

Jesus for president appendices

Appendix 1:

How the Creation Story Deepened Israel's identity as set-apart and anti-imperial

It is a common temptation in our day to read the Bible through 21st century lenses, thinking that it always speaks directly to our world of strip malls, television, drugs, etc. We have no problem with trying to understand what the Bible means for us today. Obviously this whole book is such an attempt. But to gain biblical understanding for us today we must understand what the words recorded in the Bible meant *to its first listeners*.

A great example of this misunderstanding is found in the creation story. Many readers today like to take this story and insert it into the fashionable religion vs. science, creation vs. evolution debates. Christians then, misunderstanding the original meaning of the text, assume that the Bible is trying to present an alternative science textbook for class. But this is not what it is for.

The creation story as we read it was not penned by Adam and Eve, and then passed down until King James got hold of it. The stories we find there floated around in oral tradition and become solidified, edited, and compiled by the Jews while in exile in Babylon (starting around 586 B.C.E.). The Jews found themselves in a two class society: the “images of the gods” and the slaves of the gods—the Hebrews, as refugee exiled slaves, obviously fit into the latter category.

In the beginning, so goes the Babylonian story *Enuma elish*¹, the world was created through violence and bloodshed. The world was created through the result of a fight between the sea goddess, Tiamat, and Marduk. Marduk cut Tiamat in half, and split her in two, creating the sky from her top half and the earth from her lower half. And to fill everything in between, to create a population to take care of the world, Marduk would use another god's (Kingu's) blood. This story shaped the way people viewed the world. It was their main ingredient for saying, “that's just the way the world is.” It is based on conflict.

But this story oppressed the Hebrews (and others) who lived as the slaves of the images of god. The Jews had a counter-narrative, one that spoke of another God. Their creation story begins with God “hovering over the *deep*.” “Deep,” here (Hebrew *Tehom*)², is related to the

¹ This reading is indebted to the scholarship of Brian Walsh in *Subversive Christianity* (Alta Vista College Press: Seattle, WA. 1994. Pp18-26) and Richard Middleton (see *The Liberating Image?: Interpreting the Image Dei in Context*. Christian Scholars Review 24.1 (1994) 8-25).

² The New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV). 3rd edn. (Oxford University Press: New York. 2001). Pp11. This notation (p. 11) goes on to show how the narrative's point is not that God

Babylonian word “Tiamat”! They are going to tell of a story that hovers over the enslaving creation story. The sky and earth are not split from the bloodied body of a revolution, but from the loving evocation of God’s word. And instead of creating images of god and slaves to them, God would create a world where *all* of humanity from its inception is made in the image of a loving God. And instead of work being considered a curse for slaves, tending the earth is written about as participation in the divine creation-rhythm of work and rest—a day of rest being a very thing that the Israelites struggled to celebrate under slavery.

If you follow the parallels you see how the Israelites shaped their identity in contrast to their ruling culture. We cannot improve on Brian Walsh’s treatment:

“[W]riting that story down and proclaiming it in worship in the context of Babylon is not simply an exercise in comparative mythology or a suggesting of an alternative understanding of how creation got started. Rather, telling this story is a subversive act. It says, in the face of a powerful and brutal empire, that the true God of creation, the true lord and sovereign, indeed, the only king, is none other than Yahweh, the God of these vanquished Israelites. He, not the body of Tiamat, is the source of creational life. And he, not Marduk or his underlings, is the final rule, power and authority in heaven or on earth. To tell this story is to engage in an act of radical civil disobedience because it dethrones, dismantles and topples the false god Marduk. To tell this story liberates a people in captivity by liberating their imaginations. This story gives them an alternative worldview, an alternative reality” (p. 20).

Even in the face of brutal slavery and the cultural colonization they were facing under Babylonian captivity, the Israelites found a way to maintain a unique and peculiar identity. They told stories. They remembered what the world is really about. To the cynics who would proclaim “this is just the way the world is” (while ordering them about their slavish tasks), they would proclaim a resounding “no,” while they renewed their imaginations for a world ruled by a loving Creator-God.

Instead of seeing the world as a place of violence, exploitation, and wars between numerous gods, we see a contrary vision of the world as *creation*—a place that was evoked by a Word, intentionally created by one god, and called *good*.

But we can take this story as deeper and broader than a commentary on Jewish relations with Babylon. “In fact, though there are Middle Eastern myths far older than the Genesis tale, the biblical account represents the world’s first systematic ideology of resistance to the project of *civilization*, and it is produced by a people who had front row seats in the historical drama, surrounded as they were by empires of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Anatolia” (Myers, italics

created the world out of nothing—a contemporary idea imported into the text—but rather that God creates order out of an existing chaos.

mine)³. While a criticism of *civilization itself* is much more radical and deep than any average person is ready to go, the Torah would seem to contain some of these unlikely themes.

We can start by asking the question: in their sacrifices to God, why is Cain's sacrifice of vegetables rejected and Abel's of meat accepted? After all, isn't vegetarianism God's plan until the compromise after the flood (Gen. 9:3)? Aren't Adam and Eve the quintessential gardeners? But, if you read the story, Adam and Eve are foragers. Rather, it is the curse of the fall that brings work by the sweat of one's brow in cultivation and land use. The Garden of Paradise might be seen then as a symbol of the "light living" that comes from foraging, harkening back to the Neolithic patterns of life. They own no land because all the earth is the Lord's. After the fall comes "civilization," land ownership, and an attempt to "re-create" (the name of the first city, *Enoch*) the world. "The city becomes the re-engineered alternative to the garden—an accurate reflection of what actually happened in the last millennia of pre-history. In this way the Genesis scribes boldly portray the rise of civilization as a progressive history of the Fall." We might have a small key to understanding God's rejection of the sacrifice: Cain is the frowned upon as the archetype of land hoarding, whereas Abel, older and wiser, is the nomadic herdsman.

The similar themes then become more visible. In the creation story we see a movement from communion with God in the wild to a "metropolitan nightmare" of civilization. The entire scope of the Torah is set in contrast to the "centralized regimes of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Anatolia (modern day Turkey)" and their "fortified cities." But there is no envy for these fortifications, as Jericho is not repopulated but left uninhabited. In Babel we see a "thinly veiled reference to imperial Babylon" and its ziggurats. These towers continue through the scriptures to symbolize civilization's arrogance.⁴ Instead of a tragedy, it is a liberation that God prefers Babel's builders be "scattered abroad throughout the face of the earth," "a mandate reiterated throughout the primeval cycle (Genesis 1:28; 9:1)."⁵ The typical urban motifs of "centralization," "cultural conformity," and "architecture of domination" stand out in Babel's

³ All following quoted material is from Myers' article titled "Cultural/Linguistic Diversity and Deep Social Ecology (Genesis 11:1-9)" published for *The Witness* magazine. See also Myers, *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ecology*, section titled *Anarcho-Primitivism and The Bible*. Basically any points made here can be understood as drawing on his points made in the articles.

⁴ Isaiah 14:13, 33:18; Jeremiah 51:53; Zephaniah 1:16; Judges 8:9.

⁵ The monolingual world is also frowned upon in favor of linguistic diversity. This confounds the imperialistic modern mind of unification and globalization—whereas the ecologists have always known that God's world is healthiest with diversity.

story. Abraham is called to *come out* of Chaldea.⁶ God prefers wild, unhewn stones for any altar building and is considerably opposed to the idea of a Temple, but in favor of camping. Even reality represented through “images,” which shape, mediate, and constrict our perception of reality⁷, are considerably too domesticated for these wild people.

If you follow the pattern, you begin to see the bias of the scriptures in a new light, quite contrasted to the popular modern (sub)urban-bound lens. We can then imagine the identity of the people of God through renewed language and goals.⁸ Myers puts it well:

Early Israel was a heterogeneous mix of foragers, fringe-dwellers, pastoralists and small-scale farmers who existed at the margins of the late Bronze Age Egyptian empire, as has been outlined so persuasively by Norman Gottwald. Their myths of origin had to do with wandering Aramaens, and a prophet who summoned them to abandon the store cities of Late Dynastic Egypt for a reconstituted life in the wilderness. Their divine revelations came under trees and upon mountaintops and beside magically flowing rivers and burning bushes. Their form of social organization was for many generations a kinship-based and loosely confederated tribal system. Their economy was based on gift ritual and generalized reciprocity, or what I call ‘Sabbath economics.’ And they largely eschewed the urban life of Canaan until they abandoned their primal ways and fashioned their own centralized kingdom under David and Solomon so they could be like all the other surrounding nations. This ‘civilizing’ project, understood in I Samuel 8 to be a betrayal of their tribal identity, was centered in an old Canannite fortress city called Jerusalem. (Myers, *Ibid.*)

In the hearts of this peculiar people echoes this prayer (Psalm 55:7,9-11):

Truly, I would flee far off; I would lodge in the wilderness...

Confuse, O Lord, confound their speech, for I see violence and strife in the city.

Day and night they go around it on its walls, and iniquity and trouble are within;

⁶ The drama between horticulturalists (often equated with the upper class and land ownership) and light living herdsmen (with no owned land but “the Lord’s earth”) is a theme made popular by Daniel Quinn’s *Ishmael* series. It also has been used as a motif to understand the conflict between Hutus (herdsmen) and Tutsis (land owners) in Rwanda (see Philip Gourevich’s *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*. Picador Publishing. 1999.)

⁷ One only need consider the most blasphemous concept of “reality” or hype we receive from television.

⁸ While the basic point of our book is not dependent on this reading of the Torah, if it is true it would only support the sense of God’s people as truly “set-apart.”

Ruin is in its midst; oppression and fraud do not depart from its marketplace.

Appendix 2:

More Detail on Subordination and Revolution:

How do these themes rhyme with Romans 13?

If we are “aliens and strangers” to the powers of the world, how do we relate to those powers? It makes sense that two of the longer New Testament passages on relating to the powers are coupled with even longer passages on non-conformity. The popularly misquoted Romans 13 is surrounded by language on not conforming to the patterns of the world, loving one’s enemies, nonviolence, and overcoming evil with good. The 1 Peter passage on submitting to authority is couched in repetitive language that we are aliens. So, before we hastily jump to the conclusion that these passages support Christian war or violence, we must understand them in detail (what they actually say) and generally concerning their placement in the overarching New Testament themes.

Let’s start by reading Paul:

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

We’ll note some talking points about this text.

1) To study any text with an appropriate sympathy, one must give it the benefit of the doubt before it is finally judged. Allow the text to be “innocent until proven guilty.” This means we must assume that the author (in this case, Paul) has enough intellect and comprehension to not contradict his or her self. If there is an overarching coherence in Paul’s thought, then we can use his obvious and clear passages to fill in the gaps for passages that are harder to understand. If we can allow this, we can assume that Paul’s point in Romans 13 rhymes with the rest of his politics.

Without this initial sympathy, we might fail to understand a text--the critical eye, squinted with distrust, cannot see clearly.

And it gives the author no benefit of the doubt to cover over the seeming contradictions in the two texts by “balancing” them, concluding, “Christians need a violent side, and a peaceful side.” And others simply write off this text as either a later "compromise" in Paul's originally radical politics, or just a foreign paragraph in the midst of a largely anti-conformist epistle. But what if, instead of having two contradicting points and “balancing” them, Paul had a single sensible point? So, let’s assume that no where in this above text Paul is saying anything that contradicts his previous chapter (12):

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse... Live in harmony with one another....Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

2) Note that the text intentionally says God orders “*all* authority.” It is easy to blindly use this text to support some militaristic adventure of Constantine or the United States and assure their divine sanction, but this overlooks the fact that “*all*” must include all authorities: Nero, Domitian, Pilate, Mao Tse Tung, Saddam Hussein, Hitler’s Third Reich, etc. Also, there is no standard in the text where all of these authorities, under the right conditions, are considered divinely inspired (therefore worthy of obedience, proof-texting Romans 13) or, not meeting some criteria, are considered divinely condemned (therefore worthy of disobedience, proof-texting Revelation 13). The text does not give ordination to only democratically elected governments. As we asked before, what would this text sound like to a German Christian under Hitler’s rule or an Iraqi Christian under Saddam’s rule?

When some governmental standards (which have been imported into this text from elsewhere) are not met, some like to finally introduce an exception: "we must obey God rather than men." But this phrase was not originally uttered to provide an exception to the rule, but as a clue to the overarching politics of the people of God: they *always* obey God rather than men AND they *always* subordinate to all authorities.

That God establishes all authority does not mean that God approves of them. The point is rather that God is to be considered greater than, not equal to, all the powers of this world. Even

the best democracy in the world (if indeed one has been found) is not worthy of allegiance--for God is sovereign even over that. "Established" here means that God orders the powers, as a librarian may order books but not necessarily approve of their content. After all, Paul speaks of a government that "rewards the just" but also has extensive experience with wrongful imprisonment under its rule, and John of Patmos later writes of it (in Revelation 13) as the great whore. That God was "ordered" pagan Assyria to chastise Israel (Isaiah 10) is similar to Paul's point. In that story no mention is made in the text of God approving of this nation or the violence they used. Jesus echoed this belief when he declared to Pilate, "you would have no power if it were not given to you from above," while obviously acknowledging his very abuse of this power. Or remember back to when Israel demanded a king despite God's warnings of what kings would do to them, and "in God's anger God gave them a king" (Hosea). And now we ask God to save us from ourselves and our kings and presidents.

3) So as can see that Paul gives no conditions for a disciple to be subordinate to the authorities, we also see he is talking about something deeper than disobedience or obedience. Paul, in fact, did not use the word "obey" (which would imply the sense of bending one's will). He used the word "subordinate" (whereas "submit" and "be subject" might be slightly less clear), which means that you simply consider yourself *under* their *order*. This is not about patriotism, pledging allegiance, or any affection for the powers. Paul is not here trying to convince unpatriotic Christians to pledge more allegiance. Rather, Paul's problem is the opposite: he must convince Christians, who are not conforming to the patterns of this world, to not overthrow the government! Paul is here helping them understand the futility of such endeavors, encouraging them to keep on the path of described in Romans 12 (and all of Jesus' life and teaching), and not fly off into a new (and hopeless) project of vying for power. As Paul made clear in chapters 9 through 11, Gentiles need to see themselves not as participants in the political dramas of upheavals and revolutions, but now as a part of the set-apart people of God begun through Abraham and Sarah. Subordination is not simply a helpful spiritual caveat for the Christian to stay humble. It is a necessary safeguard against violence and power. It is very difficult to find a time in history when the revolutionary, in his or her use of violence and coercion, does not become a new oppressor. As mentioned in section 2, Jesus knew this in his people's recent history with the Maccabeans. Thus Jesus rejected the zealous goal to "take the power back" from Herod or Pilate. As with Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, the only thing that should be done with the ring of power was dissolve it in the fire, not get it in the hands of "a pious man."

If this ever becomes confusing, one must simply look at the example of Jesus' death at the hands of the powers to understand subordination. The way Jesus interacted with the temple courts and Pilate display a subordinate yet revolutionary heart. Jesus never obeyed their whims

and wishes--indeed his wild action in the temple escalated his arrest--and yet he also seems to have gone the second mile by nonviolently subordinating to arrest. He understood the powers as fallen but lovingly navigated through their mistaken hands, speaking truth that their power had blinded them to. In order to overcome evil he would not resist it but suffer and absorb it.

4) Many warrior Christians like to refer to the “just war tradition.” And apparently Romans 13 is at the heart of this theory’s constitution. As you read through the text, you’ll notice there is no place where sanction is given to the Christian to take up arms or even try to become the one who “governs by the sword”. Indeed, the Christian identity is upheld in this text, as it was a chapter before, as radically distinct from the powers. For Paul, the powers and the state are clearly a “they” because he pledges allegiance to another Lord. Much Just War reflection not only fails in its logic and application, but for Christians it fails in its preconception: their mistaken “we” is not the Church, but the State. To the question, "What should we have done in World War II?", we must ask *who is we?* If you are a Christian and your citizenship is in Jesus’ kingdom, reflection begins not with the powers but with the Church. The Church should not have religiously supported, fought for, and obeyed Hitler. [SHARPSEVEN: Insert picture of church shaking hands with third reich.] The Church should have been enacting the teachings of Jesus. The Church should have been taking in Jews and others hunted—and in many instances *was*, but this is not the history we learn. Each of these instances, as in the case of Schindler or in our Celestine story (or the mid-wives in Egypt), these are acts of holy subversion and disobedience. While these questions do not give advice to the state, they are nevertheless very realistic and practical questions to ask for their own political body in applying the lessons of history.

Not only does Romans 13 give no mention of Christians and the sword, it also does not talk about the state and war. When the text refers to the sword (v.4, *machiara*: short dagger), this is a word that refers not to war but to the symbol of local policing—like the symbol of power for a Swiss officer’s sword. There are many words that fit appropriately for war, but *machiara* is not one.

But if we must talk about the state and war, "just war" is the only identifiable tradition in the Church. One problem for Just-War Christians is that there has never been a Just War waged in all of Church history--for it is almost impossible to meet its criteria. Just war theory was originally intended to criticize governments, minimize violence, and give them several reasons that their wars were wrong. It is a negative theory—that is, reasons a war is *unjust*. It was never intended to give criteria and standards for Christians to participate in war.

There are several rules in this theory to judge a war “unjust” and they are stringent. We would be hard pressed to find a Just War Christian who knows the rules well, obeys them, and refrains from violence when the rules are not met. All major denominations declared the recent Iraq war unjust and illegitimate, including Just War churches. (But why have all of the local

congregations sanctioned and sent their members off to war?) The only major denomination to officially sanction the war, the Southern Baptists, did so for reasons that did not cite the actual criteria of just war. (We might also ask here, would this denomination have sponsored this war if the U.S. president was an atheist, and not a “born again Christian”?)

5) The only parameters describing the state and the use of the sword are whether the state “resists evil and rewards good.” Only when the state does this can it be considered God’s servant. The conditional word “attending” (v. 6, *proskarterountes*) could read more appropriately: they are servants of God insofar as they busy themselves with governing (resisting evil and rewarding good). When these conditions are met, it is not as if the Christian would join in—no, they are still completely separate identities. In a similar way, the fact that the prophets speak of what a “good king” should do does not change the fact that kings were not part of God’s original plan, but a breaking of God’s heart (1 Sam. 8). The condition is simply to define for the Christian a broad conception for the state’s duties, which are not theirs. The act of resisting evil is what Paul and Jesus explicitly restricted for Christians (Matt 5, Rom 12).

It may be argued that this reading of Romans 13 leaves the dirty work of violence to the state while the Christians keep their hands clean. Paul, indeed, does understand that the powers play a role. (Paul had been protected from riot violence by this pagan government. Doubtlessly he was gracious for this, but he also seemed to be unconcerned for his safety in claiming, “to live is Christ and to die is gain.”) The powers’ role is simply part of the old order that is passing away and crumbling.

It is as if an old castle, deteriorated and littered with holes in the walls from war, is being rebuilt. The powers, partly responsible for creating the cycles of war, protect the castle from further bombing and set up scaffolds and girders to keep the building from crumbling on everyone’s heads. They mitigate the mess that they have not yet become convinced to stop making. Meanwhile, those committed to the renewed castle (here, the Church) act to make peace between the warriors who destroyed the castle, redesign the architecture, rework the plumbing, etc. But if the re-workers resort to constructing gun turrets on the walls, they simply assure the tightening of the cycle that destroyed everything. This analogy, like any, falls short. But the basic picture is that the old order plays a role, but it is limited and largely negative. Rather than trying to save a sinking ship, the Christians are helping get people into lifeboats.

To the extent that people play a part in the old order of violence and power, they prolong and maintain it. Put crisply, “The most effective way to contribute to the preservation of society in the old aeon is to live in the new” (Yoder, *The Original Revolution*. p83).

Moving from Romans 13, we’ll take a short look at two small occasions that would make one wonder about Jesus’ teachings on resisting evil.

a) Matthew 10:34. “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a ‘man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—your enemies will be the members of your own household.’”

To understand what he was actually saying it is necessary to see this phrase in its context. This verse is couched in his discussion about his disciples acting as innocent sheep, not fearing the powerful, being persecuted and losing one’s life, and taking up one’s cross—all nonviolent postures. It is also necessary to note what the in-family strife means. Jesus is here quoting Micah 7, a text that loathes the shedding of blood and acknowledges the chaos surrounding “the day God visits you.” God’s visitation—which Jesus hints as the very meaning of his life—is accompanied by a division between people. Jesus does not rejoice in this division though he recognizes its inevitability. The presence of truth and love in a violent world is a recipe for disaster—it even provokes disaster; consider Herod’s slaughter of the innocents—and Jesus says his disciples must be ready to live through it. Jesus’ kingdom, though small as a mustard seed and humble as a dove, is also as bold and incisive as a sword. But this kingdom, written in this very passage, is to be spread through homeless visitations, not through force. There seems to be no reason to think that Jesus is here changing his mind on loving one’s enemies.

b) Luke 22:35-38 Then Jesus asked them, “When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?”

“Nothing,” they answered.

He said to them, “But now if you have a purse take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.”

The disciples said, “See, Lord, here are two swords.”

“That is enough,” he replied.

This is part of a larger conversation about power at the last supper. Jesus’ disciples had apparently been unable to understand the meaning of his discussions on suffering and nonviolence. Over the course of this dinner conversation, Jesus had been trying to tell them that the kingdoms of this world wield power and demand service, but his kingdom was about serving others and self-sacrifice. As in many cases where Jesus would draw out props to make a point (e.g. the coin in the fish’s mouth), Jesus here needs to draw out a dangerous prop: the sword.

To prove his point, Jesus helps his disciples remember that *they don't need anything*—which they acknowledge. With that in mind, he will help them understand that they also do not need a sword.

Very explicitly, Jesus equates the carrying of a sword with being a “transgressor.” This phrase references the beautiful passage of Isaiah 53 on how God’s glory is best known through humiliation and suffering and not apparent strength or majesty. To teach one of his most radical lessons on nonviolence, Jesus will incur the embarrassing reputation of going down with terrorists and insurgents, and not the potentially meaningful status of a blameless martyr. “He will be numbered with the transgressors.” Jesus even stripped his self of the ennobling innocent appearance of nonviolence. While he could go down with his unblemished personal character intact, to teach a lesson he will risk the misguided and violent wills of his disciples marring his reputation. (His final healing miracle will then be to clean up after the mess of his disciples’ violence by healing an arrestor’s ear.) This makes radical, counter-intuitive claims about the very nature of God and even what we mean by the word “God.” Is not humiliation and suffering the very opposite of God? Now he will appear before court as being one of the zealots who cut people’s ears off.⁹

If calling the sword the transgressor’s tool is not obvious enough, the outcome of the lesson is univocally clear. The very next scene is in Gethsemane where the disciple will use those swords. His disciples ask, “Lord, should we strike with our swords?” As one disciple strikes an arrestor, Jesus yells, “No more of this!” and heals the wound. This is the commonly known time when Jesus also states, (in other gospels) “put your sword away,” and “those who live by the sword die by the sword.” After healing his arrestor, Luke’s gospel shows Jesus punctuating this lesson of nonviolence with a question, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns” (Luke 22:53).

Nowhere in all of the New Testament is a disciple of Jesus found carrying a sword again.

Appendix 3:

⁹ When the disciples find the swords that will mark their very sinfulness, Jesus says “enough.” John Yoder comments: “ ‘Enough,’ cannot mean that two swords would be enough for the legitimate self-defense against bandits of twelve missionaries traveling two by two. He is (in direct parallel to Deut. 3:26, where YHWH tells Moses to change the subject, *LXX hikanon estin*) breaking off the conversation because they don’t understand anyway” (The Politics of Jesus, p. 45).

Mohammed for President?: Pluralism and Uniqueness

A disastrous by-product of the US led wars since 9/11 has been the increasing fear, antagonism, and violence between Christians and Muslims. A cartoon in some small European newspaper caused riots and killing all over the world. A comment by the Pope incited mass protest and anger from Muslims around the world. An Israeli bomb dropped in Lebanon has “Made in the USA” stamped on its shrapnel, connecting in their minds the bomb back to a “Christian nation.” The “war on terror,” now dubbed “the long war” to prepare you for its longevity¹⁰, led largely by Christians, has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians.

The Muslim world, in feeling this rising tension, must conclude what many Christians think of Muslim terrorists: “those religious fanatics think that violence will solve their problems.” Some people in Iraq refer to many in the U.S. as “Christian extremists.” The relationship between Christians and Muslims is at a pinnacle of fragility, as volatile as a powder keg in a room of flying sparks. One must wonder if, at a time like this, anybody should be writing a book with such a totalizing and *unpluralistic* title as “Jesus for President.” Doesn’t this worsen the harsh and violent outcomes of mixing faith and politics? How would we feel about a book titled “Muhammad for Prime Minister”?

Peacemaking between Christians and Muslims will not happen through either party denying the political and public expressions of their faith (nor would that likely happen), but through continually seeking the true depths, meaning, and practice of their own faith. It is easy to forget where most problems stem from in religious conflict: it is not when each side too greatly believes their faith, but it is when people forget and confuse their faith, zealously combining it with another faith (patriotism, nationalism, global-capitalism) and violence. The befuddling mystery of our day is not the presence of sincere Muslims but violent Christians.

Conflict arises between faiths when people think their faith is not faith, but a weapon, knowledge of scientific certitude. Faith is hoping and living for what you cannot see and know for sure. In faith we *confess* the truth; we don’t *have* the truth. Philosophically we might call that an epistemological gap; the Bible simply calls it “seeing through a glass dimly.” Faith is truly faith when you *live* that unlikely hope now. If you don’t *live* faith, it is demoted to the status of a dream. But when you think you have your faith set in stone as a fact, it is mutated to the status of a crusade or a jihad.

Certainly the scriptures speak of living your faith with steadfast assurance, but those exhortations are so that people *live* in a certain way. And yet, ever since the “scientific revolution” it seems that the church has become afraid of the supposed claims of science,

¹⁰ See Washington Post, Feb. 3, 2006. “Rumsfeld Offers Strategies for Current War.”

thinking that science provides unquestionable facts for knowledge. In response the Church has attempted to counter “science” with its own “assurance of salvation.” This is a misunderstanding of scientific knowledge. Any 6th grade science class will teach you that science never assuredly arrives at “facts”; the best information science provides is a theory, supported by some experiments, as yet to be disproved. Science should not be feared, but understood as a method for understanding how reality and matter work. Faith, on the other hand, serves to see beyond matter, to see into the heart of things, to offer a vision for life and meaning.

The Church need not transform faith into stone-cold facts and knowledge. The glass we dimly see through will not be shattered so we can see clearly. What the Church is supposed to do with Jesus is not to convince everybody that he is an irrefutable fact (lest they burn!), but to act like him. This is also to say that a Christian’s goal is to believe in the way of the cross and resurrection enough to actually follow suit. This is largely more difficult (and rewarding) than convincing one’s self or others to abstractly “believe” in it.

In reaction to the vigorous insanity of fundamentalists, our readers might want to avoid identification with a set of beliefs by formulating the fashionable dichotomies:

“I’m not religious, I’m spiritual.”

“I’m not a Christian, I’m a follower of Jesus.”

There seems to be little hope in the project of Christians to pretend to have a different name than they have had since the Church’s inception. It is worth noting that “Christian” was a derogatory name given *to* Christians because they acted like Jesus the Christ. If anything, this should remind us that we would do better to have others define for us whether we are faithful Christians (likely with their verbal abuse, not praise).¹¹ It is also worth reframing our imaginations to think of ourselves as a part of the *Body* of Christ—a more communal, less individualistic identity than “Christian.” Or perhaps we should see “Christian” as a title for which we are aspiring, not that we have attained. But none of these seem like good enough reasons to assume we are doing Jesus a favor by losing the common name and calling ourselves “followers of Jesus.”

Or one might want to go further and opt out of the entire drama, saying, “religion is too controversial. I don’t want to believe anything.” But, the idea of a reverting to a neutral culture is an illusion from pluralism. Even if someone has “no religion” she still chooses to order her life in particular ways, eat in certain ways with certain types or numbers of people, keep to certain rhythms of life, obtain life-supplies from the earth in a certain way (tan a hide or go to Wal-Mart), attend meaningful ceremonies (be it the pub’s conversation or a football game’s pomp), etc. These are all elements that comprise one’s “religion” and “culture” (notice how *cult*,

¹¹ Gandhi’s response to the question, “Are you a Christian,” came the response, “ask the poor.”

group worship, is at the root of *culture*). It is not as if we are born into a default, flat setting, and then we may or may not choose to add some accessories (some religious actions here, some cultural motifs there). If we do not recognize and choose to cultivate our religion, the most powerful nearby religion will do it for us: the powers, the state, the culture at large, or those who make money by drawing us into their fabricated TV culture. The State has (or is) a faith system of its own¹², a way to view and act in the world. The Church must not hand its politics over to the State while keeping its “spiritual” convictions to oneself—as if true spiritual convictions have no real world implications. The question is not if you are religious or not, political or not. We all undoubtedly embody *some kind* of religion and politics—it’s *how* that matters.

It is in *living* one’s faith, instead of attempting to convince or kill others to believe it, where different faiths might have legitimate interchange. Scholars and theologians of differing faiths will have deeply meaningful discussion to the extent that they are also *practitioners*, not just indifferent knowledge-brokers. For example, we have been impressed to remember that many Muslims and Jews do not charge financial interest because of their faith. They do this because, stemming from the tradition of the Torah, it takes advantage of their neighbor. It is an act of healing the world, though it undoubtedly requires a sacrifice from them. Wouldn’t Christians do well, instead of aggressively partaking in market capitalism, to do something (every day, systematically) for the sake of others because of their faith? On this, we learn greatly from other faiths (even though this practice comes from the same Bible).

Some might consider our call to seek out and live the radical depths of faith as insulting the debonair demands of pluralism, as a retreat into tribal barbarism. Duke Professor Hauerwas and Willimon offer a counter point:

We reject the charge of tribalism, particularly from those whose theologies serve to buttress the most nefarious brand of tribalism of all—the omnipotent state. The church is the one political entity in our culture that is global, transnational, transcultural. Tribalism is not the church determined to serve God rather than Caesar. Tribalism is the United States of America, which sets up artificial boundaries and defends them with murderous intensity. And the tribalism of nations occurs most viciously in the absence of a church

¹² William Cavanaugh, in *Torture and Eucharist* (Blackwell Publishing, 1998, p.136), cites the following, “The modern State aspires to be *Weltanschauung*, a conception of the world and of life, in substance, a religion. Christianity too is a *Weltanschauung*, besides being a supernatural religion. Between Christianity and the modern State conceived as a *Weltanschauung* conflict is inherent and inevitable” (Luigi Sturzo, *Church and State*, trans. Barbara Barclay Carter (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962 [1939]), 535).

able to say and to show, in its life together, that God, not nations, rules the world
(*Resident Aliens*. Nashville, Abingdon Press. 1989. P. 42).

Lastly, Christians would do well to sympathetically learn about other faiths—for a deeper reason than learning how to convert them. How can a Christian, who so fervently believes that they have chosen “the best religion,” also know nothing about what a Taoist means when they refer to “the Tao” or the “Four Greatnesses”? Or how could one genuinely say, “I don’t believe in Islam” when he or she has never spent time studying the Koran? You cannot reject something you do not understand.

Certainly pluralism has thrown Christians into a frenzy of confusion, resulting often in either aggressive fundamentalism (an epistemology of “knowledge” over faith) or in giving up on faith. But Christianity has a way to interact with other religions. But is neither condescension nor compromise for the least common denominator. It is an acknowledgement that our main task is to live our own faith with integrity while exuding a deep respect for other faiths when they live theirs well—or even better than we do, as Gandhi should make Christians blush.

Lastly, A Litany of Resistance and Confession (to be read publicly)

One: Deliver us, O God

***All:* Guide our feet in the ways of your peace.**

One: In humility, we ask

***All:* Hear our prayer. Grant us peace.**

One: In humility, we ask

***All:* Hear our prayer. Grant us peace.**

One: Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world

***All:* Have mercy on us**

One: Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world

***All:* Free us from the bondage of sin and death**

One: Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world

***All:* Hear our prayer. Grant us peace.**

One: For the victims of war

***All:* Have mercy**

One: Women, men and children

***All:* Have mercy**

One: The maimed and the crippled

***All:* Have mercy**

One: The abandoned and the homeless

***All:* Have mercy**

One: The imprisoned and the tortured

***All:* Have mercy**

One: The widowed and the orphaned

***All:* Have mercy**

One: The bleeding and the dying

***All:* Have mercy**

One: The weary and the desperate

***All:* Have mercy**

One: The lost and the forsaken

***All:* Have mercy**

One: For those fleeing in terror

***All:* Have mercy**

One: For our scorched and blackened earth

***All:* Forgive us for we know not what we do**

One: For the scandal of billions wasted in war

***All:* Forgive us for we know not what we do**

One: For our leaders who wage war in our name

***All:* Forgive us for we know not what we do**

One: For our Caesars and our Herods

***All:* Forgive us for we know not what we do**

One: Deliver us, O God

***All:* Guide our feet into the ways of peace**

One: In humility, we ask

***All:* Hear our prayer. Grant us peace.**

One: From the arrogance of power

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the poverty of violence

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the tyranny of greed

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the ugliness of racism

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the politics of hypocrisy

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the hysteria of nationalism

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the cancer of hatred

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the seduction of wealth

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the addiction of control

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the avarice of imperialism

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the idolatry of national security

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the despair of fatalism

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the violence of apathy

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the profanity of war

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the war on the poor

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the violence of the street

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the segregation of the poor

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the brutality in our schools

***All:* Deliver us**

One: From the demonic waste of young lives

***All:* Deliver us**

One: Deliver us, O God

***All:* Guide our feet into the ways of peace**

One: In humility, we ask

***All:* Hear our prayer. Grant us peace**

One: Obedience to God comes before obedience to human authority

***All:* Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's**

One: Let your will be done, not mine

***All:* With the help of God's grace**

One: Let us resist and confront evil everywhere we find it

***All:* With the help of God's grace**

One: With the waging of war

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With the forces of fear

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With the legalization of murder

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With the legalization of genocide

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With laws that betray human life

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With the destruction of community

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With the commodification of all of life

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With the violating of our earth

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With the destruction of peoples

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With the raping of women

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With governments that are blind to the sanctity of life

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With economic structures that impoverish and dehumanize

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With the manipulation and control of public information

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With economics that manufacture instruments of death

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With economics that reduces our lives to consumers

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With the perpetuation of violence

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With structures that divide rich from poor

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With the hypocrisy of political maneuvering

***All:* We will not comply**

One: With the help of God's grace

***All:* We will struggle for justice**

One: With the compassion of Christ

***All:* We will stand for what is true**

One: With God's abiding kindness

***All:* We will love even our enemies**

One: With the love of Christ

***All:* We will resist all evil**

One: With God's unending faithfulness

***All:* We will work to build the beloved community**

One: With Christ's passionate love

***All:* We will carry the cross**

One: With God's overwhelming goodness

***All:* We will walk as pilgrims of peace**

One: With Christ's fervent conviction

***All:* We will labour for truth**

One: With God's infinite mercy

***All:* We will live in solidarity with all people**

One: In the power of the Spirit,

***All:* We will seek justice**

One: In the power of the Spirit,

All: **We will love mercy**

One: In the power of the Spirit

All: **We will walk humbly with our God.**

One: In the power of the Spirit,

All: **We will tell stories of pain,**

One: In the power of the Spirit,

All: **We will live stories of hope.**

One: In the end there are three things that last

All: **Faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love**

One: Let us abide in God's love

All: **Thanks be to God.**