exegetical level is further evidence of the weakness of James Turner Johnson's attempt to preempt dialogue between Yoderians and Augustinians before it can get going. As we will see, O'Donovan believes Yoder's exegetical conclusions about the relationship between Christian discipleship and coercive power is untenable, which is at least an acknowledgement that these two political

of my account of Yoder's sympathy for modernity, that O'Donovan is not among the

orthodox despisers of political liberalism. He offers a critical defense of the liberal

political project in light of the gospel—an effort that, to a remarkable degree, was

undertaken by Yoder himself.[15] Neither Yoder nor O'Donovan sets his sights on

liberalism as the primary obstacle to be overcome in contemporary theology.[16]

As I have said, I find O'Donovan's account finally lacking. His direct criticisms of

Yoder are among the least satisfying portions of his work. Nevertheless O'Donovan's

published criticisms provide an occasion for clarifying why they fail and for producing

what I hope to be a better reading of the difference. At the end of the day, Yoder and

O'Donovan—and indeed Yoder and Augustine[17]—clearly disagree about the

compatibility of violence with the Christian life. My aim in this chapter is to show how

Oliver O'Donovan and John Howard Yoder could share so much while simultaneously

differing on a matter of such significance. O'Donovan is as invested in the Christian

transformation of the world's politics in and through creative Christian involvement in

violence as Yoder was invested in the Christian transformation of the world's violence in

and through the pacifism of the messianic community. I will argue through to an ironic

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theologies are working at common problems. Johnson tries to avoid such an engagement entirely on dubious methodological grounds.

[15] See, for example, Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 151–71. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that Yoder's theological defense of political liberalism is the same as O'Donovan's. Their different readings of Romans 13 are certainly on display in their divergent appreciations for democratic governance. Yoder is always interested in the ways in which the sword-bearers of any age are held in check: "Of all the forms of oligarchy, democracy is the least oppressive, since it provides the strongest language of justification and therefore of critique which the subjects may use to mitigate its oppressiveness." Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 159. O'Donovan's appreciation for any political theory will flow from his essentialist account of government-as-judgment, and O'Donovan is unlike Yoder in worrying that government could be too lenient, or bear the sword to lightly. Consider the following question (about Augustine no less!), which stems from reflections on bishops role in seeking lenience from civil magistrates: "Might the wholesome dialectic of terror and mercy collapse if pastoral authorities were too insistent and magistrates too obliging? Might the essential function of deterrence be left with too little support in actual practice?" O'Donovan and O'Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius*, 109.

[16] This is generally true when the works of the two authors are considered in their entirety. However, O'Donovan is exercised by liberal theological challenges a great deal more than was John Howard Yoder. The latter's critique of Constantinianism frees him up to be both more appreciative of modernity's eclipse of Christendom and more interested in interpreting modernity's weaknesses as instantiations of older Constantinian desires. There is for Yoder a hunger for power in modern political theory and theology that is anything but modern.

[17] I remind the reader of my earlier argument that *contesting* Augustine is the mark of any serious Augustinianism.

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conclusion—namely, that when it comes to evaluating this difference between Yoder and O'Donovan, Yoder has the upper-Augustinian hand. O'Donovan's construal of his difference with Yoder hides from the reader how O'Donovan actually departs from Augustine on a number of key questions pertaining to the politics of Christian discipleship. I view these departures as movements away from the best of Augustine, and thus not, as I believe is the case with Yoder's disagreements with Augustine, a form of constructive internal criticism. Moreover, Yoder's position could be pressed—indeed already was, and repeatedly so—in O'Donovan's own terms: that is to say, on the basis of divine judgment, the renewal of the created moral order, a political theology inherited from Israel that is *for the nations*, and so forth. The yawning gap that does exist between Yoder and O'Donovan is revealed by a rather narrow exegetical question. What is the proper Christian relation to the "agent of God's wrath" spoken of by the apostle Paul in Romans 13? O'Donovan and Yoder read this text and answer this question quite differently, and it is in Yoder's reading and answer, and not O'Donovan's, that I suggest we encounter more profoundly Augustinian intuitions.

4.2 The Concluding Lesson of The Problem of Self-Love

4.2.1 Establishing the Augustinian Framework

No thread of concern runs through O'Donovan's rich tapestry of writings more prominently than the relation between human action and God's redemption of creation in Christ.[18] A concern for human beings as moral agents whose activity in the world is

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[18] "The principle orientations of [*Resurrection and Moral Order*] are sketched out in the first part. Purposeful action is determined by what is true about the world into which we act." O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, ix. "If [the attempt of the essays to manifest the older theo-political tradition's relevance] is at all successful, it alters the horizons of present political understanding and opens up the possibilities for action." O'Donovan and O'Donovan, *Bonds*. "Authority is 'the objective correlate of freedom'. That is to say, it evokes free action, and makes free action intelligible." O'Donovan, *Desire*, 30. "To arm you against the occasional suspicion that your guide has lost his way, you should have an overall compass-bearing, and this is given by the title, *Common Objects of Love*. It is the question of what unifies a multitude of human agents into a community of action and experience sustained over time." O'Donovan, *Common Objects*, 1. "Human action is always subject to limits of that make it fall short of its intellectual conception, and the action of political authorities, despite the illusion of being able to transcend limits, is peculiarly subject to them." O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures, 2003*, 29.

meaningful pervades all of O'Donovan's work. He is committed everywhere to the proposition that God's salvation of the world in Christ Jesus renews the intelligibility of human action.[19] Yet this persistent interest is framed and animated by an even more basic theological commitment—the commitment that I take to be the concluding lesson of O'Donovan's first book, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine*.[20] This Augustinian lesson arguably lies at the heart of everything O'Donovan has done. Since it is at the same time this Augustinian lesson that I will argue is undermined by O'Donovan's moral-theological embrace of some forms of violence, we would do well to carefully attend to it.

Problem of Self-Love, O'Donovan's revised dissertation, is at first glance a rather narrowly focused treatise. It takes up the thought of Augustine so as to elucidate a paradox in the Christian tradition. The New Testament teaches, on the one hand, that whoever seeks to save her life will lose it and, on the other, that whoever would inherit the kingdom must love her neighbor as herself. Does not the first instruction denounce self-love and the second require it? Is there or is there not a place for love of self in the Christian gospel?

O'Donovan provides a rich reading of Augustine's treatment of this "problem" throughout his massive body of work, before turning in a concluding chapter to prominent readings of Augustine's theology that emerged in the early-twentieth-century writings of Lutheran scholars Karl Holl and Anders Nygren. The Lutheran positions advance an evangelical critique of Augustine's erotic theology. Holl and Nygren, O'Donovan explains, are unhappy with Augustine's attempt to hold together what they take to be incompatible interests. Augustine, they protest, tries to think of the Christian

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[19] Yoder was no less concerned to supply a theological account of intelligible action: "That action is right which fits the space of the Kingdom to come." Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 136. And: "the criterion most apt for validating a disposition, a decision, an action, is not the predictable success before it but the resurrection behind it, not manipulation but praise." Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 137–38.
[20] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980). Hereafter referred to as *Problem of Self-Love.*

life in terms of *eros* and *agape*, happiness and self-denial, Plato and Paul. This effort is judged by the Lutheran critics to fail. Augustine did not adequately appreciate, according to Holl and Nygren, just how the Pauline gospel preempts any such combinations.

O'Donovan makes quick work of getting to the metaphysical heart of the matter. He argues that Augustine's eudaemonism, together with his provocatively erotic theology, flows from a prior theological commitment to the continuity of creation and redemption. Augustine's eudaemonist affirmation of immanent teleology represents, according to O'Donovan, not a foreign disruption of Pauline theology by Platonism or Greek metaphysics, but rather a robust doctrine of creation—one that refuses to think of redemption as an alien invasion of nature by grace. O'Donovan believes that the stakes of this debate between Augustine and his critics could not be higher. It is in fact the concluding lesson of *Problem of Self-Love* that Augustine's position is the authentic Christian understanding of the relation between creation and redemption. The relevance of this conclusion to O'Donovan's larger project and his quarrel with Yoder makes it worth quoting the final paragraph in its entirety:

> The heart of the quarrel between Augustine and his critics, then, is whether the creative work of God allows for teleology, and so for a movement within creation, which can presuppose the fact of creation as a given starting point, to a destiny which "fulfills" creation by redeeming it and by lifting it to a new level. It is the meaning of salvation that is at stake: is it "fulfillment," "recapitulation"? If this is indeed the authentic Christian understanding of what God has done in Christ, then Augustine's critics will have to face this implication: *Between that which is and that which will be there must be a line of connection, the redemptive purpose of God*. We cannot simply say that *agape* has no presuppositions, for God presupposes that which he has already given in *agape*. However dramatic a transformation redemption may involve, however opaque to man's mind the continuity may be, we know, and whenever we repeat the Trinitarian creed with Saint Augustine we confess that our being-as-we-are and our being-as-we-shall-be are held together as works of the One God who is both our Creator and Redeemer.[21]

Though much of this extract is phrased in the subjunctive mood, it is clear that O'Donovan believes Augustine has offered the more genuine Christian position, and the

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[21] Ibid., 158–59.

specifics of this concluding Augustinian lesson will set the stage for O'Donovan's

prolific career as a moral and political theologian. He will henceforth be concerned with

the mystery of dramatic continuity between creation and redemption and with the

ethical and political implications that follow from this "authentic Christian

understanding."[22] Note especially that it is Augustine who lays out for O'Donovan the

"authentic Christian understanding" of the relation between creation and redemption,

nature and grace, reason and will. In doing so, Augustine established the possibility,

even the necessity according to O'Donovan, of thinking of the moral life in terms of

teleology. The meaning of redemption in Christ must be approached in light of the

created order it presupposes, restores, and fulfills.

The full moral import of the Augustinian lesson is only hinted at in the final

sentence of the extract above. O'Donovan refers vaguely to "our being-as-we-are" and

"our being-as-we-shall-be." However, it is but a short step from these final sentences of

Self-Love to the rich reflections of O'Donovan's second major work, *Resurrection and

Moral Order*.[23] For the sort of beings that humans both are and are to become is,

according to O'Donovan, the sort that is distinguished by meaningful moral agency.

Christian moral theology, if it is to keep faith with the Augustinian lesson of *The Problem

of Self-Love*, has to be committed to the proposition that redemption presupposes the

human creature's status as a meaningful moral agent. The task of *Resurrection* is to think

theologically about this human specificity in light of the Augustinian upshot of *The

Problem of Self-Love*.

The lesson prompts O'Donovan to unfold the task of moral theology in

Resurrection according to three interrelated theological principles, which he labels the

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[22] In a "sermon" published in 2006 on the Fulcrum website, now included as chapter 6 in *Church in Crisis: The Gay Controversy and the Anglican Communion*, O'Donovan goes so far as to claim that the "dialectic of creation and redemption" is the "central and decisive" front in the battle "between orthodoxy and revision." O'Donovan advances this argument in the context of the debates in the Anglican Communion over homosexuality, but more specifically in reply to a declaration by the Church of Sweden that had declared the distinction between creation and redemption irrelevant to the question of homosexuality in the church. See O'Donovan, *Church in Crisis*, "Creation, Redemption, and Nature," 86–101, at 88.

[23] O'Donovan, *Resurrection*. Hereafter cited as *Resurrection*.

realist, the evangelical, and the Easter principles. O'Donovan summarizes their interrelation in the prologue to the second edition of *Resurrection* in a way that immediately brings to mind the conclusion of *Problem of Self-Love*:

> Purposeful action is determined by what is true about the world into which we act (realist principle). That truth is constituted by what God has done for his world and for humankind in Jesus Christ (evangelical principle). The act of God which liberates our action is focused on the resurrection from the dead, which restored and fulfilled the intelligible order of creation (Easter principle).[24]

Working through the interrelation of these three principles proves in O'Donovan's hands to be a remarkably constructive way of doing Christian ethics. By staging the work of *Resurrection* as the exposition of these three principles, O'Donovan makes clear just how much was at stake in the debate between Augustine and his critics. The extreme Lutheran critique of Augustine, in rejecting immanent teleology, threatened to sever the continuity between creation and redemption, violating the realist principle and undermining the very intelligibility of human agency. O'Donovan sees no way forward for genuine Christian moral reflection than to think through this continuity, however radical and mysterious it may be.

Yet O'Donovan does not turn, as he might have, to "natural theology." For, on O'Donovan's reading, the attempt to ground ethics in a "natural order" prior to or independently of God's redemption of the world in Christ would be but the other extreme of the false polarization of nature and grace. According to O'Donovan, Christians are bound by the gospel to believe that the immanent teleology of nature— that which is true about the world—is vindicated by and perfectly manifested in what God has graciously done in Jesus Christ.[25] So while the "realist" principle bars the way for those who would choose the order of redemption over against the order of creation, O'Donovan's "evangelical" principle bars the way for those who think they can have "natural order" apart from "resurrection order." "In the sphere of revelation,"

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[24] Ibid., ix.
[25] Ibid., 53.

O'Donovan insists, "and only there, can we see the natural order as it really is and overcome the epistemological barriers to an ethic that conforms to nature."[26] The only way to a genuine knowledge of nature is through grace, and there is no grace that does not include the nature it redeems and fulfills.

These realist and evangelical principles do not, however, guarantee a proper orientation for Christian moral theology. We must look to Christ for the true meaning of creation and for the renewal of human agency, but where in particular in the life of Christ must we look? Bethlehem? Golgotha? Gethsemane? The Sea of Galilee? What exactly has Christ done that vindicates creation and renews human agency within it? O'Donovan's answer to these questions yields the "Easter" principle: "when we think quite specifically about Christian *action* we have to single out the resurrection moment which vindicates the creation into which our actions can be ventured with intelligibility."[27] By no means does O'Donovan want to deny the significance to moral theology of the diverse moments of Jesus's life and ministry. O'Donovan insists rather that the resurrection and only the resurrection guarantees a properly Christian moral theology. For only the resurrection announces God's definitive "Yes!" to creation. Only the resurrection demonstrates that the forces of sin and death have not, and will, not prevail. The resurrection is the proper focal point for moral theology, for it is the basis for believing in the final goodness and integrity of the created order. In raising the crucified Jesus from the dead, God made clear that redemption is nothing less than the vindication of the original gift of creation. The resurrection is the sign that God has not abandoned the original gift.

On O'Donovan's reading, we can only affirm the intelligibility of human agency within the cosmos if we keep faith with God's Easter vindication of the order of things in creation. An ethic that conforms to nature must be realistic *and* evangelical, but it can be

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[26] Ibid., 19–20.
[27] Ibid., xviii, emphasis in original.

either only because of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The possibility of intelligible human agency thus depends entirely upon God's Easter vindication of creation.

4.2.2 The Evangelical Revolution of the Natural

O'Donovan's argument that resurrection renews the link between creation and redemption can be usefully elaborated by way of Herbert McCabe's account of revolutionary continuity.[28] In answering the question, What is ethics all about?,[29] McCabe looked at sometimes-radical changes in the meanings of ordinary words and offered an account of just the sort of dramatic continuity that O'Donovan seems to be after. McCabe observes that the more complex or vital a concept—a complexity, McCabe notes, which tends to attend words with complex usages—the more likely we are to detect fluidity and growth in our understanding of it. With some particularly fecund words we even come to expect future transformations or expansions of our understanding. With such words, we already know we do not know all there is to know about them. McCabe calls these words "growing words," and his most important example is "love." We are aware that our understanding of the meaning of "love" changes, hopefully growing and maturing as we ourselves do.

Yet McCabe is concerned to forestall a misunderstanding, one that, interestingly enough, has had fateful consequences for ethical reflection. Just because a word's usage is complex does not mean that its meaning is destined to be hopelessly vague. While "love" might come to mean unexpected things, it cannot come to mean just anything. It might be difficult to nail down once and for all the referent or content of "love," but it would be a mistake to conclude that "love" is an empty container, or that it simply means whatever we make of it. In speaking of our *growth* in understanding, McCabe

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[28] See Herbert McCabe, *Law, Love and Language* (New York: Continuum, 2003), especially 17–29.
[29] "What is ethics all about?" is the title of the book that has now been reissued as *Law, Love, and Language*. See McCabe, *What Is Ethics All About?*

suggests that there is organic continuity with what came before. "The meaning of the word may develop in various unexpected and indeed unpredictable ways but after any such development we must subsequently be able to find a continuity of meaning."[30]

McCabe goes on to suggest that some subsequent discoveries of continuity are so dramatic, so radical, that they must described as revolutionary. The new meaning— which is discovered to be a genuine, organic prolongation of an earlier meaning—was nowhere on the horizon of earlier interpretation; nobody, save the revolutionary, foresaw the transformation. This change in meaning is a revolutionary event, according to McCabe, because "revolution is never intelligible in terms of the society it supercedes; but that society must be intelligible in terms of the revolution."[31] In other words, revolutionary continuity is retrospective for everyone but the revolutionary. The revolutionary sees the radical continuity with the past and brings others into a new hermeneutical universe, a new horizon of meaning. The crucial part of this hermeneutical universe just is this understanding of organic prolongation: "A creative, revolutionary change, then, even though it is not a mere advance along the old lines of continuity, but a discovery of new lines, does not fully realize itself until it can be seen as in a new kind of continuity with the past. The revolution is not consolidated until it sees itself as the 'natural' fulfillment of the aspirations of the people."[32]

Oliver O'Donovan would no doubt recognize in McCabe's language echoes of '60s radicalism. Published in 1968, McCabe's *Law, Love, and Language* appeared when it was increasingly fashionable in the West to speak of revolution.[33] Yet it is crucial to see

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[30] McCabe, *Law, Love and Language*, 23.
[31] Ibid., 27.
[32] Ibid., 29.
[33] O'Donovan can be quite dismissive of attempts to interpret Jesus in revolutionary terms. For example, he describes earlier attempts to align Jesus with Zealot expectation as a "fashion" that has "deservedly passed." O'Donovan, *Desire*, 95. He sarcastically suggests that this fashionable interpretation gives "academic respectability, one might say, to the views of Pontius Pilate!" (ibid.). But then O'Donovan goes on to lend his own academic respectability to none other than Pontius Pilate when he writes, just twenty pages later, "The content of these titles [i.e., the kingly ascriptions for Jesus given in the Gospel accounts] is fairly clear: they amount, as Pilate, with a somewhat limited political imagination, expresses it, to a claim to be 'the King of the Jews'" (115). Moreover, O'Donovan simply replaces one kind of revolutionary interpretation with

that O'Donovan's moral and political theology is revolutionary in precisely McCabe's

sense. The three principles—realist, evangelical, and Easter—are coordinated by

O'Donovan to emphasize the revolutionary continuity that must exist between creation

and redemption if the concluding Augustinian lesson of *Problem of Self-Love* is to be

maintained. The natural theologian errs in knowing nothing of the revolution in Christ,

which, while not contained within "the natural," both redeems and elevates the created

order in such a way that one can only speak of "the natural" and Christ at one and the

same time. Only *after* the revolution in Christ can the theologian again speak responsibly

of the "natural."[34] There is no path to the natural that does not pass through the

specificity of what God has done in Jesus Christ.

McCabe thus provides a useful vocabulary for elaborating O'Donovan's case

against both "natural law" and extreme Lutheran alternatives. The natural theologian

says nothing of nature's *revolution* in Christ; the radical Lutheran says nothing of the

revolutionary *continuity* with creation established in Christ's resurrection from the

dead.[35] For O'Donovan, Christ *revolutionizes the natural*, rendering typical natural law *and*

Lutheran approaches problematic. The resurrection is the revolutionary event, *after*

which the world can never be the same. It is only *after* the resurrection and in light of it

that we can see the created order for what it is and what it is to become; but also, and

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another. His own political theology turns on a revolutionary Christology. Consider this remark from *Desire* about Christ's relation to politics, here and now: "On all sides pundits proclaim that the nation-state is in trouble. The truth is, it has been in trouble ever since Christ rose from the dead" (241). It must be said that O'Donovan betrays a rather stereotypically conservative suspicion of every radical position but his own. That Christ is "the original revolution" is as true for O'Donovan's political theology as it is for John Howard Yoder's, and his distaste for the language of revolution appears to be coming from elsewhere than his theology.

[34] There is an obvious connection here with the theme of chapter 1—the question of the "after" in Christian theology. O'Donovan helps us to see how the question of the "after" goes to the heart of the relation between creation and redemption, nature and grace.

[35] O'Donovan singles out Lutheran positions for failure to preserve genuine continuity at the end of *Problem of Self-Love* and in the prologue to *Resurrection* where he deals briefly with the thought of Martin Honecker (xii-xiv). Herbert McCabe focuses on a related failure in the work of situation ethicists. See McCabe, *Law, Love and Language,* chapter 1.. In *Resurrection*, O'Donovan offers his own critique of situation ethics in a section dealing with the modern anxiety about human action that often attends our consciousness of historical change (183–90). He reads situation ethics and consequentialism as responses to this anxiety, and his rejoinder to both is germane to my discussion of revolutionary continuity: "Only if we are endowed with a vision of what it is in the world which measures change and so stands beyond it, can we dare to encounter change" (188).

derivatively, who *we are* and who *we are to become*. To recall the argument of the first chapter, resurrection is for O'Donovan the basis and guarantee of the Christian "after."

I will return to the question of whether O'Donovan is successful in his construal of revolutionary continuity. In my view, John Howard Yoder places a question mark against O'Donovan's moral and theopolitical vision at just this point. Yoder's contribution to political theology ought to lead us to question whether O'Donovan's accommodation of violence *within the Christian life* undermines the Augustinian framework of revolutionary continuity that he is otherwise trying so hard to keep at the center of his work. The larger case I am trying to build in this dissertation is that Yoder's work constitutes an alternative, more satisfactory way of inhabiting this self-same Augustinian framework.

Before returning to my exposition of O'Donovan's ever-expanding project, I wish to keep the following questions in the background: is political force *necessary* for the maintenance of the revolutionary continuity God has made known in the resurrection of Christ from the dead? Why and how does God's revolution of the natural entail for O'Donovan the theological embrace of force, and not merely its toleration? If the nonviolent Jesus is the Word made flesh—the One through whom all things were made—does the legitimation of violence not undermine the revolutionary continuity manifested to the world in God's resurrection of *this man*, this Christ and not some other, from the dead?

4.2.3 The Power of the Principles

O'Donovan demonstrates the power of his principles both positively and negatively. Negatively, he uses them to illumine the weakness of numerous contemporary intellectual tendencies. For one notable example, O'Donovan considers "historicism" to be a systematic violator of the realist principle. The historicist equation of "the reality of a notion" with "the history of its thought" brings to naught the concept of a natural

order of kinds and ends given by God in creation. Moreover the historicist tendency to abandon the natural "order of things" and their teleological relations undermines on O'Donovan's reading the very humanism that animates historicist projects: "it is not possible for humanism to refuse the *question*, 'What is the chief and highest end of man?' For without some answer to that question it has lost, not only the grounds for respecting this human species (thus leaving itself engaged upon a pointless self-worship), but also . . . the very reason to understand humanity as a unitary species at all, rather than a chance objectification, or 'tragic thrownness', of being."[36]

If historicism fails to respect natural teleology, O'Donovan sees in voluntarism and nominalism related failures to respect the authentic Christian doctrine of creation. Modern science and Enlightenment philosophy collude to make purposiveness something that could only be projected onto an ateleological nature by willing human subjects—the hallmark of voluntarism.[37] And the productive abstractionism of the scientific method—a procedure that has according to O'Donovan yielded genuine benefits—has tempted observers to conclude that there are no such things as natural kinds or genera, the hallmark of nominalism. The cumulative result according to

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[36] O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 38, emphasis in original. In a section on philosophical idealism (36–37), O'Donovan criticizes Hegel's "ontologizing of epistemology" for putting an end to natural teleology. Unfortunately, O'Donovan never presses his critique of historicism in the context of his engagement with John Howard Yoder. Yoder certainly speaks in ways that O'Donovan would appear to reject: "Reality always was pluralistic and relativistic, that is, historical. . . . pluralism/relativism is a confusing world, but it is not an alien one. . . . [it] is itself a part of the ripple effect of the gospel's impact upon Western culture." Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 59–60. Yoder goes on to argue that, while pluralism/relativism does not threaten proper Christian belief, it does threaten establishment or Constantinian epistemologies. Three things are worth noting. First, O'Donovan radically qualifies, even *historicizes*, normal access to the natural order of ends and kinds through his exposition of the effects of sin. We must only recall that, for O'Donovan, the truth about the created world is "constituted" by what God has done in Christ. One suspects that O'Donovan's strong anti-Hegelianism flows more from his realist principle than his evangelical principle, thus undermining his own projected unity. Second, Yoder's defense of pluralism/relativism as part of the "cultural ricochet" of Christianity effectively turns the tables on O'Donovan's polemics against historicism. Yoder's appeal to the power of faithful Christian practice against prior or subsequent deviations is the bread and butter of O'Donovan's entire project. Lastly, even if O'Donovan is right about particular claims advanced by the philosophical architects of historicism, Yoder's version does not run afoul of any of O'Donovan's three principles of moral theology. Most significantly, Yoder affirms exactly the Augustinian continuity that O'Donovan wants to preserve between redemption and creation. Yoder's claim that "those who bear crosses are working with the grain of the universe" is only possible because he believes that "our being-as-we-are and our being-as-we-shall-be are held together as works of the One God who is both our Creator and Redeemer."

[37] O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 45–46.

O'Donovan is a deeply problematic instrumentalization of life. To give up on natural ends (voluntarism) and natural kinds (nominalism) is to succumb in science and morality to the technological imperative—rather than being summoned to act in conformity with the given laws of nature or morality, we simply manipulate things according to purposes of our own conjuring or positing; that is to say, according to purposes that have no intrinsic relation to the reality into which we act.

O'Donovan's interactions with historicism, nominalism, and voluntarism are as much about retaining what is helpful within these intellectual movements as they are about leaving the rest behind. Thus regarding historicism, O'Donovan affirms the need to grapple self-consciously with historical existence. He does not "object to the idea that history should be taken seriously." On the contrary, the "Christian response to historicism will wish to make precisely the opposite point: when history is made the categorical matrix for all meaning and value, it cannot then be taken seriously *as history*. A story has to be a story about something; but when everything is story there is nothing for the story to be about."[38] If the historicist project is to avoid a fatal and incoherent relativism, it must acknowledge the intrinsically meaningful *something* that gives shape to the story being told. For Christians, according to O'Donovan, that something is concentrated in "the saving act of God in Jesus Christ."[39] History cannot be taken seriously as a story without the confession of some such turning point in history that gives the story meaning.[40] In the Christ-event, we have a turning point unlike others, in that it is as much about the future as it is about the past: "The Christian understanding of [history] is, of course, only to be reached through a Christian understanding of the

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[38] Ibid., 60. As we explored in chapter 3, Yoder makes a consonant point. "[H]istory and human endeavor can be understood only in terms of God's plan. There is no significance to human effort and, strictly speaking, no history unless life can be seen in terms of ultimate goals. The *eschaton*, the 'Last Thing,' the End-Event, imparts to life a meaningfulness which it would not otherwise have." Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 75. However, it must be emphasized that Yoder's apocalyptic Christology funds a simultaneous affirmation of the significance of the future (the *eschaton* as coming Kingdom) and the past (the decisive *after* of the incarnation): "Only a reference point in the past can be equally accessible to all and a judgment on all. Only the normativeness of some past afford us critical leverage on the present." Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 56.
[39] O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 60.
[40] The resonance with what we have already explored in Yoder should be obvious.

end towards which events are directed, that is, through eschatology."[41] O'Donovan thus wants to retain the aim of historicism—i.e., taking history seriously—by revising the entire project eschatologically. On O'Donovan's reading, historicism without an "after" is unintelligible.

As we have seen, O'Donovan's task throughout *Resurrection* is to think through the theological requirements of intelligible human action in light of God's Easter revolution of the natural in the death and resurrection of Christ. Eschatological fulfillment is the only context for proper Christian moral reflection. "Classical Christian thought proceeded from a universal order of meaning and value, an order given in creation and fulfilled in the kingdom of God, an order, therefore, which forms a framework for all action and history, to which action is summoned to conform in its making of history."[42] In saying that that the "order given in creation" is "fulfilled in the kingdom of God," O'Donovan abides by his evangelical principle. If action is to "make sense," if it is to be redeemed from sin and incoherence and be in genuine conformity with the order given by God in creation, it must be in response to and conformity with God's eschatologically transformative act in Jesus Christ. There can be for O'Donovan no immanentizing of the ethical horizon: "the fulfillment of history is not generated immanently from within history. . . . The transformation [in divine redemption] is in keeping with creation, but in no way dictated by it. The destined end is not immanently present in the beginning or in the course of movement through time. . ."[43] Thus does O'Donovan rule out natural law ethics and historicist ethics on the same eschatological grounds.[44]

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[41] O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 55.
[42] Ibid., 67.
[43] Ibid., 64.
[44] It is worth noting in passing that O'Donovan attributes to historicism the belief that "history will declare its own meaning" (ibid.). Whatever else might be said of John Howard Yoder's historicism, this cannot. As we have repeatedly seen, the idea that history wears its meaning on its sleeve is for Yoder an idea whose *Sitz im Leben* is Constantinian Christianity. The powerful are typically fond of it, as they take their power to be the meaning that history happens to be declaring.

This review of the major themes of *Resurrection* is demonstration enough that the concluding lesson of *Problem of Self-Love* continues to guide O'Donovan's efforts to think theologically about free and intelligible human. O'Donovan's own summary statement in *Resurrection* presses the connection: "Morality is man's participation in the created order. Christian morality is his glad response to the deed of God which has restored, proved and fulfilled that order, making man free to conform to it."[45] I have focused on the emergence and deployment of this Augustinian framework in O'Donovan's work for its pertinence to my larger thesis about Yoder and the possibility of a nonviolent Augustinianism. Yoder's messianic pacifism arguably inhabits much the same framework.

4.2.4 Yoderian Interlude

"History, from Abraham to Marx," declared Yoder, "demonstrates that significant action, for good or for evil, is accomplished by those whose present action is illuminated by an eschatological hope."[46] The doctrine of the last things was thus for Yoder, as it is for O'Donovan, the key to God's "revolution of the natural" in Christ. Human activity in the present is rendered intelligible for both O'Donovan and Yoder by God's vindication of the world in the victory of the Lamb: "the cross is not defeat. Christ's obedience unto death was crowned by the miracle of the resurrection and the exaltation at the right hand of God. . . . [Christ's] sacrifice was turned by God into a victory which vindicated to the utmost the apparent impotence of love." Yoder's persistent effort to speak of the cross in connection with the resurrection points up a crucial difference with O'Donovan—a difference to which I will return. Here the point is to emphasize that both Yoder and O'Donovan share the goal of inhabiting the Augustinian lesson of *Problem of Self-Love*. God's vindication of creation in the resurrection of Jesus is the eschatological event that establishes a relationship of revolutionary continuity between redemption

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[45] O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 76.
[46] Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 75.

and creation. Yoder could not make the connection more explicit: "The cross is what creation is all about. What Jesus did was local, of course, because that is how serious and real our history is to God. But what the cross was locally is universally and always the divine nature."[47]

Yoder is doing nothing less than harnessing the power of this framework to make the normative case for nonviolence. "The way the Creator WORD came among us was not in dignity but in weakness, suffering, and defeat."[48] God's vindication of created order in the resurrection unveils for Yoder the nonviolent texture of the cosmos and its Creator-Lord:

> As you see the grain of a piece of wood at its edges, Jesus' choice not to rule the world violently is now seen to be the surfacing of an eternal divine decision (if there can be such a thing as an eternal decision)—an eternally binding and freeing-decision of the Son, very God of very God, to enter into our history. Then self-emptying is not only what Jesus did. It is not only what the eternal divine Son did. If it is that, then it is the very nature of God. The Creator of the universe is a servant. The Almighty loves his enemies.[49]

Recalling O'Donovan's realist, evangelical, and Easter principles, we can observe in a passage like this Yoder harnessing the theological power of the interrelations. The God who vindicates creation (realist principle) does so through the resurrection of Jesus (Easter principle), making known the truth about that created order by what he has done for the world in Jesus Christ (evangelical principle). As we saw, O'Donovan went so far as to say that what is true about the world is "constituted" by what God has done in Christ Jesus, and Yoder's nonviolence is nothing if not an exposition of that claim.

It is also important to note that both theologians insist on the radical hermeneutical significance of this eschatological transformation. There can be for the Christian theologian no a-christological horizon of interpretation—no approach to the natural, the moral, the historical, or the political disconnected from what God has done

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[47] Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace*, 85.
[48] Ibid., 83.
[49] Ibid., 93. Examples could easily be multiplied. Reflecting on the political importance of the "Powers" language in the Pauline texts of the New Testament, Yoder concludes that "'cross and resurrection' designates not only a few days' events in first-century Jerusalem but also the shape of the cosmos." Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 160.

for the world in Christ Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the basis for the hope in light of which all nature, action, and history make sense. We caught a glimpse of where Yoder goes from here—namely, to interpreting genuine politics as cross-bearing testimony to the cruciform shape of the cosmos.[50] O'Donovan's political theology moves in a decidedly different direction, and it is to O'Donovan's sophisticated development of that direction that we now turn.

4.3 The Power of Authority

A crucial development in O'Donovan's thought comes with his treatment of authority. "Authority," he writes, "is the objective correlate of freedom. It is what we encounter in the world which makes it meaningful for us to act. An authority, we may say, is something which, by virtue of its kind, constitutes an immediate and sufficient ground for acting."[51] To act freely and intelligibly is to act on authoritative grounds—grounds God has built into the very fabric of the universe. Authority is, in other words, an aspect of O'Donovan's commitment to realism in moral theology. Human agency is free and meaningful only when it takes into account, and responds to, the natural authorities given by God in creation—natural authorities such as beauty, truth, and goodness. However, authority is also an aspect of O'Donovan's commitment to teleology, for authorities are creaturely realities that constitute a distinctive kind of end of action. Unlike ends of our own devising, authorities are *given to us apart from us*; they are *objective* rather than subjective ends for action.[52]

I suggested above that authorities for O'Donovan are natural, or built into the fabric of the universe, but this statement must be qualified to do justice to the complexity of his account. There are six authorities in O'Donovan's classificatory system, only four of which are natural in the strict sense. The four natural authorities are

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[50] See also Yoder, "Armaments and Eschatology," 58.
[51] O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 122.
[52] Ibid.

beauty, age, community, and strength. Each natural authority elicits and structures human activity. They have "the capacity, as we encounter them in individuals, in human institutions and in the natural world, to inspire and order our actions in distinctive ways."[53] These four authorities are the natural bases of all human authority, always inflected by the flux of human culture and history, but never simply superseded or left behind.

The sheer existence and function of these natural authorities is not what is most important to O'Donovan in his rehabilitation of a concept of authority. He insists that "the focus of any concept of authority must be the capacity of one human being to command the obedience of another through speech."[54] Yet this focal point must not mislead the interpreter to deny the natural basis of authority. The historical flux of language and culture, which envelops all human activities including the activities of command and obedience, abides in a relationship of mutual implication with the natural authorities of creation. Here again we see the realist principle at work.

To the natural authorities of beauty, age, community, and strength, O'Donovan adds a fifth authority, the authority of truth, which, while not experienced as immediately as the other four, is natural in its own way. The authority of truth "belongs to the order of things as a totality." To comprehend the truth is to comprehend how the mélange of activities elicited by the diverse natural authorities fit together into a coherent whole. The immediacy of the natural authorities does not in and of itself guarantee the appropriate coordination of parts to whole.[55] The demands of the natural authorities must therefore be subjected to critical examination if genuine moral awareness is to be achieved. The natural authorities and the action they elicit must be

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[53] Ibid., 124.
[54] Ibid., 125.
[55] The example O'Donovan gives is the way in which activities, good in themselves, can be cloaks for vices. If this is the only reason the authority of truth is needed, then it appears to be like political authority (to which I turn next) in being only quasi-natural. There must be some need for the coordinating authority of truth that flows from life under non-sinful conditions, lest truth be cast as something only needful after the fall. What O'Donovan should have provided, but did not, is an example of why the superior authority of truth is needed for free and intelligible human agency under genuinely natural, or prelapsarian, conditions.

reviewed by the higher authority of truth. It is this higher authority that must be paid the highest respect, as it stands above us, demanding a willingness to subject even our most beloved practices and elders to critical scrutiny.

There is, finally, a sixth authority according to O'Donovan—what he calls the authority of injured right or outraged justice—which in the order of exposition in *Resurrection* appears between the four natural authorities and the appellate authority of truth. O'Donovan considers it a "striking instance" of authority, in that it is only quasi-natural; its naturalness is apparent and not real.[56] This authority seems natural enough, but only under the conditions of sin—conditions that O'Donovan insists are themselves unnatural. Though this authority is not literally natural, it is quite literally striking, for it is "the authority of injured right to command our resentment and vengeance, the authority which shapes our structures of justice and government."[57] The creaturely need to right wrongs is like the other natural authorities in that it is immediately intelligible. We need not offer explanations for the hunger to vindicate justice any more than we need to explain why people drive thousands of miles to stand in awe before the Grand Canyon. There is an immediate intelligibility to the desire to redress grievances, even as there is an immediate intelligibility to the enjoyment of beauty. The authority of injured right is the quasi-natural authority that for O'Donovan lies at the root of the political structures of our lives. The authority of injured right gives rise to the demands for vindication that culminate in the sword-bearing functions of government. "The distinctive form of authority which we call 'political' is, then, at its simplest, a concurrence of the natural authorities of might and tradition [which are forms of strength and beauty] with that other 'relatively natural' authority, the authority of

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[56] "Quasi-natural" is my language, not O'Donovan's. Elsewhere, O'Donovan refers to life under the conditions of sin as "sub-natural." O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 57. This is a description carrying a more negative connotation. O'Donovan would never seek to build upon the experience of the "sub-natural" in the way he does the "quasi-natural" experience of outraged justice. The authority of injured right is never so negatively construed by O'Donovan, even though he consistently locates its existence, and the political realities it summons, after the Fall.

[57] Ibid., 124.

injured right."[58] The confluence of these three authorities, then, constitutes the political

for O'Donovan. Yet it must be noted that might and tradition exist independently of the

political—they are grounds that elicit and structure human activity in diverse areas of

our lives. Injured right—sometimes referred to by O'Donovan as outraged justice—is

only discussed by O'Donovan in the context of the political.[59]

We have come, then, to the conceptual root of O'Donovan's account of politics.

We have seen how it unfolds under the concept of authority, and how a peculiar form of

authority—the quasi-natural authority of injured right—is intrinsic to what O'Donovan

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[58] Ibid., 128.

[59] As we have already seen, Christian moral theology cannot, according to O'Donovan, consist of a realism construed as umediated access to the natural order. Rather, moral realism must reckon with the revolution of the natural manifested in the gospel of God's resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Thus, authority must pass through the fire of the same revolutionary continuity as any other element of natural order. And here we run into a problem in the order of O'Donovan's exposition in *Resurrection* that, although acknowledged by O'Donovan himself, is neither adequately explained, nor adequately addressed in his subsequent work. O'Donovan is committed, as we have seen, to the priority of revelation in determining the meaning of the natural or the created. He affirms "the non-self-evidence of creation order" and insists we look to "the Christ-even and to the apostolic witness" (xv) in order to glimpse the genuine meaning of creation. This *ought* to mean there can be no general account of authority into which a specific account of Christ's authority will be made to fit, but the other way around: Christ's particular authority manifests the character of authority in general. Forms of authority which elicit human activity incompatible with the Christ-event and the apostolic witness can only be distortions of creation and cannot be taken as genuine grounds for free and intelligible action. I say this ought to be the shape of O'Donovan's exposition, because it is not in fact how he proceeds. He acknowledges going into his account that he ought to proceed in this manner but will not, and then he declines to offer an explanation. In the introduction, O'Donovan looks to his later exposition of authority and laments that "it will be unhappily unavoidable that we must expound the concept of authority in general terms before speaking explicitly of the moral authority of Christ to which the Spirit bears witness" (26). This is a rather astonishing statement that raises all sorts of questions. Whence the unhappy necessity? Why "must" the order of exposition proceed in this manner, and why is the unavoidability of this order the source of unhappiness? How can an exposition that follows God's revolution of creation in the resurrection of Christ be accompanied by anything other than joy, or be inhibited by unhappy necessities?

Again, in the opening paragraph of the chapter on authority, O'Donovan writes, "That small segment of reality, elect and chosen of God, shapes all the reality that we encounter, so that to be in touch with reality in any form we have to be in touch with that reality. We ought, therefore, from a formal point of view, to proceed immediately to that central focus of our discussion; and whatever remained to be said about other authorities, we ought to say it afterwards in the light of what had first been said about the authority of Christ. I am proposing, however, to take a less rigorous course. It will, I hope, make for an easier exposition when we discuss Christ's authority in the next chapter. . . ." But the only thing that this order of exposition makes easier is the setting aside of the witness of Jesus when it comes time to reflect upon the political "needs" of the world. Thus, O'Donovan writes, "Jesus taught us not to return evil for evil, but to turn the other cheek; but in a world of wickedness there is need for institutions and sanctions of justice, and we cannot simply convert Jesus' teaching into international policy" (21).

O'Donovan was aware of this very un-Barthian order of exposition of authority after the publication of the first edition of *Resurrection*, and he replied in a similarly incomprehensible way in the prologue to the second edition: "I can only say in my excuse that I admitted that the order was not satisfactory. I can imagine, though not execute, an exposition in which the authority of the church would come first after the authority of Christ. All other authorities and freedoms would then be seen to follow from it. That would certainly be a better way of handling things" (xix). Again, why cannot O'Donovan provide such an account? What is standing in his way? More to the point, would such an order of exposition not force a revision to his account of the quasi-natural authority of injured right and the institutional "needs" that such quasi-authority generates?

will develop at much greater length as the distinctive function of the political. Two pieces of O'Donovan's picture are, however, still missing. We have not yet seen how the concept of authority delivers what O'Donovan is most after—namely, an account of the capacity to command—nor have we seen how God's revolution of the natural in Christ relates to the quasi-natural authority at the root of the political.

Regarding the first piece, O'Donovan argues that political authority captures an aspect of divine authority—the power to command obedience—that the other authorities do not. We all know what it is like to obey political authorities. Most of us follow the law most of the time, even when we disagree with it; minimally, we acknowledge the power of laws to command our obedience when we pay the price for breaking them. None of us agrees with every project to which our tax monies go, but most of us pay our taxes anyway, submitting to the authority of government to command our obedience despite our scruples. All of which is to say, political authority demands and receives a moral commitment that is prior to the diverse enactments or concretizations of the same authority, any of which may be morally objectionable to us. We have, then, in our ordinary experience of the political an example of the very command and obedience that O'Donovan is seeking. "Political institutions can confront us with a morally arbitrary demand which it is morally obligatory to obey." And this experience of obeying a commanding authority throws light on a key aspect of divine authority: "It is an authority which can transcend the judgment of our moral reason. . . . In the fact of the divine command our reason declares its own authority suspended."[60]

O'Donovan is quick to add that this granting of obedience to political authority is "strictly circumscribed."[61] It is qualified definitively by the appellate authority of truth. Only that which strikes us as true can command our full allegiance, genuine

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[60] O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 131.
[61] Ibid.

comportment, or "whole-hearted action."[62] A political authority might still command

our obedience when it demands something that is false—O'Donovan's example is

Galileo submitting to authority, fingers crossed—but it will always be a half-hearted

conformity. Political authority cannot reach into the inner being of its subjects,

commanding the heart to pay its proper respect. Political authority might command the

body, but it cannot command the soul. The only thing that can command all of our being

is "supreme reality," the genuinely real: "Authority presupposes a foundation in being,

and, just as truth prevails over the natural authorities because it is the truth of reality as

a whole, so divine authority will prevail only because it belongs to that first reality in

which truth is grounded."[63]

O'Donovan describes this account of the relation between political and divine

authorities as a "medieval argument," but it is crucial to see how it relates to the

Augustinian lesson of *Problem of Self-Love*.[64] Divine authority must for O'Donovan stand

in revolutionary continuity with the created authorities it judges and orders. It can only

command our whole-hearted obedience if it is the authority of our Creator, the authority

of the One whose commands do not arbitrarily invade, reject, or cancel out our being,

but rather instantiate it, heal it, and bring it to its transformative fulfillment. "If this

medieval argument continues to exercise a fascination, it is because it concerns a

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[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 132.
[64] This is not what Yoder finds noteworthy about the political aspirations of the Middle Ages: "What medieval Christendom, with its vision of the divine stability of all the members of the *corpus christianum*, has in common with post-Enlightenment progressivism is precisely the assumption that history has moved us past the time of primitive Christianity and therefore out from under the relevance of the apostolic witness on this question." Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 231. Yoder is suggesting, to use the language of chapter 1, that the *corpus christianum* depended upon a displacement of the proper Christian "after." O'Donovan, on the other hand, thinks that the decisiveness of the Christian "after" created the conditions of possibility for the *corpus christianum*. These divergent readings stem from rival accounts of what it means to keep faith with God's revolution of the natural in Christ. From Yoder's perspective, Christendom was a failed revolution. Any effort to wed piety to the power of the sword cannot be consolidated—it will always be out of joint with the slain Lamb it celebrates as sovereign and Lord. From O'Donovan's perspective, Yoder refuses to join the revolution just in so far as he rejects the many instances of progress in the consolidation of Christ's rule over earthly politics.

question that is basic to all theological ethics, namely, the relation of the divine command to the order of creation."[65]

It is here, in the eschatological revolution of the natural as it pertains to authority, that O'Donovan locates Western theology's enduring political legacy. In raising Christ from the dead God vindicates the created order and manifests the *end* of all creation—the ultimate *telos*, the *eschaton* in light of which human action, indeed all of history, is finally intelligible. Eschatology is for O'Donovan the proper name for God's revolution of the natural in Christ, and it determines the proper horizon of reflection for any Christian moral or political theology that would be at once realistic, evangelical, and rooted in God's Easter triumph over sin and death in the resurrection of Jesus.

O'Donovan argues that Christ's triumph is politically significant chiefly for the way it disabuses earthly authorities of their grandiose aspirations. In the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, divine authority judges earthly authority, cutting it down to size and reauthorizing it for a limited function. In reconciling the world through Christ's death and resurrection, God reveals the powerlessness of earthly authority to achieve genuine reconciliation. Earthly authority wields genuine power—most notably the power to kill—but it has no power to create, redeem, or free individuals and societies from the powers of sin and death. In raising Christ from the dead, God thus radically qualified the authority and power of political orders; God revealed the properly *secular* character of earthly politics. Here, it is worth quoting O'Donovan at length:

> Eschatology has been profoundly important in shaping the Western tradition of politics (which in modern times has become the 'liberal' tradition). The opposition in Western theology between the City of God and the earthly city has enabled political thought to avoid theocratic conceptions of government, which, by claiming to express the rule of heaven on earth, must unify the earthly and the heavenly into a single totalitarian political claim. Western theology starts from the assertion that the kingdoms of this world are *not* the kingdom of our God and of his Christ, not, at any rate, until God intervenes to make them so at the end. If we ask why not, the answer must surely be that their judgments cannot reconcile the world; thus they can neither be perfectly true nor perfectly merciful. Their sovereignty can be only a relative sovereignty; . . . This does not mean . . .

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[65] O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 132.

that the secular state can be independent of God and his claims, or that the pious individual can cultivate a private existence without regard for the claims of his society. It means simply that earthly politics, because they do not *have* to reconcile the world, may get on with their provisional task of bearing witness to God's justice.[66]

God's resurrection of Christ from the dead puts earthly politics in its place by revealing its imperfection. The secular, far from being anti- or a-theological, is for O'Donovan an eschatological achievement: a "common grace" brought into being in the wake of the coming of God's kingdom in Christ and thereby his vindication of created order. The dawning of the kingdom in the resurrected Jesus creates the conditions of possibility for the secular, for in Christ's death and resurrection earthly authority is judged, brought down to size, and graciously reauthorized to discharge a limited, this-worldly task: the task of judgment. The whole Christ-event reveals that the judgments of our polities cannot do the divine work of reconciliation. Injured right cries out for final vindication, summoning into existence structures of judgment that cannot grant it. Political authority can only offer provisional judgment, bearing at best indirect witness to God's supremely true and merciful justice.

My exposition has concentrated on O'Donovan's framing of the issues in *Ressurection*, a book published over twenty years ago. I have concentrated it thusly for a single reason: O'Donovan's subsequent work amounts to an extensive elaboration of the function and achievement of politics within the theological space that O'Donovan creates for it in *Resurrection*. The elaboration is thoroughgoing and brilliant, but there are in my estimation no significant modifications to O'Donovan's account of earthly politics in relation to the triumph of Christ's resurrection in any of his subsequent writings. Both the strengths and weaknesses of *Resurrection* are thus systematically carried forward.

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[66] Ibid., 71–72.

4.3.1 The Framework: Developed or Abandoned?

Before turning to the debate with Yoder—a debate which illumines what I take to be the weaknesses of O'Donovan's account—I would like to highlight the strengths by tracing them forward in some of his subsequent work, paying special attention to affinities with Yoder and to the crucial the role of Augustine in O'Donovan's framing of political authority. I take the time to highlight both for an important reason: I believe this land—the land of a robust Augustinian political theology—is also Yoder's land. As we saw in brief above, the author of the *Original Revolution* and the *Politics of Jesus* is no stranger to the political impact of God's eschatological revolution of the natural in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. As I hope to demonstrate, O'Donovan helps to stake out the Augustinian terrain on which Yoder's position can be—indeed, already has been—persuasively pressed. Yoder's work thus constitutes a test of the seriousness of O'Donovan's own commitments. "The final question," O'Donovan rightly insists, and in a manner that Yoder everywhere affirmed, "is whether this life, this act, this character, belong to the renewed and transformed world which God is bringing into being, and that question can be answered only in terms of the relation to Christ in whom the transformed world is already present to us."[67]

4.3.2 Reading Romans 13 with O'Donovan and Yoder

As we have seen, the need to vindicate injured right is at the root of O'Donovan's account of the political. It will be worth asking in a moment whether this "quasi-authority" is properly inflected by O'Donovan's underlying commitment to God's eschatological revolution of the natural in the resurrection of Jesus. We should emphasize first, however, that O'Donovan's decision to interpret worldly political structures in terms of a theological account of authority stems from a prior exegetical decision that he shares with Yoder. O'Donovan, like Yoder, insists on interpreting the

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[67] Ibid., 259–60.

role of "government" in terms of the broader Pauline treatment of the "powers and principalities." According to O'Donovan, when viewed against the backdrop of the New Testament treatment of *archai* and *exousiai*, "we do not have to choose between an angelological and a political interpretation of Romans 13:1–2. The point of angelology is precisely to give a framework of understanding in which such a phenomenon as political authority can be talked about."[68] Moreover, such an angelological framework is indexed to the very particular work of God in Christ: "That must be the primary eschatological assertion about the authorities, political and demonic, which govern the world: they have been made subject to God's sovereignty in the Exaltation of Christ."[69]

O'Donovan's theopolitical program is clearly one that seeks peace *with* eschatology, a move that aligns O'Donovan with the heart of Yoder's own theopolitical vision.[70] This is no minor note of convergence in the works of O'Donovan and Yoder, as the common decision to read "governing authority" in terms of the fallen "powers and principalities" of the New Testament sets both Yoder and O'Donovan against major strands in the tradition. I have already noted O'Donovan's departure from typical Lutheran and natural law approaches to ethics. Such approaches represented, we

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[68] Ibid., 123. Yoder: "Most of the references to the 'Powers' in the New Testament consider them as fallen. It is important therefore to begin with the reminder that they were part of the good creation of God. . . . Unfortunately, we have no access to the good creation of God. The creature and the world are fallen, and in this the powers have their own share. They are no longer active only as mediators of the saving creative purpose of God; now we find them seeking to separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38); we find them ruling over the lives of those who live far from the love of God (Eph. 2:2); we find them holding us in servitude to their rules (Col. 2:20); we find them holding us under their tutelage (Gal. 4:3)" (Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 141.). And: "There is a strong strand of apostolic thought that sees the state within the framework of the victory of Christ over the principalities and powers. . . . Instead of a stable institution, dating from creation, the "state as such," [Romans 13] tells us to think of a dynamic process related to and reflecting the saving work of Chris, as this work reaches even beyond the realm of the church." Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 195.
[69] O'Donovan, *Desire*, 146. Though I am quoting O'Donovan here in such a way as to draw out an important commonality with Yoder—i.e., their eschatological location of "the political" by way of the New Testament treatment of the powers—there are also interesting differences visible in the very same passage. For example, O'Donovan puts no emphasis on the cross as the particular shape of God's subjection of the powers, whereas Yoder makes a great deal out of God's decision to subject the powers *in this particular way*. Moreover, O'Donovan claims that "the political *and* demonic" have been subjected to God in Christ's exaltation, whereas Yoder would find this combination redundant. Yoder very clearly reads the sword-bearing function of government as a subset of the category of "the demonic" that has been subjected to God's sovereignty in the cross and resurrection of Jesus.
[70] The alternative, "peace without eschatology" was the original title to the essay first published as "If Christ is Truly Lord," in Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 55–90. The essay was republished under its original title in Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 143–67.

observed, failures to respect O'Donovan's realist and evangelical principles. It is worth noting how much Yoder can sound like O'Donovan in both connecting the New Testament exousiology with Christ's revolution of the natural *and* in contrasting this approach to major alternatives in the tradition: "It would not be too much to claim that the Pauline cosmology of the powers represents an alternative to the dominant ('Thomist') vision of 'natural law' as a more biblical way systematically to relate Christ and creation."[71]

This exegetical convergence is also striking in relation to O'Donovan's highly sophisticated elaboration of the task of political theology in *The Desire of Nations*. In this second major work, O'Donovan picks up where he left off in *Resurrection* by advancing his interpretation of politics under the concept of authority. Thus, early in *Desire* O'Donovan reminds us that the crucial task for political theology today is to "recover the ground traditionally held by the notion of authority."[72] As we have seen, the distinctive authority that generates the political in O'Donovan's thought is an authority that exists only under the conditions of sin. O'Donovan is well aware that this puts political activity into an odd relation to the three principles of *Resurrection*. For if political structures are not natural, they are not really a part of "the order of things" given by God in creation—the order, as we have seen, that determines the truthfulness and meaningfulness of our actions. How, then, can political action be true? Or good? Or beautiful?

4.3.3 Historicizing the Political

The only alternative open to O'Donovan is, despite his anti-historicist polemics against, the *historicization* of the political: "Serious moral debate cannot avoid arbitrating questions of description and so inquiring into the structures of reality. In the case of politics this enquiry is difficult; for political structures are fluid, not, as some other

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[71] Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 159.
[72] O'Donovan, *Desire*, 19.

structures are, given in nature."[73] As we have seen, political authority is for O'Donovan

a postlapsarian phenomenon: it is to be interpreted under the category of providence

(and therefore history) rather than creation. God's revolution of the natural in the

resurrection of Jesus has *not*, on O'Donovan's reading, authorized an original set of

political institutions, the restoration and upkeep of which is possible due to the dawning

of the kingdom of God. On the contrary, theocratic conceptions of government are

among the things vanquished by the triumph of Jesus. What God has done in Christ for

the world's political structures is to strip them of their idolatrous pretentious, whittling

their authority down to a single activity—the activity of judgment. This whittling down

of politics to the single activity of judgment is the meaning of Romans 13 according to

the programmatic essay by O'Donovan that both summarized the major theme of *Desire*

and announced the task of the forthcoming *Ways of Judgment*:

> Jesus has ascended in triumph to God's right hand; yet the subdued
> "authorities" of this age, St. Paul maintained, "persist." This, he said, was to
> approve good conduct and "to execute God's wrath on the wrongdoer." The
> reign of Christ in heaven has left *judgment* as the single remaining political need.
> . . . Paul's conception stripped government of its representative, indentity-
> conferring functions, and said nothing about law. He conceded, as it were, the
> least possible function that would account for its place within God's plan. The
> secular princes of this earth, shorn of pretensions to our loyalty and worship, are
> left with the sole function of judging between innocent and guilty.[74]

Yet O'Donovan actually goes a great deal further in his interpretation of Romans

13 than this paragraph makes explicit. Here, Paul "concedes, as it were" a function.

Yoder and Barth read the text in much the same way. They see Paul describing all

governing authority, pagan or otherwise, as discharging a function within God's

redemptive plan, whatever else such authorities think they might be doing. The

emphasis is on providential *description*—i.e., of naming the way God sovereignly uses

even the rebellious powers of pagan government. O'Donovan, on the other hand, sees in

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[73] Ibid., 14.
[74] O'Donovan and O'Donovan, *Bonds*, 209.

Paul an essentialist account of governing authority.[75] He finds there a *prescription* for what genuine political authority ought to look like in the *saeculum*. Thus can O'Donovan speak of "the Pauline premise that the defining role of secular government is to exercise judgment."[76] As we will see, this difference between descriptive and prescriptive readings of Romans 13 turns out to be no small matter. The former fits the activities of the ruling authorities into a theological frame with or without the permission or cooperation of the governing authorities. Whatever else such authorities think they are doing, they are in a crucial sense already under the sovereignty of the risen Christ, being lined up for God's purposes with or without their cooperation. In the latter reading, there is an essential task that governing authorities are called upon to execute, a task which, depending upon the actual behavior of governments, may or may not be reliably discharged.[77]

O'Donovan's reference to the "secular" princes of this earth is critical, for it links his reading of political authority in light of Paul's treatment of the powers to his reading of what is arguably the most influential treatise on Christian political thought outside the Old and New Testaments—book 19 of Augustine's *City of God*. O'Donovan's understanding of secularity as theological achievement—God's provision of the common grace of a political order constituted by the delimited activity of judgment—is indeed the Augustinian core of his remarkable and erudite political theology. I will turn to O'Donvan's reading of Augustine shortly. It is I think neither exaggeration nor

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[75] See, for example, O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures, 2003*, 4 (emphasis mine). "For the proposition that the authority of government resides *essentially* in the act of government, we must turn to the New Testament, where St. Paul described the function of civil authority as to reward the just and punish the evil."
[76] O'Donovan and O'Donovan, *Bonds*, 214.
[77] I would argue that the descriptive reading is naturally wedded to a more patient, less anxious political theology. There is for Yoder no need to worry about things getting out of hand, for the disobedient rulers of the world are, despite their disobedience, always already being sovereignly used by the Lamb who was slain and thus found worthy to receive honor and power. The prescriptive reading, on the other hand, must necessarily worry about making sure "the political" is discharging its essential and prescribed task, as it is supposedly within its power *not to do so*. Here we see one of the ironies of Yoder's "weak" politics—it flows from a much greater theological confidence about the victory of God in the suffering death of his Son and in his resurrection from the dead.

reduction to say that on O'Donovan's reading of Augustine's political theology, the secular is the political, and the political is the secular.

However, we must not fail to emphasize that an element of O'Donovan's theology of the political, already discussed above in our survey of *Resurrection*, is also a crucial piece of the Augustinian inheritance. Here I will let Philip Cary capture the connection: "the politics of the earthly city is not essential to human nature. It is rooted not in the way God created human nature, but in the way Adam corrupted it. So Augustine does not treat 'politics,' as we ordinarily conceive it today, as a natural form of human life."[78] O'Donovan's insistence that political authority is to be interpreted in light of providence and not creation, is thus, in addition to the concluding less of *Self-Love*, another echo of Augustine.[79] Cary's claim that we "ordinarily conceive" politics as natural is contestable, but he is surely right to contrast Augustine's political theology and other kinds on just this question of the "naturalness" of politics. It is precisely such a contrast that O'Donovan makes when he refuses to do political theology from a basis in so-called natural law.

> We continue, then, with O'Donovan's linkage of saints Paul and Augustine:
>
> St Paul declared that God has "disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public show of them in Christ's triumphal procession" (Col. 2:15). That must be the primary eschatological assertion about the authorities, political and demonic, which govern the world: they have been made subject to God's sovereignty in the Exaltation of Christ. The second, qualifying assertion is that this awaits a final universal presence of Christ to become fully apparent. Within the framework of these two assertions there opens up an account of secular authority which presumes neither that the Christ-event never occurred nor that the sovereignty of Christ is now transparent and uncontested.[80]

God's revolution of the cosmos in Christ constitutes a victory that strips political structures of their idolatrous pretensions and reduces them to the singular activity of judgment, an activity which defines the political in the *saeculum*—this time between the

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[78] Phillip Cary, "United Inwardly by Love: Augustine's Social Ontology," in *Augustine and Politics*, ed. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, and Kim Paffenroth, *Augustine in Conversation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2005), 16.
[79] O'Donovan reminds us elsewhere that this was a general patristic interpretation and not peculiar to Augustine. Of course this reminder does not diminish the historical significance of Augustine's elaboration of this particular line of interpretation.
[80] O'Donovan, *Desire*, 146.

times of Christ's first and second comings.[81] This is what it means to speak of secularity as a theological achievement: the secular comes into being because Christ is Lord. To invoke the *saeculum* as theological achievement is, of course, to invoke the towering legacy of Augustine, and we must turn, now, to an elaboration of this point of contact in O'Donovan's thought.

4.4 Augustine's Eschatological Transformation of the Political

We are not accustomed to thinking of Augustine as an eschatological theologian in the modern sense, and for good reason. The contemporary technical jargon of eschatological interpretation—pervasive in the works of both O'Donovan and Yoder—is naturally missing from Augustine's texts. And yet it should not be surprising to see Augustine's thought engaged by O'Donovan at just this point, for Augustine's mature theology was famously shaped by a close reading of the Pauline writings. Moreover, the *City of God* is in an elementary sense an eschatological text, everywhere engaged with the tension of the Christian life stretched out between the "already" of the incarnation and the "not yet" of Christ's final return. This is a life always under pressure, according to Augustine, and how we deal with the pressures of life in the *saeculum* will depend upon the ends toward which our lives are ordered.[82] The question of the final ordering of our actions is the key to the entire treatise, and Augustine famously situates his fullest discussion of

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[81] James Wetzel offers a succinct summary of Augustine's thoughts about secularity: "The secular for Augustine pertains to the *saeculum*, the period of history that falls between the first coming of Christ and his final arrival. This intermediary period (that is, the rest of history) is a hopeful but opaque time." James Wetzel, "Review of *Christianity and the Secular*. By Robert A. Markus.," *Church History* 76, no. 2 (2007): 395.

[82] One of Augustine's most eloquent reflections on this life of pressure was used by Karl Löwith as an epigraph to his fascinating book, *Meaning in History*: "Thus the world is like an oilpress: under pressure. If you are the dregs of the oil you are carried away through the sewer; if you are genuine oil you will remain in the vessel. But to be under pressure is inevitable. Observe the dregs, observe the oil. Pressure takes place ever in the world, as for instance, through famine, war, want, inflation, indigence, mortality, rape, avarice; such are the pressures on the poor and the worries of the states: we have evidence of them. . . . We have found men who grumble under these pressures and who say: 'how bad are these Christian times!' . . . Thus speak the dregs of oil which run away through the sewer; their color is black because they blaspheme: they lack splendour. The oil has splendour. For here another sort of man is under the same pressure and friction which polishes him, for is it not the very friction which refines him?" Augustine *Sermon* 24.11. See Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), vi.

political questions in book 19 of *City*, just prior to the closing chapters on final things: judgment, hell, and heaven.

In his important essay on Augustine's contribution to Western political theory, "The Political Thought of *City of God* 19,"[83] O'Donovan rightly insists that we take careful note of the specific character of Augustine's eschatological revision of classical politics. I say rightly, for what Augustine argues for in book 19 of *City of God* is as breathtaking as it is often carelessly interpreted: in examining the classical conception of a commonwealth as a community of justice, Augustine insists that there can be no such polity, because *justice cannot be the presupposition of any political body*. O'Donovan makes the point precisely: "Augustine's new definition of a commonwealth excludes the element of 'right,' or 'law,' which is often thought decisive to the constitution of a political society."[84] Indeed, Augustine goes so far as to argue that if a commonwealth requires justice, then there is no such thing as a commonwealth and there never has been. O'Donovan comments: "[Augustine] cannot or will not disengage a separate social or political sense of the word from its theological sense. *Iustitia* must include the forgiveness of sins."[85]

Rowan Williams has offered this crucial summary of Augustine's theological strategy in book 19: "[Augustine] is engaged in a *redefintion* of the public itself, designed

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[83] The title of the essay used here is the one given by O'Donovan to the "completely revised" version of an earlier essay that appears in O'Donovan and O'Donovan, *Bonds*, 48–72. The earlier essay is Oliver O'Donovan, "Augustine's City of God Xix and Western Political Thought.," *Dionysius* 11 (1987).

[84] O'Donovan and O'Donovan, *Bonds*, 55. O'Donovan uses the terms "rightness" and "right" so as to "keep the philological parallel between *ius* and *iustitia*." O'Donovan and O'Donovan, *Bonds*, 53.. He makes it clear on the page just cited that "justice" is indeed what Augustine is refusing secular politics.

[85] O'Donovan and O'Donovan, *Bonds*, 61. The reading I am providing of Augustine's critique of secular justice is almost, but not quite, affirmed by Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 63. "If we are able to speak of any other social grouping—from empires down to a band of robbers—as a *res publica*, we need a definition that does not include justice in the *definition* of the group." This statement is true in Augustine's thought when it comes to life in the *civitas terrena*. However, it cannot be true for the "social grouping" of the pilgrim city of God, for entry into that city comes by way of confession, which is according to Augustine the beginning of justice. See below for a reading of Augustine to this effect. Markus's book is excellent reading, as it touches on many of the themes of this dissertation, engaging the work of both O'Donovan and Yoder. Markus's main task is to revise and extend his remarks in *Saeculum* about the rightful "autonomy" of "the political" in Augustine's thought. Thought I do not think Markus finally pulls off an Augustinian defense of political "autonomy," he very helpfully places the challenge of Constantinianism on the Augustinian agenda.

to show that it is life outside the Christian community which fails to be truly public, authentically political."[86] This is a radical reading of Augustine, one that is arguably ignored by a good number of contemporary Augustinians, and yet Williams's interpretation follows easily enough from the point observed by O'Donovan: in refusing to separate justice from God-talk, or theology from politics, Augustine is insisting that social and political theory are, strictly speaking, subsets of Christian theology. We must observe in passing that Yoder offers his own "Augustinian redefinition of the political" when he insists that "In biblical thought the church is properly a political entity, a polis. . . . In this root sense, therefore, the church is more truly political, i.e. a truer, more properly ordered community, than is the state."[87]

Moreover, Williams's account of Augustine's "theological redefinition of the political" brings to mind Yoder's articulation, surveyed in earlier chapters, of the task of theology as christological inflection. In books 2 and 19 of *City of God*, we observe Augustine intervening christologically in classical political discourse, adapting Cicero's defintion of a *res publica* (a community enabled by a shared commitment to *ius*) so as to show that every political order falls short of justice's strict demands. *Ius* requires that each be given his or her due, and no polity exists in God is fully given his due. According to Augustine, only a people showing forth the humility of Christ, sustained entirely by God's gift of *caritas*, could satisfy the requirements of justice *and* be preserved from the self-referentiality and fragmentation that traditional political orientations foster. In short, only an order completely "spiritual" could be genuinely "political," truly "public," in such a way that common life is preserved from the fragmenting effects of sin.

Williams's point is that Augustine appropriated words like "justice" and "commonwealth" and then inflected them theologically to subversive effect. "At the end

[86] Williams, "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the *City of God*," 59 (emphasis in original).
[87] Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, 18.

of the day," writes Williams, "it is the secular order that will be shown to be 'atomistic' in its foundations."[88] All secular political orders fail to meet the demands of justice and thus fail to amount to genuinely public bodies, real polities, actual *common*wealths. It is only the pilgrim people of God that can—not on the basis of its own achievements but rather on the basis of the *gifts* of faith, hope, and love—resist the temptation to offer the false sacrifices demanded by the kingdoms of the world. "For God," Augustine famously insists, "is not the ruler of the city of the impious, because it disobeys his commandment that sacrifice should be offered to himself alone."[89] Rather "true justice is found only in that commonwealth whose founder and ruler is Christ."[90]

And yet one must go further with Augustine to insist that Christian practice— specifically, the practice of the prayer that Jesus taught—undercuts any theoretical/theological claim to the perfection of the virtue of justice *even in the Christian community*. There really is no political body—ecclesial or otherwise—of perfected justice in the *saeculum*. Augustine writes:

> Our righteousness itself, too, though genuine, in virtue of the genuine Ultimate Good to which it is referred, is nevertheless only such as to consist in the forgiveness of sins rather than in the perfection of virtues. The evidence for this is in the prayer of the whole City of God on pilgrimage in the world, which, as we know, cries out to God through the lips of all its members: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."[91]

That Christians pray for forgiveness—and according to Jesus should do so in perpetuity—is evidence enough for Augustine that perfect justice cannot be a possession of pilgrim members of the City of God.[92] But ought this denial of perfect justice require a rejection of Williams's claim that the Christian community is more genuinely political than the earthly city? Can the Christian community be a genuine public or political body if it too lacks the perfection of the virtue of justice? It was after all Augustine's

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[88] Ibid., 58.
[89] Augustine *City of God* 19.24.
[90] Augustine *City of God* 2.22.
[91] Augustine *City of God* 19.27.
[92] Yoder said much the same thing: "The ideal order would require sinless men; by definition it cannot be attained in this age. Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, 39.

preference for Cicero's robust definition of the *res publica* in terms of justice that yielded the theological critique of classical political theory.

The humility required by the Lord's Prayer entails a qualification but not a retraction of Williams's argument. For though Augustine denies the *perfection* of the virtue of justice even to the Church as the City of God on pilgrimage, he also affirms the virtue's *commencement* in that same body of people. Indeed, *he does both at the same time and on the basis of the same practice of prayer*. According to Augustine, to pray the Lord's Prayer just is to enact creaturely justice, for human justice *begins* with the denial of creaturely perfection: "The beginning of our justice is the confession of sins. You have begun not to defend your sin; now you have started to work at justice."[93] Thus the practice of the virtue of justice commences and grows among those who refuse to defend their sin.

4.4.1 The Ecclesial Relocation of the Political: To Follow or Not To Follow

One could argue that a perennial temptation of political theology is to refuse to follow Augustine at just this point: namely, in his theological revision of political theory such that justice is ecclesially relocated. For justice, it is often presumed, is not first and foremost about the life of the pilgrim people of God, but rather about the enactments of governments, the sword-bearers and rulers of every age. It is thus crucial that we notice how Augustine closes ranks against precisely this temptation in his most famous "political" text—*City of God* 19. As we have seen, it is there that Augustine invokes the Lord's Prayer in the same breath with which he discusses the demands of justice. In so

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[93] Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 4.3 (Rettig, 175). We might say that confession in Augustine's thought provides christological specificity to his general ontology. Creatures exist insofar as they participate in the divine life. The being of creatures depend entirely upon the Being of God. After the Fall, however, creatures are perennially tempted to deny their ontological dependency by turning in on themselves and celebrating their own creativity. Augustine's response to this is adamant: "he is at work in us in such a way that we too are at work: *be my helper* [Ps 27(26).9, LXX]. By invoking a helper, the speaker marks himself also as a worker. . . . Anything you have from yourself is displeasing to God." Augustine *Sermon* 13.3; cited in Atkins and Dodaro, eds., *Political Writings*, 121. Yet this general ontology of creaturely participation in the creative being of God is given a particular shape in light of the life of Christ. The Christian participates in the divine life by way of humble confession and christological conformity.

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doing, Augustine revises the requirements of justice, turning constructive political practice into an aspect of Christian discipleship.[94] Justice is not one thing for Christians and another thing for rulers who may or may not happen to be Christians; rather, for Augustine, all Christians, including those who happen to be rulers, are called to the practice of a christologically transformed justice. In other words, Christian political ethics is first and foremost for Christians—in Augustine's thought no less than in the thought of John Howard Yoder.[95]

Two passages from elsewhere in Augustine's writings are particularly helpful in displaying his rigorous consistency on this point. The first, taken from his *Tractate on the first epistle of John*, contains a remarkable identification of justice with charity, and inteprets both through the death of Christ: "How [do we walk as Christ walked], brothers? . . . This then, that we walk in the way of justice. In what way? I have already mentioned it. He was fastened on the cross and was walking in this very way: it is the way of love."[96] And in *Sermon* 13, a text included by Robert Dodaro in an edited volume of Augustine's political writings,[97] Augustine brings to bear on the practice of justice two important New Testament pericopes: the "render unto Caesar" passage, and the case of the woman caught in adultery. Augustine's conclusion is that Jesus stood in judgment of earthly judgment, not setting its requirements aside but rather demonstrating that humans are unqualified to keep them:

> In this way [Jesus] was able to warn [the Pharisees] to restore to God the image of God in the human being, just as the image of Caesar on the coin is restored to him. Similarly in the case of the adulteress he interrogated the interrogators, and thus pronounced judgement on the judges. 'I do not forbid the stoning of whomever the Law orders', he said, 'I merely ask who will do it. I am not

opposing the Law, but I am looking for someone to execute it.' . . . You both came from the same workshop, you both had the same craftsman, the stuff you are both made of is the same clay. Why are you destroying the person you judge by failing to love him? For you're destroying justice, by failing to love the person you're judging.[98]

To judge fellow humans to the point of killing them would be, according to Augustine,[99] to discharge a disordered judgment, for the aim of judgment is not finally the punishment of the sin, but rather the reformation of the sinner: "you must try to reform that, and work to lose and remove precisely that, so that the sin is condemned, but the human being himself preserved."[100] We cannot fail to note in passing that the theological, indeed the christological, critique of violent judgment that I have just displayed in Augustine's writings was what John Howard Yoder was all about.

> At bottom violence is judged, it is *critiqued* in the deep sense of the verb, because of the passion events. We participate in that judgment by participating in the cross, the resurrection, the ascencion, and the pouring out of the Spirit. That we thus participate in the gathered life of believers goes without saying; what matters for our present study is to appropriate it as grace that we can let ourselves be led into participating in the same process no less within the struggles of our wounded world.[101]

We must now return to O'Donovan's claim that Augustine refuses to dislodge a non-theological account of justice. I will argue below that O'Donovan does not follow Augustine in this regard, but here I want to pause for a moment to contrast Rowan Williams's claim about the church as a more authentically public body with O'Donovan's understanding of Augustine's mature political thought. Williams's conclusion about the ecclesial location of the genuine political body *should follow* in O'Donovan's own thought from his reading of Augustine's refusal to imagine a non-

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[98] Augustine *Sermon* 13.4, 8, in Ibid., 122, 25.

[99] Or at least *this* Augustine. I have no need to deny the existence of other, more violent Augustines. The point here is to demonstrate that Augustine was perfectly capapble of arguing that human judgment needed to be subjected to christological revision. Whether or not Augustine was willing to live up to the full implications of this revision is another question entirely. I would submit that the christological revisions of the virtue of justice is *more* consistent with the rest of his mature thought than are the moments in which he offers theological justifications for violence.

[100] Atkins and Dodaro, eds., *Political Writings*, 124.

[101] John Howard Yoder, "A Theological Critique of Violence," (Year unknown). The passage is from an unpublished essay that should eventually appear in *The Lamb's War* (forthcoming from Brazos Press). Though O'Donovan should have no reason to be familiar with this text, the text simply states more succinctly what Yoder either presupposes or says differently in many of his other writings. I cite it and not others because it the christological judgment of violence is stated in such a way that the implicit critique of O'Donovan-like projects is hard to miss.

theological account of justice. While Augustine denies the *perfection* of justice to Christians and non-Christians alike, he also celebrates *the beginnings of justice* in those who embrace the way of Christ, often summarized by Augustine as the way of humility. Furthermore, Augustine consistently holds that embracing this way of humility is something only made possible in and through Christ, who, through the gift of the Spirit, empowers us to do what we cannot without him, that is, follow him in the way of justice. Thus, Rowan Williams's ecclesial relocation of the enactments of justice would seem to be unimpeachable on Augustinian grounds. True justice, not yet perfected, nonetheless begins and belongs among those who confess Christ in the power of the Spirit, tracing with their own lives the way in time marked out by God's incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth.

I have made several sideways glances at Yoder in my exposition, since if Williams is right in his reading of Augustine, as I believe he is, Yoder is arguably closer to Augustine than is O'Donovan. Whereas the theological relocation of the virtue of justice from "government" to church is at the very center of Yoder's project, O'Donovan goes to considerable lengths to resist such a radical conclusion, even in his important essay on the significance of Augustine's book 19.

O'Donovan is aware that to follow Augustine *and* reclaim secular justice he has his work cut out for him. He rightly cites the famous aphorism used by Augustine to devalue secular politics: "Remove *iustitia*, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale? What are criminal gangs but petty kingdoms?"[102] O'Donovan combines this text with another, the famous "mirror for princes" found in book 5, and, together with the twin treatments of Cicero's definition of a *res publica* in books 2 and 19, produces what he hopes is "a consistent account of his view of justice." According to

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[102] Augustine *City of God* 4.4, cited in O'Donovan and O'Donovan, *Bonds*, 61.

this account, Augustine believed that civil justice was possible, but only when Christians had the helm of government.[103]

Set aside for a moment the question of this account's adequacy as a summary of Augustine's treatment of political justice. Notice first that O'Donovan's focus is not on the ecclesial relocation of justice at all, but rather on this relocation's impact on civil government. Whereas Rowan Williams thinks that Augustine's achievement is to turn the tables on civil government, denying it the proper title of "political," O'Donovan attempts to absorb the same Augustinian legacy *without having to relocate the focus of political theology from government to church.[104]* That maintaining such a focus might entail a break with Augustine—and not simply an alternative interpretation of him—is acknowledged by O'Donovan in the same essay. Following his interpretation of Augustine's use of the ancient aphorism about kingdoms and pirates, O'Donovan notes:

> Here is the sharpest point of difference between Augustine and the later
> medieval and Renaissance political tradition influenced by civil and canon law.
> To Hugo Grotius, for example, it was self-evident that a state may commit
> injustice without losing political capacity, and that a band of pirates can never
> become a state. Pirates are bound together solely by the commission of crime,
> whereas states are associated for the mutual support of lawful right.[105]

O'Donovan's *en passant* invocations of Grotius and the support for "lawful right" and "political capacity" are important gestures to his subsequent work; they are signposts to his fuller elaborations of the political theology and political ethics that he esteems to be the great legacy of Western Christendom. In *Desire of Nations*, O'Donovan develops an exegetical framework that sheds light on what he takes to be the advances of this post-

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[103] Ibid.
[104] That this refusal of Augustine at just this point is carried forward into O'Donovan's future work is evident by his most un-Augustinian use of the terms "political," "private," and "pubic" in O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures, 2003*. For example: "An act with a private object cheerfully undertaken within the terms of the political order may be an act of judgment on the judgments that others have made, judging it right to conform to them. Less marginal is the use of the term in relation to the *public* engagements of a private citizen, who may take responsibility for the public order by joining in arguments, debates, or elections. This kind of activity has a directly public object, not a private one, having in view what is requisite for the good order of the community. We commonly call it 'political,' though the term 'public' expresses its scope and rationale rather better." O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures, 2003*, 10.
[105] O'Donovan and O'Donovan, *Bonds*, 61.

Augustinian elaboration of the tasks of political theology. In *Ways of Judgment*, he lays out the constructive political ethic that is allegedly opened up by the robust political theological tradition surveyed in *Desire*. The expositions in *Desire* and *Ways* are masterful and elaborate, but they will not be taken up here. I want instead to return to a question I raised earlier: Is there not evidence that, relatively early on in the development of O'Donovan's program, he decided to leave Augustine's theopolitical vision behind? As I have said, the task of this chapter cannot be to assess O'Donovan's ambitious project in any thoroughgoing way. The aim is rather to develop an account of how O'Donovan frames his project in terms of a basic Augustinian vision and then to show how in at least one crucial respect O'Donovan proceeds to leave Augustine behind.

If the first Augustinian lesson, articulated and defended by O'Donovan, is to observe the revolutionary continuity between creation and redemption, the second lesson, identified and yet, I now seek to show, abandoned by O'Donovan, is the one we have just explored—the ecclesial relocation of the political. O'Donovan cares a great deal about the former, yet consistently refuses the radical conclusions that would follow from the latter. It is relevant to the larger argument of this dissertation that John Howard Yoder offered no such refusal. Yoder held both commitments together. Indeed, Yoder's theopolitical vision helps us to question the possibility of observing the first lesson while abandoning the second, for his particular deployment of these Augustinian trajectories enables a powerful critique: Christian advocacy of the sword-bearing function of secular powers serves to undermine the distinctive shape taken by God's revolution of the natural in Christ's death and resurrection.

4.4.2 Sub-Political Justice

The decision to break with the second, much more obviously politically charged Augustinian position is rather explicit in the passage cited above from O'Donovan's

essay on the significance of book 19 for subsequent Western political thought. Yet the break with Augustine is also visible, if more subtly and implicitly, and perhaps therefore more determinatively, in O'Donovan's earlier work, especially *Resurrection and Moral Order*. Augustine, O'Donovan rightly recognized, refused to dislodge a non-theological conception of justice. "Justice is found where God, the one supreme God, rules an obedient City according to his grace," is Augustine's most concise and demanding formulation.[106] That Augustine was also consistently thinking of this theological transformation of the political virtue *christologically* is clear from the passages already cited from the *Tractates on the First Epistle of John* and *Sermon* 13. The way of justice is like any other virtue—christologically mediated.

Before returning to O'Donovan's early work, a fuller picture of Augustine's theological transformation of the virtue of justice will help us to draw out the contrast with O'Donovan's own treatment. Fortunately, there are abundant resources within Augustine's writings, particularly when one realizes that the distinction undermined by Augustine—i.e., the distinction between theology and politics—means that we can find "political" reflections throughout his most densely theological writings. Consider, for example, a text seldom consulted in discussions of Augustine's political theology, *On the Trinity*. In the prologue to book 4, Augustine writes that he is "struggling to return from this *far country* (Lk 15:13) by the road [God] has made in the humanity of the divinity of his only Son."[107] Why would Augustine struggle to return to God by this particular road? As we have seen, Augustine considers the Christian life to be one that is always under pressure. There are many perils to negotiate in Augustine's depiction of the *saeculum*, but paramount among them are the difficulties of belief; it is a struggle to believe in God rather than idols.

> [N]aturally the spirit which believes what it does not see must be on its guard against fabricating something that does not exist, and thus hoping in and loving

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[106] Augustine *City of God* 19.23 (Bettenson, 890).

[107] Augustine *Trinity* 4.prologue (Hill, 153). See also *Expositions the Psalms* 58(1).7 (Boulding, 3:153).

something false. If this happens, then it will not be charity from a pure heart and a good conscience and an unfabricated faith (1 Tm 1:5), . . . So then, since we desire to understand as far as it is given us the eternity and equality and unity of the trinity, and since we must believe before we can understand, we must take care our faith is not fabricated.

The particular path taken by God in the humanity of Jesus is at the center of Augustine's trinitarian faith, for only by adhering to the way taken by God-the-Son can sinners avoid the idolatry of loving and hoping in idols—those creatures of our own devising that we elevate to objects of devotion.[108] Therefore, justice, as a virtue that applies supremely to God first, must be understood according to Augustine in light of the particular shape of God's redemption of the world in Christ.[109] This theological pruning of the classical virtue yields particularly striking fruit in book 13 of *Trinity*, where Augustine argues that the particular shape of God's work in Christ carries with it a counter-intuitive implication: the superiority of justice over power; and not just the superiority of any conception of justice, but the very particular sort of justice enacted by God in the passion of Christ.

At the opening of 13.4, Augustine takes up the perplexing question of the necessity of Christ's humliation. "Now there are people who say," he writes, "'Was there no other way available to God of setting men free from the unhappiness of mortality, that he should want his only begotten Son, God coeternal with himself, to become man . . . and, having become mortal, so suffer death?'"[110] Ever the defender of God's freedom, Augustine aims to answer the question without denying that other ways were available to God, "since all things are equally within his power."[111] He insists, rather, that the particular way of Christ's suffering and death was, if not the only way, the most suitable

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[108] Augustine *Trinity* 8.3.6, 8.3.8 (Hill, 246–47).
[109] A sideways glance at *Expositions of the Psalms* 105.5 (Boulding, 5:207) yields a passage advancing the claim with typical clarity: "It is God who justifies, God who makes people righteous by healing them of their iniquities, and therefore the psalm proceeds, *Remember us, O Lord among the people with whom you are pleased*. This means, 'Let us be numbered among those on whom your favor rests,' because God was not well pleased with all of them. *Visit us in your salvation*: this means the Savior himself, in whom sins are forgiven and souls healed *so that they are able to form right judgment and do justice*" (final emphasis mine)
[110] Augustine *Trinity* 13.4.13 (Hill, 353).
[111] Ibid.

way imaginable, and it was so in key part because of the misery of the human condition after the sin of Adam. "By a kind of divine justice the human race was handed over to the power of the devil for the sin of the first man. . . . Thus all men are by origin under *the prince of the power of the air* who *works in the sons of unbelief* (Eph 2:2)."[112] This human predicament results from the fall from grace that God does not enact but rather permits, allowing humanity to bind itself to an alien power through the misuse of the original powers of human freedom. It is crucial here for Augustine that *it is by God's justice that humanity was subjected to an alien power*.[113] Why? Because God would subvert his just subjection of humanity to the devil's power if God, like the devil, attempted to gain control of humanity through power alone. Therefore Augustine insists:

> But the devil would have to be overcome not by God's power but by his justice. What, after all, could be more powerful than the all-powerful, or what creature's power could compare with the creator's? *The essential flaw of the devil's perversion made him a lover of power and a deserter and assailant of justice*, which means that men imitate him all the more thoroughly the more they neglect or even detest justice and studiously devote themselves to power, rejoicing at the possession of it or inflamed with the desire for it. So it pleased God to deliver man from the devil's authority by beating him at the justice game, not the power game, so that men too might imitate Christ by seeking to beat the devil at the justice game, not the power game. Not that power is to be shunned as something bad, but that the right order be preserved which puts justice first.[114]

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[112] Augustine *Trinity* 13.4.16 (Hill, 355).
[113] Ibid., (Hill, 355–56).
[114] Augustine *Trinity* 13.4.17 (Hill, 356). Edmund Hill offers a note on this passage in the New Century Press edition of *Trinity*—a note, I should add, that I discovered only *after* incorporating Augustine's reflections from book 13 on power and justice in into this chapter. Hill's reflections are worth quoting at length:
> Explanations of the redemption in terms of justice are not very fashionable nowadays. Indeed they are regarded with a reserve verging on disapproval as being "legalistic" or "feudal or "juridical"—all of which are very bad names indeed. And even if we can stomach such qualities in theological explanation, most of us nowadays find it rather peculiar to think of the devil as having legal rights which God has somehow to buy him out of, and we assume that some such idea as this is involved in talking about God overcoming the devil with justice.
> The reader must judge for himself whether Augustine's treatment of the theme is open to such criticism—certainly I should suppose it is rather hard to debit him with feudal concepts. But however that may be, it seems to me that what he has to say has a peculiar significance for us in these late twentieth century times, when we are so acutely aware of the values of social justice and the problems of social revolution, and preoccupied with the question whether and how far a Christian may rightly resort to violence (that is, power) in order to bring about a just society, or alternatively to maintain the stability and order of society.
> Current theology, in other words, is involved four square in political thought; it has its political dimension which practically no modern theologian would wish to erase even if he could. And here is Augustine presenting the redemption as an archetypal model of political action, in which justice is uncompromisingly placed before power, just as in the last book he presented the fall as the archetype of all social disarray, in which what is private is disastrously preferred to what is common to the whole human community. (Hill, 367)

Here is Augustine, then, offering a theological rebuke to worldly power, trumped by divine justice in a way that is more truly powerful. Again, the resonance with Yoder is stronger than with O'Donovan. Augustine continues, reclaiming the power of weakness in a way that Yoder ought to have admired:[115]

> What then is the justice that overpowered the devil? The justice of Jesus Christ. . . . Now would the devil have been overpowered by this most equitable of judgments if Christ had chosen to deal with him by power instead of justice? But he postponed what he had the power to do, in order to do first what he had to do; that is why he needed to be both God and man. Unless he had been man he could not have been killed; unless he had been God no one would have believed he did not want to do what he could do, but they would simply have thought that he could not do what he wanted to do; nor would we have imagined that he was preferring justice to power, but simply that he lacked power. As it is, however, he suffered human pains for us because he was man, though if he had not wanted to he would have been able not to suffer so, because he was God. In this way the justice of humility was made more acceptable, seeing that the power of divinity could have avoided the humiliation if it had wanted to; and so by the death of one so powerful we powerless mortals have justice set before us and power promised us. He did one of these two things by dying, the other by rising. What could be more just than to go and face even death on a cross for justice's sake. And what could be a greater show of power than to rise from the dead and ascend into heaven with the very flesh in which he had been killed? So he overcame the devil with justice first and power second. . . . He would have overcome the devil with power even if he could not have been killed by him, though it shows greater power to overcome death by rising than to avoid it by living. . . . Christ was crucified in virtue of the weakness he took to himself in mortal flesh, not in virtue of his immortal power; and yet of this weakness the apostle says, *What is weak of God is stronger than men* (1 Cor 1:25).[116]

Two features of this remarkable passage from 13.4 of *Trinity* merit closer attention. First, Augustine eloquently insists that the doctrine of the incarnation entails a rethinking of God's power in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The messiah's suffering and weakness in the face of human power is real—Jesus's blood is actually shed and he actually suffers the real pains of torture and execution. And yet this weak defeat is revealed in the resurrection to be a divinely powerful triumph over the mortal and contingent power of the devil. For Augustine, this is how God vanquishes evil in the

Hill's insistence that we link Augustine's thoughts on the sinful invention of privacy with his account of the false ordering of power over justice is exactly right—the one follows the other in Augustine's text—and I consider it independent confirmation of Rowan Williams's interpretation of book 19 of *City of God*: a genuine *res publica* is found in the body of Christ, the community of redemption. That this confirmation is found deep in Augustine's complex ruminations on the doctrine of the Trinity is evidence that the theological revision/ecclesial relocation of justice is systematically present throughout his mature thought.
[115] Yoder was an expert at undermining arguments from effectiveness. Yet, much like Augustine will in this next passage, Yoder comes back to reaffirm the effectiveness of Christ's weak power.
[116] Augustine *Trinity* 13.4.18 (Hill, 358).

incarnation: the devil's legitimate rights over humanity (legitimate, because the power *over* humanity is the just/punishing reward given by God to the devil for humanity's abuse *of* power in the Fall) are justly revoked by God in the innocent suffering and weakness of the Son of God. The devil, who gained "life" by the sword of a fallen creation's false prioritization of power over justice, dies by this same sword. The justice of God subjected humanity to the punishment of being bound under the devil's power; that same justice freed humanity from subjection in and through the God Man's innocent death. In predictably abusing his limited powers against the One who justly granted them—predictably, as the devil's *modus operandi* was always parasitic on *disobedience*— the devil undermined his own position.[117]

Thus the first point is that the justice of God in the suffering, weakness, and death of his own Son is for Augustine the way God actually vanquishes the devil's powerful grip on the world. It is true that for Augustine, no less than for Oliver O'Donovan, the resurrection is in one sense the primary site of God's demonstration of power: "with justice because *he had no sin* . . . and was must unjustly killed by [the devil]; with power because dead he came back to live never to die thereafter."[118] However, what O'Donovan tends to shy away from, Augustine embraces: namely, the weakness of Jesus, concentrated in the cross, as the means by which God defeats the fallen powers of an evil and disobedient creation. There is, for Augustine no less than Yoder, power in the weak justice of Jesus's defeat at the cross.

The second point is that Augustine's thoughts on justice are first and foremost theological. He makes far more room for a discussion of the demands of justice in *Trinity* than he does in *City of God*. O'Donovan himself offers an important admission about the

[117] Cf. Augustine *Expositions of the Psalms* 38.18 (Boulding 2:188–89): "If is the correction administered by a just God that has reduced a person to such weakness, there is a certain kind of strength that is simply vicious. Human beings displeased God by a show of that kind of strength, and therefore needed to be corrected by weakness; they displeased him by their pride, and therefore needed to be disciplined by humility. All proud people claim to be strong."
[118] Ibid.

orientation of the latter text: "In the end, though, we must dissent from the claim that *The City of God* is 'in the main a book about justice,' and agree that justice is not at the forefront of Augustine's concerns."[119] And yet, oddly enough, justice—particularly a political justice oriented toward the secular sword bearers of every age—will remain at the forefront of O'Donovan's concerns.[120] My aim has not been to deny the plausibility of O'Donovan's discovery in Augustine of a theological program that sets crucial markers for the subsequent development of Christendom political theology and politics ethics. O'Donovan is among the most careful expositors of Augustine's work, and his essay on book 19 of *City of God* displays his exemplary erudition and honesty. Rather, I have sought to draw attention to features of Augustine's mature theology that could legitimately be taken in a very *different* direction than the one taken by O'Donovan. And the passage just cited offers a window onto the mature Augustine's insistence that theological talk about justice is most at home when it is focused on the life, and especially the death, of Jesus; and also onto his insistence that questions about power—particularly questions about the human power needed to defeat the devil—receive an answer in the death of Jesus that amounts to a reversal of expectations.

Much of what passes for contemporary Augustinian political theology seems to operate in the wake of the simple fact that Augustine offered limited theological approval of some forms of political violence. There is no need to deny that, *if* such an approval is what one is looking for, it can indeed be found in the writings of St. Augustine. O'Donovan's appropriation of Augustine is not nearly so crude, but what he takes away from Augustine is likewise there. O'Donovan offers a brilliant interpretation of Augustine's eschatological "invention" of the secular in *City of God*, and his efforts to

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[119] O'Donovan and O'Donovan, *Bonds*, 63. The internal quote is from Ernest Fortin's essay, "Justice as the Foundation."
[120] For one example, see O'Donovan, *Common Objects*, 54. O'Donovan, here muting or even rejecting the Augustinian evacuation of justice and its concomitant ecclesial relocation, affirms "Saint Paul's famous passage on the role of government in Romans 13, in which the whole question of the representative status of government is passed by in silence and its rationale is found exclusively in the tasks of justice. Government is to enact God's word of judgment; that and nothing else."

think of secular politics as limited to the task of judgment on account of God's revolution of the natural in Christ's death and resurrection can claim a valid basis in Augustine's mature "political" thought.[121] Nonetheless, if contemporary Augustinians often move forward in their political theologies loaded with a few nuggets from Augustine's mature thought, I hope I have demonstrated that richer veins of gold are often left behind. Since any political theology with a basis in Augustine's thought is bound to be selective, the point here is not to challenge selectivity per se, but rather to reckon the costs and benefits of the selectivity in question, in this case, the selectivity of Oliver O'Donovan. While the benefits of following Augustine's defense of limited forms of political coercion are routinely celebrated—he sets the course for subsequent "just war" reflection, he offers an eloquent account of the humble and anguished statesman, he demolishes political idealism by showing us the limitations of power, etc.—the costs of that same defense are routinely ignored. I suggest that we need to begin to at least consider the dubiousness of reckoning the benefits of his defense of coercion without reckoning the theological costs.

As we have seen, O'Donovan considers the costs to political theology too high to follow Augustine's lead in subtracting justice from the enactments of the earthly city. O'Donovan believes subsequent tradition illumines a weakness in Augustine's theological rejection of secular justice, and he revises his political theology accordingly. I, on the other hand, consider the costs to Augustine's central theological insights too high to follow O'Donovan's (or, for that matter, Augustine's) lead in defending forms of political violence. In defense of this judgment, I think we need to begin to see the strangeness of the scholarly habit of beginning with the ending of Augustine's thought. By "beginning with the ending," I do not mean the habit of privileging Augustine's mature thought in contemporary assessments of his legacy, but rather the particular

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[121] I use the word "invention" here, in the way that Nicholas Lash uses it in his brief but powerful meditations in Nicholas Lash, *Holiness, Speech, and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004). Lash retrieves an older meaning, whereby invention equals discovery, not creation.

habit of assuming that Augustine's defense of some forms of political violence flows inevitably from his mature theology.[122] I have sought, rather, to assess this conclusion in light of his mature theological reflections. In other words, rather than beginning with Augustine's famous endorsements of certain forms of political violence and then working backwards to see how they fit with other features of his mature theology, I have worked the other way around. I have tried to read Augustine, in a genuinely open way, to see whether or not the celebrated endorsement of limited forms of violence is actually entailed by the robust theology. What I have documented thus far in my engagement with O'Donovan, is an Augustine who is much closer to Yoder's christological critique of secular justice than O'Donovan has been able to acknowledge.

4.5 The Critique of Yoder

Having explored, at some length, O'Donovan's framing of the tasks of political theology, sometimes Augustinian, sometimes not, we turn finally to his critique of Yoder.

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[122] Robert Dodaro is surely right that "studies concerned with Augustine's political thought invariably pay little attention to his thinking about Christ and scriptural interpretation, and make almost no effort to ask what role these and other areas in his thought contribute to his political ethics." Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 1. However, Dodaro's own exposition perpetuates the assumption that "political ethics" really takes off for Augustine in *City of God*, particularly in books 2 and 19 where Cicero's *De re publica* is engaged. Thus Dodaro begins his first chapter: "What is a just society? How is it structured and how does it function? In approaching these questions, Augustine turns to Cicero's writings, principally to *De re publica*, both in his *City of God* and in his correspondence with public officials" (6). But this narrative of Augustine's "turn" to political ethics assumes what Augustine explicitly rejects, namely, that the quest for a just society is first and foremost a matter of "politics" and not "religion," that it is the domain of the secular city and not the church. On the contrary, Augustine actually spills quite a bit of ink over the requirements of justice *before* he ever writes *City of God*, but also in contemporaneous texts like *Trinity*—texts that are typically not thought of as "political" texts at all. It is arguably the modern presumption that politics and religion are distinct fields of inquiry that lurks in the background of Dodaro's exposition. John Howard Yoder's critique of this distinction helps us to see the strangeness of certain habits of interpretation among Augustinians. Why should the following passages from the *Confessions* not be considered examples of the beginnings of Augustine's "political thought"?: "This is why we must tremble before your judgments, O Lord, for your Truth is not mine, nor his, nor hers, but belongs to all of us whom you call to share it in communion with him, at the same time giving us the terrible warning not to arrogate truth to ourselves as private property, lest we find ourselves deprived of it. For anyone who appropriates what you provide for all to enjoy, and claims as his own what belongs to all, is cast out from this commonwealth, cast out to what is truly his own, which is to say from the truth to a lie." *Confessions* 12.25.34 (Boulding, 295). Here, genuine publicity is as much a matter of truth as it is power, and Augustine cannot speak of truth without resorting to concepts such as the "commonwealth" of God. Or, consider a passage cited in chapter 2 as evidence of Augustine's critique of Platonism: "It is one thing to survey our peaceful homeland from a wooded height but fail to find the way there, and make vain attempts to travel through impassible terrain, while fugitive deserters marshaled by the lion and the dragon obstruct and lurk in ambush; and quite another to walk steadily in the way that leads there, along the well-built road opened up by the heavenly emperor, where no deserters from the celestial army dare commit robbery, for they avoid that way like torment" (7.21.27). There is absolutely no reason—at least no reason intrinsic to Augustine's thought—to consider these texts less political than *City of God* or than the writings gathered by Atkins and Dodaro in *Augustine: Political Writings*.

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O'Donovan's offers four criticisms of Yoder's work, and as I said in the introduction to

the chapter above, I am both grateful that O'Donovan has put his thoughts on Yoder

into print and disappointed with the insubstantiality of the engagement. The four

criticims that I will review will seem like a strange mix. I include each one for the sake of

thoroughness. The first two are easily set aside, but the third and fourth are more

substantial. They will helpfully take us back to Augustine and present a final occasion

for clarifying just how much closer to Augustine Yoder is than Oliver O'Donovan. The

most extensive engagement with Yoder occurs in *Desire*, which contains the latter two

critiques, and I will therefore work my way towards them.

1. Perhaps the most shockingly inadequate treatment of Yoder's work is to be

found in *The Just War Revisited*, a collection of revised lectures and essays written by

O'Donovan after the events of 9/11 and published just before the U.S. invasion of Iraq in

2003. There, O'Donovan seeks to advance his account of government as judgment, with

a particular eye to the theater of international armed conflict. In building up to his

critique of Yoder, O'Donovan observes that,

> Formally, what is proposed [in a 'just war'] is *toto caelo* different from the crime
> of war: it is a provisional witness to the unity of God's rule in the face of the
> antagonistic praxis of *duellum*. Yet it is no less true than in this form than in any
> other that judgment has only the same material means available to it as crime.
> Armed conflict is the means it requires, because armed conflict is the means by
> which the crime of war is practised.[123]

It is rather distressing to try and follow O'Donovan's own suggestion and apply this

logic to "any other form" of crime. For example, are the material means for addressing

the crime of rape "the same material means available to it as crime"? Is sexual violation

the means available to address the crime of rape, because sexual violation is the means

by which the crime of rape is practiced? Of course, O'Donovan would never advance

such an argument for the simple reason that "sexual violation" is already a negative

description of an act. However, by what right does O'Donovan treat "armed conflict" as

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[123] O'Donovan, *Resurrection*.

a netural concept? Is it not the case that the morality for Christians of "armed conflict" is precisely what Yoder is contesting? O'Donovan, the otherwise careful moral theologian, is caught out blatantly begging the question.

This question begging leads straightaway to a round condemnation of "pacifism," and this is where a second critique of Yoder appears. He continues,

> 'Pacifism' is the name usually given to one of two possible strategies . . . for refusing this Christian proposal [i.e., of evangelical armed conflict]. It characteristically limits an *active* counter-praxis to within the primary, pastoral theatre, while within the secondary, missiological theatre it restricts itself to a passive counter-praxis of endurance and martyrdom. It has been popular in recent years to say that there are not one but many 'pacifisms', and for the purposes of a sociological typology this is no doubt true [O'Donovan cites Yoder and Hauerwas on the varieties of pacifism]. But for the purpose of practical reason one pacifism is enough: in the face of a praxis of unmediated opposition, it holds that an evangelical counter-praxis of judgment is not to be looked for.

Yet again, O'Donovan ducks the actual challenge presented by Yoder's work. For what Yoder actually contests, quite specifically and consistently and repeatedly, is the legitimacy of violent action for Christian disciples. To speak in terms that O'Donvoan is familiar with, Yoder argues that God's revolution of the natural in the resurrection of the Crucified from the dead has shown us "the way things really are" and thus what a redeemed human agency should look like. As we have seen, Yoder has deploy O'Donovan's own interrelated principles—realistic, evangelical, and Easter—to make the normative case for Christian nonviolence. If Yoder's inhabitatation of O'Donovan's own framework is theologically correct, then O'Donovan would have to, on his own terms, reject this particular critique of pacifism. If not, then we need to be shown why.

Secondly, we observe in this passage a theme that will rear its ugly head in several places in O'Donovan's writings: the specter of chaos, or, as he puts it here, a praxis of unmediated antagonism.[124] It is true that Yoder offered no program for opposing "unmediated antagonism." However, that is simply because Yoder, much like

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[124] See, e.g., Ibid., 38, O'Donovan, *The Just War Revisited*, 91.

Augustine before him, denied the sheer possibility of such a thing.[125] It is oddly a

betrayal of Augustinianism and the very "order of things" O'Donovan otherwise

celebrates for him to lapse into speaking of "unmediated antagonism" and "lawless

anarchy."[126] For according to Augustine, the *fallen* created order it still a fallen *order*.[127]

Genuine anarchy can be nothing more than demonically wishful thinking, because sin

for Augustine does not destroy nature. Rather, evil creatures and institutions are,

despite themselves, always structured towards peace—no matter how wicked they are,

and no matter how self-aggrandizing or nihilistic they want to be.[128] Anarchy and

absolute antagonism are fictions, concepts with no ontological purchase—they thus fail

O'Donovan's own reality principle—and to oppose them is, on Augustinian grounds, to

fence with windmills, and thus to act unintelligibly. It is as true for Augustine as it is for

Yoder that the world's disordered and demonic violence is always already being

sovereignly used by God, despite itself, for the sake of the world's redemption.

Furthermore, the distinctive character of Yoder's pacifism cannot be so easily brushed

aside because it actually amounts to a strong evangelical counter-praxis of judgment. As

we have seen, according to Yoder, the concrete function of the cross of Christ is to God's

constructive alternative to the world's disobedience. There are in Yoder'e estimation

other valid interpretations of the cross, but they should not be allowed to crowd out the

active, political, constructive one:

> all such additional depths of meaning [of the cross] derive from and are
> dependent upon the social and historical one: a righteous man was put to death
> because of the way he refused to let stand the unrighteousness of the powers in
> control of the people he came to liberate. It is also the way he calls his followers

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[125] See Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, 39–40. "anarchy is only a word, a grammatical invention, an imaginary concept. There is no such thing as anarchy. There are varying forms of government, from tyranny to the constitutional democracy; theare are varying degrees of centralization of power, from the world empire through the nation to the independent tribe. . . . But there is always authority, and where it seems to function too little for the welfare and stability of society, the reason is never that the critique coming from the direction of Christian love has been too effective."
[126] For the latter phrase, see O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures, 2003*, 225.
[127] "Yet even something perverted must be at peace, subsisting in some aspect, deriving from some aspect, relating to some aspect of reality in which or from which it subsists; otherwise it could not exist at all." Augustine *City of God* 19.12 (Bettenson, 869).
[128] This is the point of the story of Cacus related by Augustine at *City of God* 19.12.

to take. *That is what causes us to stumble: not that the cross is weak but that it asks of us too much strength.*[129]

2. O'Donovan was interviewed by Rupert Shortt for the book *God's Advocates*, and O'Donovan offers the following retrospective thoughts on the earlier engagement with Yoder in *Desire*:

> In *Desire of the Nations* I took issue with the late John Howard Yoder, a man dearly loved and much admired for the best of reasons. Yoder became an important voice for the Anabaptist communities of America, which had not been noted for producing theological reflection. He broke through a certain taboo in bringing their traditions into discourse at a serious intellectual level with other Protestant and Catholic theologians. Nevertheless, in his determination to give the Anabaptist account of things a voice in the public realm, he seriously falsified Christian history in reading it as a capitulation by the Church to the attractions of power. In doing so he encouraged a generation of American Christians to swear their fealty to the First Amendment.[130]

It must immediately be noted that O'Donovan's remarks to Shortt are not at all a simple summary of his critique of Yoder in *Desire*. In fact, one issue that I have already addressed above and will return to below—the interpretation of Romans 13—is not mentioned at all. O'Donovan does accuse Yoder in *Desire* of a voluntarist conception of the Church, and I will return to this accusation below as the third criticism. Here, I am interested in his accusation that Yoder falsified history, for as we have already seen at great length, being careful with history was of the utmost importance to Yoder.

It cannot be denied that Yoder's critique of Constantinianism entails a repentant posture towards the failures of the Christian past. It need not, and indeed in Yoder's case it did not, entail a sweeping rejection of everything that happened after Constantine, but there are certainly ample attacks on the manifold forms of Constantinian Christianity. However, consider these words of Oliver O'Donovan from a different context:

> The redemptive work of the Holy Spirit involves the restoration of our access to reality. . . That work must involve also a detachment of the will from its self-chosen orientation; man must be free to cease willing his own past. But as willing his own past is, in itself, a natural thing to do, a guarantee of the coherence and

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[129] Yoder, *He Came Preaching Peace*, 41 (emphasis mine).
[130] Rupert Shortt, *God's Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2005), 255.

integrity in our purpose that is indispensable to our fulfilment as moral beings, that 'freedom' is, in one sense, death.[131]

Yoder's critique of Constantinianism can be read in exactly this light. It is a summons for the Constantinian church to die to itself and to become "free to cease willing its own past." Of course, the fact that Yoder's project can be read sympathetically in light of O'Donovan's own account of dying to the past does not in itself exculpate Yoder from the charge of falsifying history. What it does show, however, is that O'Donovan has remained content to beg the question. Only by presuming what Yoder contests—the legitimacy of the Constantinian transformation of early Christianity—can O'Donovan render this judgment. He has, it would seem, presumed Yoder's guilt rather than demonstrated it, and his description of Yoder's falsification of history thus hangs in the air, unsupported by anything direct engagement with Yoder's christological revision of the political. Moreover, as we have seen, Yoder's critical christological historicism is seamlessly interwoven with his interpretation of the politics of Jesus. In order for the second critique of O'Donovan's to hit the mark, he would need to offer a much closer reading of Yoder than he has yet provided. Finally, if Yoder's theological critique of the Church's embrace of the sword is valid, then it is O'Donovan, and not Yoder, who is guilty of falsifying history. It should be clear from everything that has preceded that Yoder, in subjecting wordly politics to robust christological revision, was not venturing out on a limb of wildly anti-traditional political theology; rather, he was taking up the work of christological revision that Augustine himself had begun.

3. Turning then to the critiques in *Desire*, we will begin with O'Donovan's concerns about Yoder's voluntary church. We must recall from our exposition of *Resurrection*, that O'Donovan faults philosophical voluntarism for its betrayal of his realistic principle—it represents an emphasis on the will in disconnection from the created order into which it acts, and from which intelligibility is derived.

[131] O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 112.

> In this context [a discussion of the obedience of rulers] I notice the emphasis John Howard Yoder lays upon *voluntareity* in his characterisation of the church, at the expense of *belief*. . . . What is the relation, in Yoder's view, between this all-important act of the will and Christian faith? And what role is played by divine grace in bringing faith to birth? And does divine grace not make use of the testimony of community faith in awakening individual faith? Certainly, a church defined by the faith it confesses will be free, for 'coerced faith' is a contradiction in terms. But does that make it appropriate to speak of a 'voluntary society', which usually connotes an association into which people contract *optionally*, i.e., not only without anyone forcing them to, but without any pressing need driving them to? A voluntary society is one that I could leave without incurring grave or irremediable loss, which might seem a strange thing for a Christian to think about the church. Finally, does the concept of the church as a voluntary society not commend itself chiefly because it fits late-modern expectations of how civil society will be organised? Is Yoder, in the name of non-conformity, not championing a great conformism, lining the church up with the sports clubs, friendly societies, colleges, symphony subscription-guilds, political parties and so on, just to prove that the church offers late-modern order no serious threat?

This passage is rather breathtaking for its confident ignorance of Yoder's actual ecclesiological commitments. The idea that Yoder offers an ecclesiology in lock-step with "late-modern order" is fantastical, as anyone who has actually tried to practice the politics of Jesus could have told O'Donovan. Yoder's "free church" is voluntary, not because of any aversion to philosophical realism, but because of the actual shape of the work of God in Christ. That is to say, Yoder's account of the voluntary church is an aspect of his Christology.[132] Christ's costly visibility is the basis and model for the Chruch's own costly visibility. Yoder's account of ecclesial voluntareity is offered as an alternative to the great Constantinian reversal,[133] and, far from affirming the autonomous dignity and power of the human will, flows from prior exegetical claims about the particular shape and power of genuine human freedom manifested in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.[134] Thus Christ is not only the great "after," but also the great "outer" of Christian theology.

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[132] See Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 62. "The real issue is not whether Jesus can make sense in our world far from Galilee, but whether—when he meets us in our world, as he does in fact—we want to follow him. We don't have to, as they didn't then. That we don't have to is the profoundest proof of his condescension, and thereby of his glory." Here we see the "power and the glory" of Yoder's Christology—the genuine theological basis for his critique of the "counterfeit double" of Constantinian glory and power.
[133] "The church after Constantine reversed the New Testament attitude toward these matters and thereby changed the very nature of what it means to be church." Ibid., 107.
[134] "The primary substantial criterion of Christian ethical decisions for the radical reformers is the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. What he did is the primordial definition of the human obedience which God desires." Ibid., 116.

4. This brings us, at last, to O'Donovan's critique of Yoder's reading of Romans 13. O'Donovan makes the interesting suggestion that Yoder's position shifted over time on the exegesis of this passage. He thinks that the account provided by Yoder in *Politics* and *Christian Witness to the State* represents a step back from the more acceptable account offered in *Original Revolution*. This is an odd suggestion, since Yoder opens up the *Christian Witness to the State* with a claim that he will proceed substantiate the claims he made in "the more acceptable" passage of *Original Revolution* cited by O'Donovan. Nonetheless, here is O'Donovan's complaint:

> I take as the principal source for his reading the chapter devoted to this text in *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), pp. 193–214. But if I were to look elsewhere in Yoder I would find statements with which I could be more comfortable: for example, the following brief mention in *The Original Revolution* (1971) pp. 59f., where he thinks the text gives 'criteria for judging to what extent a state's activities (since the state incarnates this semi-subdued evil) are subject to Christ's reign. If the use of force is such as to protect the innocent and punish the evildoer, then the state may be considered as fitting within God's plan as subject to the reign of Christ.' Yet in 1964 (*The Christian Witness to the State*) and again in 1972 Yoder made a major break with that line of interpretation. Absent was the reference to Christ's triumph and the state's subjection, or semisubjection. The language of principalities and powers was invoked solely to point up the demonic character of the state, requiring 'at best acquiescence', and the whole text was a call to 'a nonresistant attitude toward a *tyrannical* government' (my italics). With which I find it impossible to reconcile Paul's statements that the authorities praise those who do good, and that obedience is due 'as a matter of principled conviction'.

O'Donovan goes on to deny Yoder's characterization of the mainstream exegesis of Romans 13, suggests that "Yoder's own view of the mainstream seems to have been formed in the post-Nazi era of the German-speaking world," argues that the Pauline "passages were not attempting a description of contemporary politics; they had as their aim the definition of the ruler's right," and simply asserts that Yoder's interpretation of restraint and rebellion as "the two dimensions of the life of any state" is not enough. Yoder's account of the modest state as nonetheless still under the order of the demonic is insufficient, in O'Donovan's estmation, because it fails to attend to the way in which "Christ's enthronement . . . force[d] upon the principalities and powers the alternatives

of subjection and outright confrontation and defeat. It had brought a moment of

apocalyptic division."[135]

O'Donovan raises numerous issues in the course of rejecting Yoder's exegesis of

Romans 13. Instead of treating them all here, I propose to refocus the issue by returning

to my earlier analysis of O'Donovan's refusal of Augustine's theological redefinition of

the political.[136] As we saw, O'Donovan acknowledges and then abandons Augustine's

denial of justice to the earthly city. But this is *the* crucial theological move, and I submit

that Yoder's reading of Romans 13 is in this respect more Augustinian than

O'Donovan's. The "demonic character of the state" is not a bad contemporary

paraphrase of Augustine's evacuation of justice from the *civitas terrena*. Moreover,

O'Donovan's refusal of this Augustinian critique of earthly political justice, with its

attendant ecclesial relocation of the political, is arguably what prevents him from

appreciating the consistency of Yoder's account. For O'Donovan seems to think that

Yoder cannot have a semisubdued state (*Original Revolution*) and a demonic state

(*Politics* and *Christian Witness to the State*) at one and the same time. But in denying this

combination, O'Donovan misses the very heart of Yoder's Augustine-like denial of

earthly justice. The "state" as sword, precisely in light of its nonconformity to the

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[135] This brief summary covers most of what O'Donovan says with regards to Yoder at O'Donovan, *Desire*, 151–52.

[136] O'Donovan does raise an interesting question about Yoder's possibly shifting attitudes toward "the state." In "Peace Without Eschatology," Yoder speaks of the state as being subject to Christ's reign only under certain conditions. The state has to acknowledge a higher authority and exercise limited dominion for it to be subject to the reign of Christ. Otherwise the state is demonic. This is the essay O'Donovan cites affirmatively (it was first published in *Original Revolution*). See Yoder, *Original Revolution*. Also Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 144–45. This account gives the impression that there could be an outside to Christ's reign, and that there is such a thing as a non-demonic state. It is this possibility of a non-demonic state over against demonic states that, at least in other political theologies, generates the notion of legitimacy which, when illegitimate states are thought to appear, generates the possibility of legitimate revolution. Yoder does in fact eventually move against the possibility of such an "outside." Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*.#37 "A hypothetical just, sober, and modest state would still be in the order of the demonic." Here, Yoder rejects the concept of legitimacy opened up in the "Peace Without Eschatology" essay. Or rather, Yoder at the very least wants to say that the concept of legitimacy does not mean that the sword-bearing function of the state is anything other than rebelliousness on the part of the powers. See Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, 38. See also 43 where he rejects the "logical implication" of the concept of legitimacy. We are rather to be subject to the powers that be. Also 59, where he says that "legitimate" does not mean Christian. Yoder's account is consistent then, so long as "legitimacy" names not an option of Christian discipleship, but the relative visibility of the channeling effects of Christ's Lordship. See Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 200."[Christians] should rather rebel against all [governments] and be subordinate to all; for 'subordination' is itself the Christian form of rebellion."

nonviolent work of Christ, simply cannot be located within the orbit of redeemed

human agency, or, as Yoder puts it, "inside the perfection of Christ." However, Christ is

truly risen and Lord of history, which means that all of creation is already subject to his

reign; sword-bearers do not and cannot exist outside of God's sovereignty. Yoder's

reading of Romans 13 is that, in so far as we can observe the bearers of the sword

operating within the minimalist framework articulated by Paul, we can actually see how

even these rebellious are being conformed to the Reign of the Crucified. When they do

not so behave, that does not mean that they are outside of God's sovereignty, but rather

that we do not know how to specify their subjection to God's reign.[137]

4.5 Conclusion

I have summarized O'Donovan's ambitious effort to interpret discipleship as liberated

action in light of the resurrection of Christ and elucidated O'Donovan's focal concepts—

moral order, intelligible action, the primacy of judgment, and the common grace of the

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[137] Another place O'Donovan and Yoder differ is over the nature of the conflicts of our age. Yoder claims that the war is over, and that Christians do not need to better deploy violence in order to marginally improve an unbelieving world's disordered peace. O'Donovan thinks that Christians are given space and time by God to practice reconciliation in and through the reformation of violence. You can see why O'Donovan thinks there is so much violence left to be done in the way he relates redemption to creation, and crucifixion to resurrection (or, in the case of the latter pair, fails to relate them). O'Donovan claims that the resurrection vindicates the created order without claiming that injured right has already been taken up by God in and through the passion of Christ. The crucifixion does comparatively little work for O'Donovan. It certainly does not stand as the form of judgment that Christians are to live into in the common grace of the saeculum that God has provided to believers and nonbelievers alike. Thus the vindication of created order is still a massive work to be achieved, and the judgment of God on injured right can take the profoundly non-cruciform shape of acts of decisive violence. O'Donovan reads martyrdom and suffering as liminal cases—what is to be done when nothing else can be done, and certainly at some level this is correct. But it is highly relevant that he also reads armed conflict as liminal—what is to be done when nothing else can be done—and thus O'Donovan ends up advocating a non-cruciform practical activity in precisely that place where a cruciform one might be called for. If, rather, the cross is the way in which God justified a sinful humanity, and makes peace, then O'Donovan's attempt to win peace out of conflict through ordered violence is an attempt to restore creation order by circumventing the cross. It is noteworthy that Ephesians 2:11-16 makes no appearance in *Resurrection and Moral Order*. It is also noteworthy that in an edited volume dedicated entirely to O'Donovan's use of the bible—*A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan*—no single mention of Ephesians 2 appears, and while "resurrection, and restoration of creation" appears in the subject index of this volume, as does "resurrection and restoration of" as a subcategory under "creation order," there is no entry in the subject index for "crucifixion." Thus is the most obvious instance of political judgment in the entire New Testament downplayed, and in some instances ignored, in this most ambitious attempt to reconfigure political theology around the concept of judgment. O'Donovan mentions Ephesians 2:11–22 on 132 of *Desire*, but the work of the cross is not discussed. The focus is rather on the reconciliation achieved and how it does not entail the erasure of the distinct identities of Jews and Gentiles. Ephesians 2 is not mentioned at all in *Ways of Judgment*. It is significant that O'Donovan never reflects on the cross as that "by which he put to death their hostility." O'Donovan argues consistently that hostility must be overcome with sophistications in the use of force.

saeculum—in order to do three things: 1) highlight the Augustinianism of his proposal, 2) tease out some Yoderian resonances, and 3) set the stage for O'Donovan's critique of Yoder. I have also replayed the critical engagement with Yoder, interpreting it against the background of O'Donovan's larger project, demonstrating that Yoder's alternative reading of Romans 13 stands in greater continuity with Augustine's christolgical revision of justice and "the political."[138]

If I am right about Yoder's superior Augustinian construal of the role of "the sword" in God's economy, O'Donovan's prolific work need not be set aside. Resituated in light of Yoder's critique, O'Donovan's massive project continues to be of value. As Yoder himself demonstrated time and again, Christians have much to say to the world— even, or perhaps especially, in the context of its unbelief. O'Donovan's astute reflections on the challenge of reforming the world's violent political orders can be appreciated as the fruits of theological patience. Yet they must be recast in light of Yoder's fundamental distinction between church and world. The challenge of reforming the use of force must for Christians be understood as a ministry of patience toward those exercising the freedom that God has extended to all—the freedom not to follow Jesus, the freedom not to believe, the freedom to live outside the perfection of Christ. Only such a redescription of the political-theological task can avoid betraying the original revolution of cross and resurrection that preserves the revolutionary continuity between creation and redemption that O'Donovan otherwise seeks to maintain. If, following Yoder, the best way to reform the old *aeon* is to live in the new,[139] O'Donovan's project as it stands concedes to much to the old *aeon*; O'Donovan is too invested in reforming the old *aeon* on the old *aeon's* terms. There is, according to Yoder, room for concessions, but only if

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[138] This is another reason that James Turner Johnson's hasty dismissal of an Augustine–Yoder dialogue is misguided. Yoder's location of "the political" in God's economy is no bolt of lightening from an altogether alien theological framework. To the extent that Yoder's pacifism strikes and illumines the theopolitical landscape below, it does so because it draws upon and extends the electricity of Augustine's theopolitical vision.

[139] Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 87.

we acknowledge them to be a ministry of patience before an unbelieving and impatient world. This ministry betrays itself and the Christ it heralds when political violence is deemed usable by followers of the Kingly One whose judgment culminated in the love of enemies unto death on the cross.

Yoder and O'Donovan agree on the importance of the church's occupation of its own social space, but O'Donovan's effort to accommodate the world's violent "necessities" tends to overwhelm his affirmations of the genuinely political nature of the *ekklesia*. I suggest that, at the end of the day, O'Donovan has produced a political theology with split-personalities: his Christian citizen is exhorted to be in *and* of two worlds. Yoder's alternative construal of the role of "government" in God's economy enables an appreciative reading of the same theopolitical achievements that inspire O'Donovan without following him in endorsing the failures. O'Donovan's uncharacteristically thin treatment of Yoder's writings is a clue to the deeper flaws that would have been exposed had a more searching interpretation been undertaken.

Conclusion

Over the course of the preceding four chapters, I have sought to draw attention to features of Augustine's and Yoder's thought that resonante with the thought of the other. In "After," I used an engagement with Hans Frei's narrative of "great reversal" to draw attention to the alternative, decidedly political account of the Constantinian reversal of Christian history developed by John Howard Yoder. The point was that Yoder's imagination was, from the very beginning, theopolitical, and that this theopolitical imagination resembles in key respects the towering example of St. Augustine.

In "Inner," I explored James Turner Johnson's critique of an earlier proposal to read Augustine and Yoder together. Though I judged Johnson's critique to be highly superficial, it provided a useful occasion for thinking through the comlexities of the metaphors of depth and interiority deployed by both Augustine and Yoder. Augustine's "inside" is most famously personal, thanks to the unsurpassable achievement and reception of his *Confessions*. The "inner" is the place we go to find God, a place to which we withdraw from a messy materiality that threatens, under our own perverse enslavement to it, to keep us from rising to God. Yoder's "inside," on the other hand, is the deep meaning of history—that which cannot be adequately discerned by attending to the usual historical subjects of conquest and achievement. However, upon closer inspection, I argued that these accounts have much more in common than is typically noticed. Augustine's "interiority" is not at all a region of security, but rather an abyss of privacy opened up a sinful humanity. Augustine would not have us recede into secure interiors; rather he would have us be turned inside-out by the humility of Christ. I also suggested that we connect this account of human interiority in Augustine's *Confessions* with his unmasking of pagan narratives of glory in *City of God*. If we do both of these, a

hard contrast with Yoder's work becomes much more difficult. For Yoder is as concerned to resist the superficial narratives of Christian mastery and self-possession as Augstine ever was. Moreover, Augstine's "personal" account of interiority is a useful supplement to Yoder, as helps us unite the "interiority" of the personal and "interiority" of the world-historical under a robust doctrine of creation as plenitude, and sin as privation.

"Before," chapter 3, contains what I think is the most tentative, yet perhaps also the most interesting, argument. Extending the work of contrast with postliberalism I undertook in chapter 1, I sought to gather together the evidence of what I called Yoder's sympathy for modernity. I also replayed Yoder's critique of the Constantinianism of modernity, but it is my review of Yoder's strongly postive appraisal of historical criticism and its findings that will surely strike some readers as wrongheaded. My aim in doing so was twofold: 1) to suggest that we cannot assess Yoder's legacy, negatively or positively, without receiving it in full; since these are not the portions of Yoder's work most frequently handled in the secondary literature on Yoder's contribution, I sought to correct for that; but also 2) to draw attention to Yoder's distinctive account of the theological task as "christological inflection," and to show why Yoder's "sympathy for modernity" cannot in any easy way be construed as a capitulation to it. I concluded the chapter by attempting to relate Yoder's christological historicism to Augustine's metaphysical commitments. Surely this "relation" deserves a fuller treatment, but I believe my interaction with sources in both Yoder and Augustine at least suggested that there might be something like a cruciform ontology, and that such an account of "the order of things" bears directly upon any Christian understanding of history.

In "Outer," I turned to the work of Oliver O'Donovan, so as to confront head on a critique of Yoder from a contemporary political theologian whose work I deeply admire. I worked from the beginning of O'Donovan's ever-expanding corpus and explored what looks to be the crucial Augustinian lesson O'Donovan learned in the

writing The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine: namely, that in the work of theology and ethics, creation and redemption must be held together in revolutionary continuity. I then read forward in O'Donovan's work to his treatment of politics. There, I uncovered an unwillingness to follow Augustine in one crucial respect: his ecclesial relocation of the just political order. I argued that Yoder's "politics of Jesus," while certainly abandoning Augustine's explicit endorsement of limited forms of violence, is actually closer to Augustine on this particular issue than is O'Donovan's political theology. Augustine and Yoder both argue that the church is more genuinely political than "the world" (Yoder) or the *civitas terrena* (Augustine). Here again, I suggested that Yoder's theopolitical vision deserves to be appreciated for its Augustinianism.

Thus have I suggested an answer to my titular question over the course of the four chapters. Yes, there is such a thing as a nonviolent Augustinianism. It can be found in the work of John Howard Yoder. Of course, Yoder was not a Platonist, he did not believe in coercing heretics back into the fold, and he would have rejected out of hand Augustine's views about women, the priesthood, and a great many other things. The fact that all of this is true of most contemporary Augustinians is worth keeping in mind.

However, the cumulative affirmative answer I have provided is not meant to suggest that we can learn from Yoder everything that there is to learn from Augustine, and the leave the rest behind. Far from it. There is in Yoder nothing like Augustine's theology of desire, and Yoder's work is the weaker for it. What would Yoder's account of patience look like in combination with Augustine's meditations on the desiring self? Augustine's trinitarian mediations also continue to astound, and Yoderians would be wise to think long and hard about how Augustine's account of the vestiges of the Trinity might complement Yoder's cruciform ontological claims.

My affirmative answer flows rather the conclusion that Yoder's pacifism depends in certain key respects on the sorts of theological moves made long ago by Augustine. The summons to a christological revision of history, the critique of univocal

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conceptons of power, the unmasking of narratives of glory, the account of a dispossesive self made vulnerable by the humility of Christ, the ecclesial relocation of the political: I judge these to be at the very heart of the theology of the mature St. Augustine. They are also indispensable resources for Yoder's politics of Jesus.

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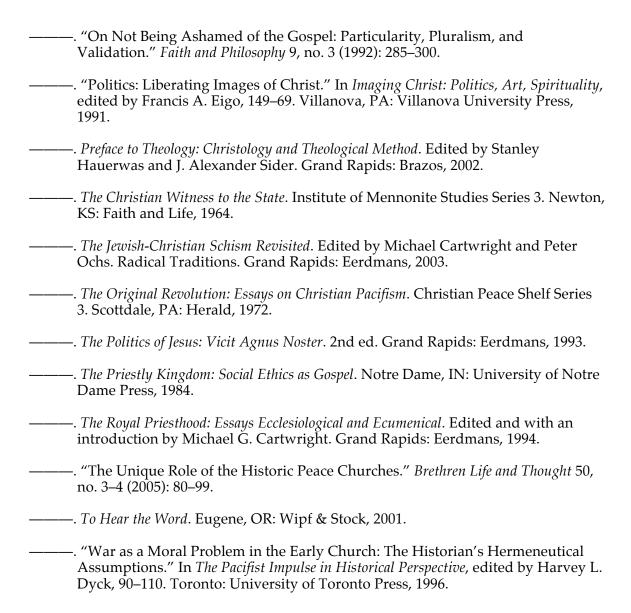
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Biography

Charles Mayo Collier was born to Martha Mayo and John Calvin Collier on December 24th, 1971, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. When he was seven years old, his family relocated to Houston, Texas, and in 1990, Charlie graduated from Lamar Senior High School of Houston. In 1994, he received a B.A. in International Studies from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Charlie graduated Phi Beta Kappa, the recipient of an Emory merit scholarship for his junior and senior years, and a member of the Mortar Board. After graduation, Charlie spent a year in Vienna, Austria, living with extended family and working in an editorial position for the U.N. Joint FAO/IAEA Programme for Nuclear Techniques in Food and Agriculture. He completed a Masters of Theological Studies at Duke Divinity School in 1997 (*summa cum laude*), before moving to Texas to serve with Erin Angela Martin as long-term volunteers at the Houston Catholic Worker, Casa Juan Diego. Charlie and Erin were married on August 15, 1998, at St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Houston. From 1998 to 2000, Charlie worked as a systems engineer for American General while Erin completed her Masters of Divinity at Perkins School of Theology en route to ordination as an elder in the United Methodist Church. In 2000, Charlie entered the doctoral program in theology and ethics at Duke University, for which he received a Duke Fellowship from Duke University, a John Wesley Fellowship from A Foundation for Theological Education, and a Dempster Fellowship from the General Board of Higher Education & Ministry of the United Methodist Church. Charlie published a review of Paul Griffiths's *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* in *The Christian Century* (Feb. 22, 2005), and he co-authored with Stanley Hauerwas a review essay on the same book for *Pro Ecclesia* (vol. 13, no. 4 [Fall 2004]: 287–94). Since July of 2006, Charlie has worked as an acquistions editor for Wipf and Stock Publishers of Eugene, Oregon. He and Erin have three children—Krysten (19), Katie (17), and Elijah (3)—and they are expecting a fourth child in April of 2009. Charlie is a lifelong member

of the United Methodist Church. He enjoys cooking, gardening, running, cycling, and anything that gets him up into the mountains.