

Part One

The Story of Christian Ethics

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Chapter One

The Story of God

The Bible is the document that Christians believe shows them the character of God, and the nature of life under God. This is a tradition Christians inherit from Jews, although of course the text Jews recognize as authoritative is significantly different from the text Christians cherish. It is also worth noting that not all Christians recognize exactly the same text – for example, the status of the so-called Apocryphal writings is controversial.

Nonetheless the Bible is integral to Christian ethics. But what does *integral* mean? Does it mean comprehensive, indispensable, highly significant, or influential? This chapter considers the role of the Bible in Christian ethics.

There are many for whom Christian ethics simply means following Jesus. But beneath this apparently straightforward commitment lie a number of questions that are difficult to resolve. Three kinds of questions shape this chapter, and yield the three respective sections below:

- 1 What is the status of the Old Testament in the ethic of Jesus? In other words, is following Jesus identical to seeing the Bible as authoritative in ethics, or are some parts of the Bible more important than others?
- 2 If it is acknowledged that the New Testament has different emphases and even perhaps in occasional places contrary emphases to the Old, is the New Testament itself to be regarded as a seamless robe, or are different nuances to be highlighted, understood in context, or minimized?
- 3 Is Jesus primarily a figure who *made possible* a new life (through his death and resurrection, as Paul's

epistles generally emphasize) or did he also *model* a new life (as the narrative accounts of his ministry in the gospels might suggest)?

The readings in this chapter explore these kinds of questions. They are drawn from different periods and traditions of the church. They do not give a consistent answer to the questions raised above, but they do address the most significant questions. No excerpts from the Bible itself have been included in this volume; however, the volume assumes regular specific and general encounters with the scriptural text.

The People of God

This section concerns the Old Testament, sometimes known as the Hebrew Bible. There have been three broad approaches to the Old Testament from the point of view of Christian ethics. The first is separation. This view assumes the Old Testament should be considered independently of the New Testament. The subtle and affirming aspect of this view points out that God's revelation to Israel, at least as Jews understand it, has continued beyond the Old Testament into the Talmud and the Halakhah, and that the Old Testament cannot be read independently of this later Jewish tradition. The less subtle but older view is that the God of the Old Testament is wrathful and obsessed with ritual and is thus more or less a different God from the God of the New.

The second view sees a seamless transition between Old Testament and New. The first offers promise; the

second brings fulfillment. The laws, the priests, the sacrifices, the Temple, the kings, and the prophets of the Old Testament were all fulfilled in Jesus. When it comes to the lengthy legal passages, the moral laws were simply part of natural law, and thus remained binding. The ceremonial laws applied specifically to ancient Israel and had no abiding authority.

The third view affirms the continuity of God's character from Old Testament to New, but sees a creative tension between the two testaments. The cautious aspect of this sees the primary value of the Old Testament in Christian ethics as a collection of salutary stories, challenging prophecies, and distilled wisdom, particularly concerning freedom for the oppressed, justice for the poor, compassion for the outcast, and regard for the whole earth. The less cau-

tious view sees the Old Testament as the indispensable scene-setting for the New, with the overall continuous theme of God calling a people through whom the whole earth will be restored to well-being and healthy relationship.

The readings in this section address some of the most pertinent issues concerning the role of the Old Testament in Christian ethics. Tertullian is struggling with the question of whether the God of the Old Testament is a harsher God than that of the New. Karl Barth is concerned with the relationship of Israel and the church. John Howard Yoder focuses specifically on whether a pacifist can find resources in the Old Testament for an ethic based squarely around Jesus. And Oliver O'Donovan seeks to root political theology in the life of Israel under God.

Tertullian, *Against Marcion*

Tertullian (160–225) grew up in Carthage (in modern Tunisia) as the son of a Roman centurion. He became a Christian as a young adult and was the first great theologian to write in Latin. He was very influential in early formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity (he was the first to use the term) and he was the first to coin the terms Old and New Testaments. He ended his life as a Montanist, a member of an ecstatic sect that believed its prophecies had superseded the New Testament and was thus declared heretical.

In this text Tertullian is offering counter-arguments to Marcion. Marcion of Sinope (110–160) argued in the early second century that the creator God of the Old Testament was chiefly concerned with the law. Jesus came to displace the God of the Old Testament and inaugurate an era of love. Marcion's Bible had none of the eventual Old Testament and only parts of Luke and Paul in it.

The heart of Tertullian's argument lies in Book IV number 6, where he shows that Christ has no authority if it is not derived from the Creator, in other words the God of the Old Testament. His compelling conclusion is that "Christ must belong to Marcion or to the Creator, but not to both." While some of Tertullian's arguments may seem remote, it is vital to realize that Marcion's claim is very widely aired today; the notion that the God of the Old Testament is a wrathful (and thus a somehow lesser) God is by no means limited to the second century CE.

Tertullian. *Adversus Marcionem*. Ed. Ernest Evans. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972. From Book I Paragraph 10 (pp. 25–7); I.19 (pp. 49–51); IV.6–7 (pp. 257–85); IV.20 (pp. 365–71); IV.43 (p. 507). Available online at www.tertullian.org/articles/evans_marc/evans_marc_00index.htm. By permission of Oxford University Press.

Book I

10. For the fact is that ever since things have existed their Creator has become known along with them: for they were brought into being with the intent that God might be made known. Admittedly it is somewhat later that Moses before others is seen to have established the

God of the world in the temple of his writings: but we need not on that account reckon that the knowledge of him was born along with the Pentateuch, for Moses' writings as a whole do not initiate knowledge of the Creator, but rather describe it from the beginning, so that its age must be counted from Paradise and from Adam, not from Egypt and Moses. And again, the great majority of the human race, though ignorant even of Moses' name, not to mention his written works, do for all that know Moses' God. In spite of the darkness of idolatry, and its wide dominion, men do distinguish him by the name of God, as though this were a proper noun – "God of gods," and "If God grant it," and "What God will," and "I commit to God." Evidently they know him, for they testify that he can do all things: and this they owe not to any books of Moses, for man's soul was there before prophecy. The knowledge inherent in the soul since the beginning is God's endowment, the same and no other whether in Egyptians or Syrians or men of Pontus. It is the God of the Jews whom men's souls call God.

19. "Yes, but our god," the Marcionites rejoin, "though not revealed from the beginning, or by virtue of any creation, yet has by his own self been revealed in Christ Jesus." One of my books will have reference to Christ and all that he stands for: for the divisions of our subject have to be kept distinct, so as to receive more complete and orderly treatment. For the time it must suffice to follow up our present argument so far as to prove, and that in few words, that Christ Jesus is the representative of no other god than the Creator. ... The separation of Law and Gospel is the primary and principal exploit of Marcion. His disciples cannot deny this, which stands at the head of their document, that document by which they are inducted, into and confirmed in this heresy. For such are Marcion's Antitheses or Contrary Oppositions, which are designed to show the conflict and disagreement of the Gospel and the Law, so that from the diversity of principles between those two documents they may argue further for a diversity of gods. Therefore, as it is precisely this separation of Law and Gospel which has suggested a god of the Gospel, other than and in opposition to the God of the Law, it is evident that before that separation was made, that god was still unknown who has just come into notice in consequence of the argument for separation: and so he was not revealed by Christ, who came before the separation, but was invented by Marcion, who set up the separation in opposition to that peace between Gospel and Law which previously, from the appearance of Christ until the impudence of Marcion, had been

kept unimpaired and unshaken by virtue of that <sound> reasoning which refused to contemplate any other god of the Law and the Gospel than that Creator against whom after so long a time, by a man of Pontus, separation has been let loose.

Book IV

6. I now advance a step further, while I call to account, as I have promised, Marcion's gospel in his own version of it, with the design, even so, of proving it adulterated. Certainly the whole of the work he has done, including the prefixing of his Antitheses, he directs to the one purpose of setting up opposition between the Old Testament and the New, and thereby putting his Christ in separation from the Creator, as belonging to another god, and having no connection with the law and the prophets. Certainly that is why he has expunged all the things that oppose his view, that are in accord with the Creator, on the plea that they have been woven in by his partisans; but has retained those that accord with his opinion. These it is we shall call to account, with these we shall grapple, to see if they will favour my case, not his, to see if they will put a check on Marcion's pretensions. Then it will become clear that these things have been expunged by the same disease of heretical blindness by which the others have been retained. Such will be the purpose and plan of my treatise, on those precise terms which have been agreed by both parties. Marcion lays it down that there is one Christ who in the time of Tiberius was revealed by a god formerly unknown, for the salvation of all the nations; and another Christ who is destined by God the Creator to come at some time still future for the re-establishment of the Jewish kingdom. Between these he sets up a great and absolute opposition, such as that between justice and kindness, between law and gospel, between Judaism and Christianity. From this will also derive my statement of claim, by which I lay it down that the Christ of a different god has no right to have anything in common with the Creator; and again, that Christ must be adjudged to be the Creator's if he is found to have administered the Creator's ordinances, fulfilled his prophecies, supported his laws, given actuality to his promises, revived his miracles, given new expression to his judgements, and reproduced the lineaments of his character and attributes. I request you, my reader, always to bear in mind this undertaking, this statement of my case, and begin to be aware that Christ belongs either to Marcion or the Creator, but not to both.

7. [Luke 4:31–37] ... Also what had he to do with Galilee, if he was not the Creator's Christ, for whom

that province was predestined as the place for him to enter on his preaching? For Isaiah says: *Drink this first, do it quickly, province of Zebulon and land of Naphtali, and ye others who < dwell between > the sea-coast and Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles, ye people who sit in darkness, behold a great light: ye who inhabit the land, sitting in the shadow of death, a light has arisen upon you.* It is indeed to the good that Marcion's god too should be cited as one who gives light to the gentiles, for so there was the greater need for him to come down from heaven – though, if so, he ought to have come down into Pontus rather than Galilee. Yet since both that locality and that function of enlightenment do according to the prophecy have their bearing upon Christ, we at once begin to discern that it was he of whom the prophecy was made, when he makes it clear on his first appearance that he is come not to destroy the law and the prophets, but rather to fulfil them. For Marcion has blotted this out as an interpolation. But in vain will he deny that Christ said in words a thing which he at once partly accomplished in act. For in the meanwhile he fulfilled the prophecy in respect of place. From heaven straightway into the synagogue. As the saying goes, let us get down to it: to your task, Marcion: remove even this from the gospel, *I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, and, *It is not < meet > to take away the children's bread and give it to dogs*: for this gives the impression that Christ belongs to Israel. I have plenty of acts, if you take away his words. Take away Christ's sayings, and the facts will speak; See how he enters into the synagogue: surely to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. See how he offers the bread of his doctrine to the Israelites first: surely he is giving them preference as sons. See how as yet he gives others no share of it: surely he is passing them by, like dogs. Yet on whom would he have been more ready to bestow it than on strangers to the Creator, if he himself had not above all else belonged to the Creator? Yet again how can he have obtained admittance into the synagogue, appearing so suddenly, so unknown, no one as yet having certain knowledge of his tribe, of his nation, of his house, or even of Caesar's census, which the Roman registry still has in keeping, a most faithful witness to our Lord's nativity? They remembered, surely, that unless they knew he was circumcised he must not be admitted into the most holy places. Or again, even if there were unlimited access to the synagogue, there was no permission to teach, except for one excellently well known, and tried, and approved, and already either for this occasion or by commendation from elsewhere invested with that function. "But they were all astonished at his doctrine."

Quite so. *Because*, it says, *his word was with power*, not because his teaching was directed against the law and the prophets. For in fact his divine manner of speaking did afford both power and grace, building up, much more than pulling down, the substance of the law and the prophets. Otherwise they would not have been astonished but horrified; would not have marvelled at, but immediately shrunk from, a destroyer of the law and the prophets – and above all else the preacher of a different god, because he could not have given teaching contrary to the law and the prophets, and, by that token, contrary to the Creator, without some previous profession of belief in an alien and hostile deity. As then the scripture gives no indication of this kind, but only that the power and authority of his speech were a matter of wonder, it more readily indicates that his teaching was in accordance with the Creator, since it does not deny that, than that it was opposed to the Creator, since it has not said so. It follows that he must either be acknowledged to belong to him in accordance with whom his teaching was given, or else judged a turn-coat if his teaching was in accordance with him whom he had come to oppose. ...

20. [Luke 8:25–48] Now who is this, that commands even the winds and the sea? Some new ruler, perhaps, and impropiator of the elements which have belonged to that Creator who is now subdued and dispossessed? By no means. Those elements had recognized their author, even as they had of old been accustomed to obey his servants. Look at Exodus, Marcion: see how Moses' rod gave orders to the Red Sea, a much greater matter than all the ponds in Judaea, so that it was split to the bottom, was made firm with equal amazement on either side, and by a route through its midst let the people pass through on dry feet: and again at the command of the same rod its nature returned, and the flowing together of the waters overwhelmed the Egyptian host. To that Work also the south winds gave service. Read how for the dividing off of one tribe by lot there was a sword at their crossing of Jordan, after Joshua had clearly enjoined its current from above and below to stand still as the prophets passed over. What say you to this? If Christ belongs to you, you will not find him more powerful than these servants of the Creator. Now I might have been content with these instances, but that a prophecy of this actual walking upon the sea had anticipated Christ's action. When he crosses the sea, there is a psalm being fulfilled, *The Lord is upon many waters*. When he scatters its waves, Habakkuk is being fulfilled, *Scattering the waters by his passage*. When at his rebuke the sea is stricken down,

Nahum too is made complete, *He rebuketh the sea and maketh it dry*, along with those winds, of course, by which it was disquieted. By what evidence will you have me prove that Christ is mine? By the Creator's acts or by his prophets? ...

43. ... I have, I think, fulfilled my promise. I have set before you Jesus as the Christ of the prophets in his doctrines, his judgements, his affections, his feelings,

his miracles, his sufferings, as also in his resurrection, none other than the Christ of the Creator. And so again, when sending forth his apostles to preach to all the nations, he fulfilled the psalm by his instruction that their sound must go out into all the world and their words unto the ends of the earth. I am sorry for you, Marcion: your labour has been in vain. Even in your gospel [the Gospel of Luke] Christ Jesus is mine.

Karl Barth, *Israel and the Church*

Karl Barth (1886–1968), a Swiss Presbyterian who spent much of his life in Germany and was closely involved in the German church struggle, is widely regarded as the most significant theologian of the twentieth century. The heart of his theology is the notion of election. For Barth, the decisive choice is God's choice never to be except to be for us in Christ. Our choice in return to follow Christ is secondary. Theology derives from the way God's life is shaped in order to be in relationship with us.

In this passage Barth elucidates the delicate relationship between Israel and the church, and thus between the Old and New Testaments. He sets out what we described above as the third approach to the Old Testament – the notion of the people of God as uniting the history of Israel and the history of the church. In a series of carefully worded formulations, Barth states both the continuities and the discontinuities of Israel and the church. He reiterates that God's election is definitively expressed in Christ; it “does not immediately envisage the election of the individual believer,” but principally considers the community – “a fellowship elected by God in Jesus Christ and determined from all eternity for a particular service.”

While Barth affirms that the community “is as Israel and the Church indissolubly one,” he does not shy away from underlining the significant differences. Israel represents the divine judgment, the church the divine mercy; Israel is shaped by hearing, the church by believing; one form of the community of God is characterized by a passing form, another by a coming form.

Karl Barth. “Israel and the Church.” *Church Dogmatics*. Volume 2, Part 2. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1949. From Section 34, “The Election of the Community,” pages 195–205. By kind permission of Continuum International Publishing Group.

§ 34 The Election of the Community

The election of grace, as the election of Jesus Christ, is simultaneously the eternal election of the one community of God by the existence of which Jesus Christ is to be attested to the whole world and the whole world summoned to faith in Jesus Christ. This one community of God in its form as Israel has to serve the repre-

sentation of the divine judgment, in its form as the Church the representation of the divine mercy. In its form as Israel it is determined for hearing, and in its form as the Church for believing the promise sent forth to man. To the one elected community of God is given in the one case its passing, and in the other its coming form.

I. Israel and the Church

The election of man is his election in Jesus Christ, for Jesus Christ is the eternally living beginning of man and of the whole creation. Electing means to elect “in Him.” And election means to be elected “in Him.” Yet there is “another” electing and election, not alongside or

outside, but included in the election of Jesus Christ. Already we have found it impossible to speak of the latter in itself and as such without continually thinking of this “other” election. Materially, the self-giving of God determined in it concerns the man Jesus, but teleologically it concerns man in himself and as such created by and fallen away from God. It is to this man, to the plurality of these men, to each and all, that the eternal love of God is turned in Jesus Christ. And it is turned to them in such a way that in this name it is to be attested to everyone, and in this name it is to be believed by everyone. The way taken by the electing God is the way of witness to Jesus, the way of faith in Him. Included in His election there is, therefore, this “other” election, the election of the many (from whom none is excluded) whom the electing God meets on this way.

But if we keep to Holy Scripture, we find that unlike the classical doctrine of predestination it is in no hurry to busy itself with the “many” men elected in Jesus Christ, either in the singular or plural. It does do this, of course, and we shall have to do so. But starting from the election of Jesus Christ it does not immediately envisage the election of the individual believer (and in this too we shall have to follow it), but in the first place a mediate and mediating election. The Subject of this is indeed God in Jesus Christ, and its particular object is indeed men. But it is not men as private persons in the singular or plural. It is these men as a fellowship elected by God in Jesus Christ and determined from all eternity for a peculiar service, to be made capable of this service and to discharge it. According to Holy Scripture its life and function is the primary object of this “other” election which is included in the election of Jesus Christ. Only from the standpoint of this fellowship and with it in view is it possible to speak properly of the election of the individual believer (which tradition has been far too eager to treat as *the* problem of doctrine of predestination). To designate the object of this “other” election we choose the concept of the community because it covers the reality both of Israel and of the Church. The meaning of concept – given here only in outline – is as follows. The community is the human fellowship which in a particular way provisionally forms the natural and historical environment of the man Jesus Christ. Its particularity consists in the fact that by its existence it has to witness to Him in face of the whole world, to summon the whole world to faith in Him. Its provisional character consists in the fact that in virtue of this office and commission it points beyond itself to the fellowship of all men in face of which it is a witness and herald. The community which has to be described in this way forms

so to speak the inner circle of the “other” election which has taken place (and takes place) in and with the election of Jesus Christ. In so far as on the one hand it forms this special environment of the man Jesus, this inner circle, but on the other hand it is itself of the world or chosen from the world and composed of individual men, its election is to be described as mediate and mediating in respect of its mission and function. It is *mediate*, that is, in so far as it is the middle point between the election of Jesus Christ and (included in this) the election of those who have believed, and do and will believe, in Him. It is *mediating* in so far as the relation between the election of Jesus Christ and that of all believers (and vice versa) is mediated and conditioned by it.

... Again, the existence of the community cannot be regarded as an end in itself with respect to the world. It has been chosen out of the world for the very purpose of performing for the world the service which it most needs and which consists simply in giving it the testimony of Jesus Christ and summoning it to faith in Him. It has forgotten and forfeited its election if it is found existing for itself only and omitting this service, if it is no longer really mediating. The inner circle is nothing apart from the relation to the outer circle of the election which has taken place (and takes place) in Jesus Christ.

But this outer circle, too, is in its turn nothing without the inner one; all the election that has taken place and takes place in Jesus Christ is mediated, conditioned and bounded by the election of the community. It mirrors in its mediate and mediating character the existence of the one Mediator, Jesus Christ, Himself. In its particularity over against the world it reflects the freedom of the electing God, just as in its service to the world (that is, in the provisional nature of its particularity) it reflects His love. It is only in virtue of this reflection that witness to Jesus Christ, the summons to faith in Him and therefore the faith of the individual elect are achieved. ...

Now just as the electing God is one and elected man is one, i.e., Jesus, so also the community as the primary object of the election which has taken place and takes place in Jesus Christ is one. Everything that is to be said of it in the light of the divine predestination will necessarily result in an emphasising of this unity. But we had to regard the divine predestination that is to be equated with the election of Jesus Christ as a double predestination, as the primal act of the free love of God in which He chooses for Himself fellowship with man and therefore the endurance of judgment, but for man fellowship with Himself and therefore the glory of His mercy. According to the first aspect of this act He determines

man for the hearing of His promise, and according to the second aspect of the same act for faith in it. In the one He determines him for an old and passing form of existence, in the other for a new and coming (and abiding) form. If the election of the community is included in the election of Jesus Christ, if in and with Jesus Christ it is the object of this primal act of the free love of God, then we must inevitably expect that in its election too we will encounter this twofold (and in its twofoldness single) direction of the eternal will of God. This is indeed the state of affairs with which, according to Holy Scripture, we have to do.

Who and what is Jesus Christ Himself in His relation to the community of God? Here already we find unity and differentiation. He is the promised son of Abraham and David, the Messiah of Israel. And He is simultaneously the Head and Lord of the Church, called and gathered from Jews and Gentiles. In both these characters He is indissolubly one. And as the One He is ineffaceably both. As the Lord of the Church He is the Messiah of Israel, and as the Messiah of Israel He is the Lord of the Church. ...

To this unity and twofold form of Jesus Christ Himself there corresponds that of the community of God and its election. It exists according to God's eternal decree as the people of Israel (in the whole range of its history in past and future, *ante* and *post Christum natum*), and at the same time as the Church of Jews and Gentiles (from its revelation at Pentecost to its fulfilment by the second coming of Christ). In this its twofold (Old Testament and New Testament) form of existence there is reflected and repeated the twofold determination of Jesus Christ Himself. The community, too, is as Israel and as the Church indissolubly one. It, too, as the one is ineffaceably these two, Israel and the Church. It is as the Church indeed that it is Israel and as Israel indeed that it is the Church. This is the ecclesiological form of what we have previously described in christological terms. ...

The Church is the gathering of Jews and Gentiles called on the ground of its election. It is the community of God in so far as this community has to set forth to sinful man the good-will, readiness and honour of God. As Jesus Christ the crucified Messiah of Israel shows Himself in His resurrection to be the Lord of the Church, the latter can recognise and confess the divine mercy shown to man. And as it recognises and confesses that the divine Word is in its fulfilment stronger than the contradiction of its hearers, it can believe and keep and do it. It can reveal in its existence the coming of the new man accepted and received of God. The Church,

however, as the gathering of Jews and Gentiles, called on the ground of its election, is at the same time the revealed determination of Israel, which is established by it, as elected to bring forth Him in whose person God makes all human sin and need His own concern, as marked out by the hearing of His Word, which must in any case precede faith in it, as the form of the old man who in his passing makes room for the new and coming man.

... The object of election is neither Israel for itself nor the Church for itself, but both together in their unity. (In speaking of elected Israel or of the elected Church we must be clear that we are speaking "synecdochically.") What is elected in Jesus Christ (His "body") is the community which has the twofold form of Israel and the Church. The glory of the election, the love of God to man as the basis of the election, the bow of the covenant that God in His love to man has from eternity purposed and established – all these are the same in the one case as in the other, for in both cases it is Jesus Christ who originally and properly is both Elector and Elected, and in both cases we find ourselves in His environment. Admittedly everything has a different form in the two cases. This difference is in the relation of election to the rejection which inevitably accompanies it. And it is in the twofold determination of Christ Himself that this difference has its basis. It consists in the fact that the Israelite form of the elected community reveals its essence in its Old Testament determination, as determined from the side of elected man as such, whilst its Church form, on the other hand, reveals the same essence of the elected community in its New Testament determination, as determined by the electing God as such. This ineffaceable differentiation of its essence is made plain by the fact that the people of the Jews (delivering up Jesus Christ to the Gentiles to be put to death) resists its divine election, whereas the gathering of Jews and Gentiles (believing in the same Jesus Christ) is called on the ground of its election. The decisive factor in the former case is human turning away from the electing God, and in the latter case the turning of the electing God towards man. These are the two forms of the elected community, the two poles between which its history moves (in a unilateral direction, from here to there), but in such a way that the bow of the one covenant arches over the whole. ...

It is, moreover, implicit in the nature of the case that only in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and of His election, i.e., in the faith of the Church, is the differentiation as well as the unity of the elect community knowable and actually known. The bow of the covenant over the

two is not a neutral area and observation point between them but the history which takes place between Israel and the Church. The way of this history is, however, the way of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. It leads from

Israel to the Church. Only in this movement, i.e., in practice only from the standpoint of the Church, can it be perceived, described and understood as the living way of the one elect community of God.

John Howard Yoder, *If Abraham is our Father*

John Howard Yoder (1927–1997) was a Mennonite biblical scholar and theologian shaped by his pacifist Anabaptist tradition, his ecumenical experiences in Europe, and his exposure to Roman Catholic faculty colleagues. He is most famous for his book *The Politics of Jesus* which reasserts the primacy of the example of Jesus for social ethics.

In this reading Yoder carefully examines in characteristic “list” style five approaches to the problem of the way the Hebrew Bible seems to foster and glorify violence. His concern is not so much with the wrathful God generally but with the violent, war-mongering God more specifically. His central argument is that what God wanted of Israel, and wants of the church, is the conviction that “their survival could be entrusted to the care of Yahweh as their King.” In the Old Testament narrative this is frequently expressed in the willingness to wage war against extraordinary odds; in the New Testament, when all people are seen as potential partakers of the covenant, “then the outsider can no longer be perceived as less than human or the object for sacrificing.”

For Yoder, as for many other theologians, the most creative theology comes out of refusing to reject the legacy of the Old Testament and striving to articulate the theological continuities and historical developments that link the Old to the New.

John Howard Yoder. *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1972. From “If Abraham is our Father,” pages 91–111. Copyright © 1971, 1977, 2003 by Herald Press, Scottdale, PA 15683. Used by permission.

One basic problem of interpretation, which cannot be avoided by Christians whose commitment to nonresistance or pacifism is oriented around loyalty to Jesus Christ, is the issue of the Old Testament. The entire impression left with the modern reader by the narrative of the Hebrew Bible is one of violence being not merely tolerated but fostered and glorified. This impression seems to be present throughout the Old Testament, and to constitute a logical unity. ...

In the face of this problem there seem to be only a certain number of possible explanations. They recur all through the centuries.

A. The New Dispensation

The Sermon on the Mount, in which we find the most concentrated statement of the ethical demand of

Jesus, repeats six times the formula, “You have learned that our forefathers were told. ... But what I tell you is this. ...” It has seemed self-evident to many that Jesus here is announcing the beginning of a new era or dispensation which purely and simply sets aside what went before. There need therefore be no embarrassment about the contradiction with the sacred writings of old; Jesus takes it upon Himself to declare them no longer binding. Thus in Peter of Chelitchitz, in some early Anabaptists and Quakers, in Tolstoy and numerous modern Protestants, the sweeping novelty of the new covenant is a total answer to this problem. ...

Thus both the claim of Jesus to represent the claim of fulfillment of Israelite faith and Jewish hope, and the claim of the God of the Bible to be a faithful and reliable witness are seriously jeopardized by a sweeping shift of dispensations, unless we are to be provided with some far more clear way of measuring the why and the wherefore of the shift, its extent and its character. On the face of the text, the words of Jesus in Matthew 5 do not suffice to sweep away our problem, for to do so would

demand that they sweep away the entire Old Testament, which is clearly not their intent.

B. A Shift of Degree; Concession to Disobedience

It is possible to interpret Jesus' words, "But I say," not as a fundamental shift of the divine purpose but as pointing to a new stage in its definition and realization. We could say that the purpose of God has always been the same, but that He made a permissive concession to the unwillingness or unreadiness of men to accept or to obey His full intent. There is a shift from old to new, but that shift is the termination or the withdrawal of the concession.

C. The Pedagogical Concession

Perhaps God was making an adjustment not to a culpable hardness of heart but to an innocent primitive moral immaturity. Perhaps insight into the destructiveness of violence and the redemptiveness of love is a very refined kind of cultural understanding accessible only to cultures with a certain degree of advancement. It would have been too much to ask for the rough and illiterate tribesmen of the age of Moses and Joshua. For the age of Jesus, however, standing on the shoulders of the civilizing preparation of later prophets and the experience of exile and Roman rule, the nature of such an imperative became much more readily conceivable. ...

One difficulty with this kind of position is its traditional correlation with an evolutionist liberal theological perspective. To hold a view like this one must look down on the ancient Israelites with a sense of moral superiority which is difficult to justify on objective grounds. One must also take a rather cavalier attitude toward the authority of the scriptural narratives, which affirm explicit and affirmative divine instructions hardly able to be subsumed under the heading of "adjustment to immaturity." It could be pointed out also that the analogy of the child's use of fire is significantly reversed. In the case of Israelite warfare it is the command which comes early and the prohibition late. The same conception of the growing capacity to act with insight would not seem to fit as well in this case.

D. The Division of Levels or Realms

In view of the shortcomings of each of these views which seeks to interpret Old Testament warfare as somehow less binding or exemplary than New Testament nonresistance, it is no surprise that the main

stream of Christian interpretation has resolved the question by dividing the materials into different levels. One has no difficulty in reconciling the Old Testament and the New if one notices they are simply talking on different subjects. ...

In the Old Testament we have narrative and imperative dealing with the civil life of the Hebrew people. The commands and permissions which enabled that civil order to defend itself, including the use of violence both against social offenders and against enemies, were not only legitimate for them but continue to give legitimacy to the use of the death penalty and military violence by the state in our age. The New Testament does not deny or retract any of this; it cannot since it is not on that subject. Nothing in the New Testament prescribes any standards for the civil order. The only New Testament texts which speak to that issue are those which recognize the civil order as being master in its own house. ("Render to Caesar that which is Caesar's," "Be subject to the powers that be"). The nonviolence, the renunciation of rights, and the willingness to suffer which are typical of the ethic of the New Testament are only imperatives for the Christian individual and apply only in his primary relationships or in the church. Thus there is no contradiction.

This approach has the great advantage of not really needing to solve the problem we have been working at. It merely sets it aside. It does have, however, some significant theological and logical shortcomings. One finds them when one attempts to neatly draw the line (which it takes for granted) between the individual and the social, or when one recognizes that the New Testament says far more about social and political orders than simply to command submission to Caesar. ...

E. The Concrete Historical Anthropological Meaning

... If we look at the Old Testament from the perspective of the New we are struck by the difference, and the difference seems to lie at the point of whether killing is forbidden or not. But if we were instead to look at the events of the old story as they happened, moving toward the new, we should have been struck by quite another kind of consideration. It is therefore more proper, in reading the Old Testament story, to ask not how it is different from what came later, but rather how it differs from what went *before* or what prevailed at the time, and how it moves toward what was to come later. If we put the question in this way, we then find that the diversity of imperatives regarding killing is not the basic

issue. What is most fundamentally at stake is rather an understanding of the covenant community and its relationship to God who has called it and promised it His care.

... What kind of social phenomenon was holy war in ancient Israel? We should ask, we have said, not how it differed from New Testament discipleship but how it was original in its own cultural context. ... We first observe that the issue of the rightness or wrongness of taking of life does not arise in these accounts. There is no discussion within them of any effort to relate these words to the teaching of the Decalogue which forbids killing. It is not argued that killing is wrong except in these circumstances (the lines of the later doctrine of the just war which was taken over from pagan philosophical tradition). The possibility had not yet come into view that the prohibition of killing in the Decalogue (as it was understood) would need somehow to be related to these wars.

The holy war of ancient Israel is a religious or a ritual event. Prominence is given in many of the accounts to the term *herem*, meaning "set apart" or *tabu*; before being attacked, a Canaanite city would be "devoted to Jahweh," a ceremony which made of that entire city, including its living inhabitants, a sacrificial object. The bloodshed which followed the victory was not conceived as the taking of the individual lives of persons, each of whom could be thought of as a father or a mother or a child; it was rather a vast, bloody sacrifice to the God who had "given the enemy into our hands." The enemy has been put to death not because he has been conceived of personally as an object of hate but because in a much more ritual way he becomes a human sacrifice.

This ritual context has in turn an economic side effect. If all the slaves and the flocks of the enemy are to be slaughtered in one vast sacrifice, there will then be no booty. The war does not become a source of immediate enrichment through plunder nor a source of squabbling among the soldiers about how to divide the spoils; for there are no spoils.

The holy war is not a result of strategic planning but an *ad hoc* charismatic event. Israel is under the pressure of a neighboring tribe; a leader arises who is not a part of any royal dynasty or professional military class, and in response to his call the men of Israel arrive bringing their own weapons, whatever tools (axes, hoes) they had just been using. There is no professional army and no military strategist. If Israel's forces win it is not because they were more expert or more numerous but because of a miracle: "Yahweh gave the enemy into their hands."

Sometimes, especially as in the parade around Jericho and the wars of Gideon, special symbolic measures are taken to dramatize the non-rational, nonprofessional, miraculous character of the entire sacramental battle. When the Israelites want to have a king like other kings and a standing army like other nations have, *the holy wars come to an end*.

What the original experience of the holy wars meant in the life of Israel was that even at the very crucial point of the bare existence of Israel as a people, their survival could be entrusted to the care of Yahweh as their King, even if He told them to have no other kings. They did not need to trust to their own institutional readiness or the solidarity of their royal house; Jahweh would provide.

This interpretation of the central permanent meaning of the holy war story is supported by the appeal which is made to the holy war tradition by the later prophets and by the writer of the Book of Chronicles. These later interpreters do not derive from the tradition the conclusion, "Israel slaughtered the Amalekites and therefore we should put to death all the enemies of God." The point made by the prophets is rather, "Jahweh has always taken care of us in the past; should we not be able to trust His providence for the immediate future?" Its impact in those later prophetic proclamations was to work *against* the development of a military caste, military alliances, and political designs based on the availability of military power. ...

The Case for the Historical View

From this perspective we can avoid both the condescending and arbitrary approach of saying that the ancient Hebrews only thought that God told them to fight, and the concept of a "concession" in response to conscious disobedience. We can affirm that in these events there was, as the story says, a real word from the true Jahweh of hosts, speaking to His people in historically relevant terms.

The issue to which He spoke was not one of ethical generalizations and the limits of their validity. To place the question here is the source of our trouble. The issue to which this experience speaks is the readiness of God's people to be dependent upon miracles for survival. The holy war of Israel is the concrete experience of not needing any other crutches for one's identity and community as a people than trust in Jahweh as king, who makes it unnecessary to have earthly kings like the neighboring nations.

From the ancient Hebrews through the later prophets up to Jesus there was real historical movement, real

“progress”; but the focus of this progress was not a changing of ethical codes but rather in an increasingly precise definition of the nature of peoplehood. The identification of the people of Israel with the state of Israel was progressively loosened by all of the events and prophecies of the Old Testament. It was loosened in a positive way by the development of an increasing vision for the concern of Yahweh for *all* peoples and by the promise of a time when *all* peoples would come to Jerusalem to learn the law; it was loosened as well in a negative direction by the development of a concept of the faithful remnant, no longer assuming that Israel as a geographical and ethnic body would be usable for Jahweh’s purposes. These two changes in turn altered the relevance of the prohibition of killing. Once all men are seen as potential partakers of the covenant, then the outsider can no longer be perceived as less than human or as an object for sacrificing. Once one’s own national existence is no longer seen as a guarantee of Jahweh’s favor, then to save this national existence by a holy war is no longer a purpose for which miracles would be expected. Thus the dismantling of the applicability of the concept of the holy war takes place not by promulgation of a new ethical demand but by a restructuring of the Israelite perception of community under God. ...

Thus, instead of being struck by a categorical difference between an Old Testament which permits killing and a New Testament which does not, we will observe positive movement along coherent lines, beginning with what is novel in holy war itself and moving in continuous steps to what is novel about the man Jesus. Already in the very earliest legislation of early Israel

there will be novelties, such as for instance the rejection of indirect retaliation which was a part of the contemporary laws of other peoples, and the greater dignity given to woman and the slave in Israelite legislation. Then progressively the prophetic line underlines these same dimensions as the story continues. Through the incorporation of persons of non-Israelite blood into the tribe, through the expansion of the world vision to include other nations, through the prophets’ criticism of and history’s destruction of kingship and territorial sovereignty as definitions of peoplehood, the movement continued through the centuries which was ultimately to culminate at the point where John the Baptist opened the door for Jesus.

“Do not claim that you are sons of Abraham; God can raise up sons of Abraham out of stones.” To be the son of Abraham means to share the faith of Abraham. Thus the relativizing of the given ethnic-political peoplehood is completed in both directions. There is no one in any nation who is not a potential son of Abraham since that sonship is a miraculous gift which God can open up to Gentiles. On the other hand there is no given peoplehood which can defend itself against others as bearer of the Abrahamic covenant, since those who were born into that unity can and in fact already did jeopardize their claim to it by their unbelief. Thus the very willingness to trust God for the security and identity of one’s peoplehood, which was the original concrete moral meaning of the sacrament of holy warfare, is now translated to become the willingness or readiness to renounce those definitions of one’s own people and of the enemy which gave to the original sacrament its meaning.

Oliver O’Donovan, *Yhwh Reigns*

Oliver O’Donovan (b. 1945) is the leading theological ethicist currently at work in the United Kingdom, and his trilogy *Resurrection and Moral Order*, *The Desire of the Nations*, and *The Ways of Judgment* is the most accomplished contribution to Anglican ethics since World War II. He sees ethics in largely teleological terms, aspiring to the eschatological fulfillment of the created order, and seeks to recover the scriptural roots of Christian ethics. His project is to identify and articulate the distinctively political character of Christianity and the uniquely Christian character of politics.

In this passage O’Donovan resolves the political legacy of Israel into four terms – salvation, judgment, possession, and praise. The first three refer to God’s exercise of kingship, the fourth to humanity’s appropriate response. It is important to note that O’Donovan resolves the question of God’s bellicose activity in a very different way

from Yoder: for O'Donovan, the military face of God is just one aspect of a larger category called salvation. Likewise "possession" gives O'Donovan a subtle tool to handle the delicate question of the relationship of God's reign to the land of Israel. Meanwhile, "praise" offers potential for discussing civil religion and its equivalents. This is among the most ambitious attempts to harness the social and historical context of the Old Testament for contemporary political ethics.

Oliver O'Donovan. *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 2002. From pages 30–49. © Cambridge University Press, reproduced with permission.

"Yhwh reigns"

The cry *Yhwh mālāk* ["Yhwh is king"] carried with it three kinds of association. In the first place it offered a geophysical reassurance about the stability of the natural order; in the second place, it offered a reassurance about the international political order, that the God of Israel was in control of the restless turbulence of the nations and their tutelary deities and could safeguard his people; in the third place, it was associated with the ordering of Israel's own social existence by justice and law, ensuring the protection of the oppressed and vulnerable. In the third of these lines of association lay the calling and the demand. ...

We can explore the idea of Yhwh's kingship further ... by identifying some leading political terms that are habitually grouped with it. We shall take three common Hebrew words as primary points of reference: *y'shū'āh* (salvation), *mishpāt* (judgment) and *nah'ālāh* (possession). Yhwh's authority as king is established by the accomplishment of victorious deliverance, by the presence of judicial discrimination and by the continuity of a community-possession. To these three primary terms I add a fourth, which identifies the human response and acknowledgment of Yhwh's reign: *ʾhillāh* (praise). ...

1. Let us begin with "salvation," the usual translation of a Hebrew word which often bears a military sense, "victory." Yhwh's kingship is established by the fact that he delivers his people from peril in conflict with their enemies. To be sure, this starting-point should not be construed in too narrowly military a sense, as though Yhwh's power was confined to the battlefield (though "warrior" is a title given him at Exod. 15:3; Jer. 20:11; Zeph. 3:17). Rather, as Buber expressed it (*The Kingship of God*, p. 101): "His natural potency is contained in his historical potency." To Yhwh belongs the power to initiate. He initiates and

leads his people in the face of opposition and obstacle. They come to be, and they go forward, in the wake of his call to follow, in defiance of all that would destroy and disintegrate them. The miracle of the Exodus, which is a military event only in an unconventional sense, is the paradigm of Yhwh's *y'shū'āh*. Miraculous and providential deliverance are a part of what that "right hand" and "strong arm" have accomplished, as much for the individual worshipper, beset by his "pursuers," as for the people as a whole. Yet, equally, it is clear that the primary political implication of *y'shū'āh* is Israel's power to win military engagements, especially engagements against the odds. ...

Taking "salvation" as a point of reference, we can follow subsidiary parallels which help us explore the meaning of Yhwh's military victories. They were, in the first place, a sign of his *hesed* or "favour" (Pss. 13:5; 85:7). As has been constantly stressed, Yhwh's *hesed* is more than a momentary or occasional disposition of goodwill. It is his enduring commitment to those who lived within his covenant. (*Hesed*, "turn" often stands in parallel to *'mūnāh*, "faithfulness" (Ps. 98:3 e.g.), and the two words occur together in parallel with *y'shū'āh*.) In the second place it was an exercise of Yhwh's *tsedeq*. The group of words formed on the root *tsdq* are traditionally translated "righteousness" or "justice"; but their sense is often better caught by "vindication" or "justification," as Luther famously discovered. If with *hesed* we are in a relation known only from within, inscrutable to the outside world and private to Yhwh and his people, with *tsedeq* we are in the fully public realm of a world court. When Yhwh's right hand and holy arm have effected a victory for his people, it is a matter of international notice (Ps. 98:2). ...

2. This brings us to our second primary point of reference: judgment. The *tsdq* words appear in connexion with the *ysh'* words from time to time; but they are continually associated with words formed on the root *shpt*, which have to do with judging. "To judge with *tsedeq*" is the usual phrase for "judging justly," as it might apply to anybody responsible for making decisions of any kind. But the successful dis-

charge of judicial duties, especially those of the monarch, is described in the Deuteronomic period by a favourite combination of two nouns and a verb, as “doing judgment and justice” (2 Sam. 8:15; 1 Kgs. 10:9; Jer. 22:3, 15; 23:5; 33:15; Ezek. 45:9). ... He is “a righteous judge ... who is angry every day” (Ps. 7:11), which is to say that, like his earthly counterpart, he is scrupulous to hold daily assizes (Zeph. 3:5, cf. Ps. 101:8). But his judicial role is also taken to include international and military exertions on behalf of his people as a whole. ...

A very similar assertion, however, can yield a very different inference. “He stands up to judge his people; he enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people,” says Isaiah of Jerusalem (Isa. 3:13). The preexilic prophets often return to the theme of Yhwh’s “controversy” with his people (Mic. 6:2; Jer. 2:9), which is taken up memorably in Psalm 50, where Elohim testifies against the consecrated people that makes sacrifices to him. Here the notion of an *objective right* comes to the fore. If it is true that Yhwh’s *tsedeq* is his vindication of the righteous against their adversaries, it is also true that it is his vindication of the *righteous*, and that a faithless nation, though chosen of God, cannot escape God’s judgment of its ways. Out of this delicately balanced tension springs the whole dynamic of Israel’s election-consciousness – one could say, without exaggeration, the dynamic of the Gospel itself, which, through God’s act in the death and resurrection of Jesus, addresses not only our need for comfort but our need for objective justice, that paradoxically twofold need which refuses, existentially or ontologically, to be reduced to simplicity one way or the other.

To judge is to make a distinction between the just and the unjust, or, more precisely, to bring the distinction which already exists between them into the daylight of public observation. ... *Mishpāt* is primarily a judicial *performance*. When “judgment” is present, it is not a state of affairs that obtains but an activity that is duly carried out. When it is absent, it is not imbalance or maldistribution that is complained of but the lapsing of a juridical function that always needs to be exercised. ...

The permanence of the law, then, was not a reflection of Yhwh’s eternal unchangingness as such, but of his divine decisiveness. There is ... a theme of legal and cosmic stability in Israel’s faith; yet it is not self-standing, but rests on the self-consistency of Israel’s God, his *’emeth* and *’emūnāh*, truth and faithfulness, in confirming and upholding his own judgments. ...

3. This brings us to our third point of reference: without the consciousness of something *possessed* and handed on from generation to generation there could be a theology of divine judgments but not a political theology, since it would never be clear how the judgments of God could give order and structure to a community and sustain it in being. It was not always the case that this traditional possession was identified primarily as the law. Originally and fundamentally the existence of Israel as a people was mediated through the land. But between these two ideas there was more connexion than at first meets the eye. Possessing the land was a matter of observing that order of life which was established by Yhwh’s judgments; possessing the law was a matter of enjoying that purchase on the conditions of life which was Yhwh’s gift. ... The material and spiritual aspects of the Israelites’ possession are held together, a thought which will deeply affect John Wyclif two millennia later.

We may say that the land was the material cause of Yhwh’s kingly rule, as judgment was the formal cause and his victories the efficient cause. There never was a pure nomad-ideal in Israel’s history. ... The land was Yhwh’s sovereign gift to his people (Josh. 24:13 etc.), even though, exceptionally, it could be thought of as given solely on leasehold (Lev. 25:23), emphasising Yhwh’s sovereign right of disposal. ...

Corresponding to the notion that the land as a whole is Israel’s possession as a whole is an assertion that Israel itself is Yhwh’s possession. Possessing the gift, she is possessed by the giver; and this is something that is either to be true of the whole nation or not to be true at all. Hence the stress on the common act of conquest the military self-commitment of the nation to the claiming of the land which preceded, according to the Deuteronomic historian, the act of division. And hence the emphasis, which became very important for the Deuteronomic reformers, on a united nation based on a single cult-centre. ...

4. ... So Yhwh’s rule receives its answering recognition in the praises of his people. In a telling phrase a psalmist describes Yhwh as “enthroned upon the praises of Israel” (Ps. 22:3), an adaptation of the conventional designation, drawn from the sacred furniture of the First Temple, which has him “enthroned upon the cherubim” (i.e. of the Ark). The link which ties the exercise of Yhwh’s kingly rule to the praise of his people is that as the people congregate to perform their act of praise, the political reality of Israel is displayed. “To you belongs praise, Elohim, in Zion ... to you shall all flesh come” (Ps. 65:1f.). The gathering of the

congregation is the moment at which the people's identity is disclosed (as in the late Psalm 149 the distinct identity of the warrior-saints (*h'sidim*) is seen in the fact that they have their separate assembly of praise). Hence the importance of "gathering," both on annual pilgrimage and in a final and complete return from exile, to the hopes of the post-exilic community: "Gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise" (Ps. 106:47). The community is a political community by virtue of being a worshipping community; while the worship of the single believer, restored from some affliction and desiring to thank God, must, as it were, be politicised by being brought into the public arena of "the great congregation" (Pss. 35:18; 40:9f.) in "the gates of the daughter of Zion" (Ps. 9:14). Otherwise, the poet says, Yhwh's righteousness faithfulness, salvation, love and truth would be "hidden" and "concealed" (Ps. 40:10).

The congregation, however, forms the centre of a much wider community of praise which runs out as far as Yhwh's kingly rule is manifest. It is as though the assembly can extend itself to include communities of worship everywhere that have seen evidence of the divine rule. So the thought of the poet of Psalm 48 moves from the Temple, where worshippers "have thought on" Elohim's favour – "Like your name, Elohim, so your praise reaches to the ends of the earth. Your right hand is occupied with vindication" – and then back to the focal place of worship again: "Mount Zion shall rejoice" (9–11). ...

Praise is a kind of proving or demonstration of the fact of God's kingly rule. At no point is the suggestion allowed that the people, by their praises, have *made* Yhwh king, nor should that suggestion be inferred from the speculative hypothesis of an "enthronement ceremony." This fourth section of our discussion, then, has to be set apart from the three which preceded it, for it does not relate to them as they relate to each other. Victory, judgment and possession are what God has done "by his own right hand." In one sense everything is complete when he has done them. If Israel's praises did not follow, or were radically defective, then, as the prophet of Psalm 50 very well understands, God's position would not be weakened in the slightest. "The heavens" are sufficient to "declare his vindication" in an assembly where the supposedly "consecrated ones" can expect nothing but judgment for their meaningless

attempts at worship (Ps. 50:6). Yet the people's praise is more than "confirmation," if by that word we mean no more than a kind of public notification of something that has happened quite independently. The kingly rule of Yhwh *takes effect* in the praises of his people, so that ... praise is the final cause of God's kingdom. Deutero-Isaiah can say that Yhwh "formed" the people for himself "that they might declare my praise" (43:21). This is what God's reign is directed towards, an acclamation that unites the whole community. In giving himself as king, God sought acknowledgment from mankind. We can say that much without derogation from divine sovereignty, since it is the implication of the covenant by which sovereign and subject are bound together. So that even Psalm 50, which knows that Elohim will get his tribute of praise regardless of what Israel does, must renew the summons of the covenant: "He who brings thanksgiving as his sacrifice, honours me; to him who orders his way aright I will show Elohim's victory" (Ps. 50:23).

Shall we conclude, then, that within every political society there occurs, implicitly, an act of worship of divine rule? I think we may even venture as far as that. "State-authority," remarks Stephen Clark, "is what emerges when households, clans and crafts first recognise a sacred centre in their lives together and then forget where the centre gets its authority. ... The voice of the High God reminds us that the land is his" (*Civil Peace and Sacred Order*, p. 90). Certainly it explains, as very few attempts at theorising the foundations of politics ever do explain, the persistent cultural connexion between politics and religion. And it allows us to understand why it is precisely at this point that political loyalties can go so badly wrong; for a worship of divine rule which has failed to recollect or understand the divine purpose can only be an idolatrous worship which sanctions an idolatrous politics. It sheds light, too, on the nature of the impasse into which a politics constructed on an avowedly anti-sacred basis has now come. For without the act of worship political authority is unbelievable, so that binding political loyalties and obligations seem to be deprived of any point. The doctrine that we set up political authority, as a device to secure our own essentially private, local and unpolitical purposes, has left the Western democracies in a state of pervasive moral debilitation, which, from time to time, inevitably throws up idolatrous and authoritarian reactions.

God in Person

The key question regarding the gospels is whether and to what extent Jesus may be regarded as normative for Christian ethics. Looking at his life in four dimensions – his incarnation, his ministry, his death, and his resurrection – different theologians have stressed different dimensions as key, and among them some have seen the respective dimension as normative, while others have seen it as only illustrative of ethical foundations that were also available elsewhere. This distinction between normative and illustrative views of Jesus is very important for understanding the role of Jesus in ethics.

Thus, theologians such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth ground their understanding of the uniqueness and ethic of Jesus not so much on the outstanding features of his life but on his *incarnation* and birth – his very existence. Jesus for them was significant not for what he did but for who and what he was.

Meanwhile, theologians such as Walter Rauschenbusch and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza place Jesus' ministry and *teaching* as central. For them, what was unique was the quality and ethos of the community he inaugurated and gathered around him.

For Reinhold Niebuhr, the *cross* is the key element of Christ's coming, since it illustrates the reality and consequences of sin and the paradox of finitude and freedom. The cross is also central for John Howard Yoder, but in a very different sense from Niebuhr: for Yoder, the definitive dimension of Jesus' ministry was his willingness to go to the cross as a form of revolutionary subordination rather than pursue a zealot's crusade or settle for establishment quietism.

Finally, there are those for whom the *resurrection* and ascension are the most important features. For Rudolf Bultmann, the resurrection wrests the imagination away from commitment to inauthentic existence; for Oliver O'Donovan, it is the key moment that restores creation (and thus keeps salvation this-worldly) and inaugurates the kingdom of God (and thus appeals to a world beyond).

In the selections below John Calvin outlines a comprehensive view of Jesus across these stages of his "career"; and Stanley Hauerwas similarly restores the role of Jesus' life prior to the cross as vital for ethics, incorporating his embodiment of Israel.

John Calvin, *The Purpose for which Christ was Sent by the Father*

Perhaps the most influential understanding of the significance of Jesus for Christian ethics has been that of John Calvin (1509–1564). In his *Institutes* Calvin sets out the ministry of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. In this he draws out the salient roles of Old Testament leadership – for the people who kept Israel faithful to God through the story of the Old Testament were, at different times, prophets, priests, and kings. All of these were anointed roles, and thus are linked to the most common title of Jesus – the Messiah, or Christ, which means the anointed one.

Calvin intended all three titles to apply to all aspects of Jesus' life – his birth, ministry, death, and resurrection. However, in the *Institutes* as they stand the prophetic ministry is linked most clearly to Jesus' life, the priestly ministry is connected most evidently to Jesus' death, and the kingly ministry is oriented most explicitly to Jesus' resurrection. The threefold office (or *munus triplex*) is not fully developed in the *Institutes*, and elsewhere in Calvin's work he largely settles for describing Christ as priest and king. The potential of the prophetic office may have appealed to Calvin as a basis for understanding the authority and role of Protestant ordained ministry (for which he was reluctant to use the term *priest*). Karl Barth was later to take up Calvin's unfinished project and develop a much more thorough account of Christ's threefold office.

John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 2 vols. Ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. The Library of Christian Classics 20. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960. From Vol. 1, Book II, Chapter 15, pages 494–502. Available online at www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/books/institutes/.

Book Two, Chapter XV: To Know The Purpose for Which Christ Was Sent by the Father, and What He Conferred Upon Us, We Must Look Above All at Three Things in Him: the Prophetic Office, Kingship, and Priesthood

(i. Christ's saving activity threefold: first the prophetic office, 1–2)

1. *The need of understanding this doctrine: Scriptural passages applicable to Christ's prophetic office*

... Therefore, in order that faith may find a firm basis for salvation in Christ, and thus rest in him, this principle must be laid down: the office enjoined upon Christ by the Father consists of three parts. For he was given to be prophet, king, and priest. ...

We have already said that although God, by providing his people with an unbroken line of prophets, never left them without useful doctrine sufficient for salvation, yet the minds of the pious had always been imbued with the conviction that they were to hope for the full light of understanding only at the coming of the Messiah. This expectation penetrated even to the Samaritans, though they never had known the true religion, as appears from the words of the woman: "When the Messiah comes, he will teach us all things" [John 4:25 p.]. And the Jews did not rashly presume this in their minds; but, being taught by clear oracles, they so believed. Isaiah's saying is particularly well known: "Behold, I have made him a witness to the peoples, I have given him as a leader and commander for the peoples" [Isa. 55:4]. Elsewhere, Isaiah called him "messenger or interpreter of great counsel" [Isa. 9:6, conflated with Isa. 28:29 and Jer. 32:19]. For this reason, the apostle commends the perfection of the gospel doctrine, first saying: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets" [Heb. 1:1]. Then he adds, "In these last days he has spoken to us through a beloved Son." [Heb. 1:2 p.] But, because the task common to the prophets was to hold the church in expectation and at the same time to support it until the Mediator's coming, we read that in their dispersion believers complained that they were deprived of that ordinary benefit: "We do not see our signs; there is no

... prophet among us, ... there is no one ... who knows how long" [Ps. 74:9]. But when Christ was no longer far off, a time was appointed for Daniel "to seal both vision and prophet" [Dan. 9:24], not only that the prophetic utterance there mentioned might be authoritatively established, but also that believers might patiently go without the prophets for a time because the fullness and culmination of all revelations was at hand.

2. *The meaning of the prophetic office for us*

Now it is to be noted that the title "Christ" pertains to these three offices: for we know that under the law prophets as well as priests and kings were anointed with holy oil. Hence the illustrious name of "Messiah" was also bestowed upon the promised Mediator. As I have elsewhere shown, I recognize that Christ was called Messiah especially with respect to, and by virtue of, his kingship. Yet his anointings as prophet and as priest have their place and must not be overlooked by us. Isaiah specifically mentions the former in these words: "The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me, because Jehovah has anointed me to preach to the humble, ... to bring healing to the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberation to the captives ... , to proclaim the year of the Lord's good pleasure," etc. [Isa. 61:1–2; cf. Luke 4:18]. We see that he was anointed by the Spirit to be herald and witness of the Father's grace. And that not in the common way – for he is distinguished from other teachers with a similar office. On the other hand, we must note this: he received anointing, not only for himself that he might carry out the office of teaching, but for his whole body that the power of the Spirit might be present in the continuing preaching of the gospel. ...

(ii. The kingly office – its spiritual character, 3–5)

3. *The eternity of Christ's dominion*

I come now to kingship. It would be pointless to speak of this without first warning my readers that it is spiritual in nature. For from this we infer its efficacy and benefit for us, as well as its whole force and eternity. Now this eternity, which the angel in The Book of Daniel attributes to the person of Christ [Dan. 2:44], in the Gospel of Luke the angel justly applies to the salvation of the people [Luke 1:33]. But this eternity is also of two sorts or must be considered in two ways: the first pertains to the whole body of the church; the second belongs to each individual member. We must refer to the first kind the statement in The Psalms: "Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His line shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun

before me. Like the moon, it shall be established forever; the witness of heaven is sure" [Ps. 89:35–37 p.]. God surely promises here that through the hand of his Son he will be the eternal protector and defender of his church. ...

Now with regard to the special application of this to each one of us – the same "eternity" ought to inspire us to hope for blessed immortality. For we see that whatever is earthly is of the world and of time, and is indeed fleeting. Therefore Christ, to lift our hope to heaven, declares that his "kingship is not of this world" [John 18:36]. In short, when any one of us hears that Christ's kingship is spiritual, aroused by this word let him attain to the hope of a better life; and since it is now protected by Christ's hand, let him await the full fruit of this grace in the age to come.

4. *The blessing of Christ's kingly office for us*

We have said that we can perceive the force and usefulness of Christ's kingship only when we recognize it to be spiritual. This is clear enough from the fact that, while we must fight throughout life under the cross, our condition is harsh and wretched. What, then, would it profit us to be gathered under the reign of the Heavenly King, unless beyond this earthly life we were certain of enjoying its benefits? For this reason we ought to know that the happiness promised us in Christ does not consist in outward advantages – such as leading a joyous and peaceful life, having rich possessions, being safe from all harm, and abounding with delights such as the flesh commonly longs after. No, our happiness belongs to the heavenly life! In the world the prosperity and well-being of a people depend partly on an abundance of all good things and domestic peace, partly on strong defenses that protect them from outside attacks. In like manner, Christ enriches his people with all things necessary for the eternal salvation of souls and fortifies them with courage to stand unconquerable against all the assaults of spiritual enemies. ...

5. *The spiritual nature of his kingly office: the sovereignty of Christ and of the Father*

Therefore the anointing of the king is not with oil or aromatic unguents. Rather, he is called "Anointed" [*Christus*] of God because "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might ... and of the fear of the Lord have rested upon him" [Isa. 11:2 p.]. This is "the oil of gladness" with which the psalm proclaims he "was anointed above his fellows" [Ps. 45:7], for if such excellence were not in him, all of us would be needy and hungry. As has already been said, he did not enrich himself for his own sake, but that he

might pour out his abundance upon the hungry and thirsty. The Father is said "not by measure to have given the Spirit to his Son" [John 3:34 p.]. The reason is expressed as follows: "That from his fullness we might all receive grace upon grace" [John 1:16 p.]. From this fountain flows that abundance of which Paul speaks: "Grace was given to each believer according to the measure of Christ's gift" [Eph. 4:7]. These statements quite sufficiently confirm what I have said: that Christ's Kingdom lies in the Spirit, not in earthly pleasures or pomp. Hence we must forsake the world if we are to share in the Kingdom. ...

And surely, to say that he sits at the right hand of the Father is equivalent to calling him the Father's deputy, who has in his possession the whole power of God's dominion. For God mediately, so to speak, wills to rule and protect the church in Christ's person. Paul explains in the first chapter of the letter to the Ephesians that Christ was placed "at the right hand of the Father" to be the "Head of the church, ... which is Christ's body" [vs. 20–23 p.]. He means the same thing when he teaches in another place: "God ... has bestowed upon him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess what is to the glory of God the Father" [Phil. 2:9–11 p.]. In these words Paul also commends the order in the Kingdom of Christ as necessary for our present weakness. Thus Paul rightly infers: God will then of himself become the sole Head of the church, since the duties of Christ in defending the church will have been accomplished. For the same reason, Scripture usually calls Christ "Lord" because the Father set Christ over us to exercise his dominion through his Son. Although there are many lordships celebrated in the world [cf. I Cor. 8:5], "for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we in him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we through him" [I Cor. 8:6, cf. Vg.], says Paul. From this we duly infer that he is the same God who through the mouth of Isaiah declared himself to be king and lawgiver of the church [Isa. 33:22]. For even though [the Son] consistently calls all the power he holds "the benefit and gift of the Father," he merely means that he reigns by divine power. Why did he take the person of the Mediator? He descended from the bosom of the Father and from incomprehensible glory that he might draw near to us. All the more reason, then, is there that we should one and all resolve to obey, and to direct our obedience with the greatest eagerness to the divine will! Now Christ fulfills the combined duties of king and pastor for the godly who submit willingly and

obediently; on the other hand, we hear that he carries a “rod of iron to break them and dash them all in pieces like a potter’s vessel” [Ps. 2:9 p.]. We also hear that “he will execute judgment among the Gentiles, so that he fills the earth with corpses, and strikes down every height that opposes him” [Ps. 110:6 p.]. We see today several examples of this fact, but the full proof will appear at the Last Judgment, which may also be properly considered the last act of his reign.

(iii. The priestly office: reconciliation and intercession, 6)

6. Now we must speak briefly concerning the purpose and use of Christ’s priestly office: as a pure and stainless Mediator he is by his holiness to reconcile us to God. But God’s righteous curse bars our access to him, and God in his capacity as judge is angry toward us. Hence, an expiation must intervene in order that Christ as priest may obtain God’s favor for us and appease his wrath. Thus Christ to perform this office had to come forward with a sacrifice. For under the law, also, the priest was forbidden to enter the sanctuary without

blood [Heb. 9:7], that believers might know, even though the priest as their advocate stood between them and God, that they could not propitiate God unless their sins were expiated [Lev. 16: 2–3]. The apostle discusses this point at length in The Letter to the Hebrews, from the seventh almost to the end of the tenth chapter. To sum up his argument: The priestly office belongs to Christ alone because by the sacrifice of his death he blotted out our own guilt and made satisfaction for our sins [Heb. 9:22]. God’s solemn oath, of which he “will not repent,” warns us what a weighty matter this is: “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” [Ps. 110:4; cf. Heb. 5:6; 7:15]. God undoubtedly willed in these words to ordain the principal point on which, he knew, our whole salvation turns. For, as has been said, we or our prayers have no access to God unless Christ, as our High Priest, having washed away our sins, sanctifies us and obtains for us that grace from which the uncleanness of our transgressions and vices debars us. Thus we see that we must begin from the death of Christ in order that the efficacy and benefit of his priesthood may reach us.

Stanley Hauerwas, *Jesus: The Presence of the Peaceable Kingdom*

Stanley Hauerwas (b. 1940) began his career seeking to recover the tradition of the virtues and point out the weaknesses of approaches to Christian ethics that focused disproportionately on the moment of decision. This led him to explore how character is formed, focusing on narrative, tradition, and community, and more recently on worship. His work is largely expressed in essay form, but towards the end of the first period of his career he published a single volume, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, which remains the best introduction to his work.

In chapter 5 of *The Peaceable Kingdom* Hauerwas provides perhaps the single most eloquent summary of the convictions of ecclesial ethics. He begins by pointing out that “we only learn who Jesus is as he is reflected through the eyes of his followers” and argues that, far from being a problem, this is in fact “a theological necessity.” In *The Peaceable Kingdom* he makes a transition from referring to narrative in general as significant in Christian ethics, to identifying the ways the narrative of Jesus, as disclosed through the gospels, is uniquely significant for ethics. While he argues that we should see in Jesus’ cross “the summary of his whole life” (one can perceive the influence of Yoder here), Hauerwas goes on to highlight the importance of Jesus’ resurrection, which he sees as God’s Sabbath, offering the possibility of forgiveness and restoration for all creation.

It is important also to note another recurring theme in Hauerwas’ writing: the role of Israel, historically and in the present, in locating and understanding both Jesus and the church.

Stanley Hauerwas. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983. From Chapter 5, "Jesus: The Presence of the Peaceable Kingdom," pages 72–90. Copyright © Stanley Hauerwas, 1983. Used by permission of Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd.

1. The Ethical Significance of Jesus

It is not my intention to settle to what extent we can know the "real Jesus." I am quite content to assume that the Jesus we have in Scripture is the Jesus of the early church. Even more important, I want to maintain that it cannot or should not be otherwise, since the very demands Jesus placed on his followers means he cannot be known abstracted from the disciples' response. The historical fact that we only learn who Jesus is as he is reflected through the eyes of his followers, a fact that has driven many to despair because it seems they cannot know the real Jesus, in fact is a theological necessity. For the "real Jesus" did not come to leave us unchanged, but rather to transform us to be worthy members of the community of the new age.

It is a startling fact, so obvious that its significance is missed time and time again, that when the early Christians began to witness to the significance of Jesus for their lives they necessarily resorted to a telling of his life. Their "Christology" did not consist first in claims about Jesus' ontological status, though such claims were made; their Christology was not limited to assessing the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection, though certainly these were attributed great significance; rather their "Christology," if it can be called that, showed the story of Jesus as absolutely essential for depicting the kind of kingdom they now thought possible through his life, death, and resurrection. Therefore, though Jesus did not call attention to himself, the early Christians rightly saw that what Jesus came to proclaim, the kingdom of God as a present and future reality, could be grasped only by recognizing how Jesus exemplified in his life the standards of that kingdom.

But the situation is even more complex. The form of the Gospels as stories of a life are meant not only to display that life, but to train us to situate our lives in relation to that life. For it was assumed by the churches that gave us the Gospels that we cannot know who Jesus is and what he stands for without learning to be his followers. Hence the ironic form of Mark, which begins by announcing to the reader this is the "good news about Jesus, the anointed one, the son of God," but in depicting the disciples shows how difficult it is to

understand the significance of that news. You cannot know who Jesus is after the resurrection unless you have learned to follow Jesus during his life. His life and crucifixion are necessary to purge us, like his disciples and adversaries had to be purged, of false notions about what kind of kingdom Jesus has brought. Only by learning to follow him to Jerusalem, where he becomes subject to the powers of this world, do we learn what the kingdom entails, as well as what kind of messiah this Jesus is.

... To locate our lives in relation to his is already to be involved with the basic issues of Christian ethics. Jesus is he who comes to initiate and make present the kingdom of God through his healing of those possessed by demons, by calling disciples, telling parables, teaching the law, challenging the authorities of his day, and by being crucified at the hands of Roman and Jewish elites and raised from the grave. Insisting that Jesus is the initiator and presence of the kingdom, of course, does not mean he was not the Christ, or that he is not God incarnate, or that his death and resurrection has nothing to do with the forgiveness of sins, but it does mean that each of these claims are subsequent to the whole life of this man whom God has claimed as decisive to his own for the presence of his kingdom in this world.

... By learning to be followers of Jesus we learn to locate our lives within God's life, within the journey that comprises his kingdom. I will try to show how the very heart of following the way of God's kingdom involves nothing less than learning to be like God. We learn to be like God by following the teachings of Jesus and thus learning to be his disciples. ...

We are called to be like God: perfect as God is perfect [Matt 5:38–48]. It is a perfection that comes by learning to follow and be like this man whom God has sent to be our forerunner in the kingdom. That is why Christian ethics is not first of all an ethics of principles, laws, or values, but an ethic that demands we attend to the life of a particular individual – Jesus of Nazareth. It is only from him that we can learn perfection – which is at the very least nothing less than forgiving our enemies.

2. Jesus, Israel, and the Imitation of God

... To be like Jesus requires that I become part of a community that practices virtues, not that I copy his life point by point.

There is a deeper reason that I cannot and should not mimic Jesus. We are not called upon to be the initiators of the kingdom, we are not called upon to be God's anointed. We are called upon to be *like* Jesus, not to *be*

Jesus. As I will try to show, that likeness is of a very specific nature. It involves seeing in his cross the summary of his whole life. Thus to be like Jesus is to join him in the journey through which we are trained to be a people capable of claiming citizenship in God's kingdom of nonviolent love – a love that would overcome the powers of this world, not through coercion and force, but through the power of this one man's death.

A proper appreciation of the centrality of the theme of imitation must begin, however, not with Jesus but with Israel. For Jesus brought no new insights into the law or God's nature that Israel had not already known and revealed. The command to be perfect as God is perfect is not some new command, nor is the content of that command to love our enemies new. Both the structure and the content of the command draw from the long habits of thought developed in Israel through her experience with the Lord. Jesus' activity as presented in the Gospels makes no sense without assuming what Israel had long known, that any story worth telling about the way things are requires an account of God's activity as the necessary framework for that story.

... [T]he task for Israel, indeed the very thing that makes Israel Israel, is to walk in the way of the Lord, that is, to imitate God through the means of the prophet (Torah), the king (Sonship), and the priest (Knowledge). To walk in the way of God meant that Israel must be obedient to the commands (Deut. 8:6); to fear the Lord (Deut. 10:12); to love the Lord (Deut. 11:22); and thus to be perfect in the way (Gen. 17:1). But the way of obedience is also the way of intimacy, for Israel is nothing less than God's "first-born son" (Ex. 4:22). Moreover Israel has the knowledge of the Lord as a just and compassionate God and so Israel too must act justly and with compassion (Jer. 22:16).

Israel is Israel, therefore, just to the extent that she "remembers" the "way of the Lord," for by that remembering she in fact imitates God. Such a remembering was no simple mental recollection, rather the image remembered formed the soul and determined future direction. ... Thus the call of the prophets to Israel was always a summons to return to the vocation of an *imitator Dei* ... For Israel, therefore, to love God meant to learn to love as God loved and loves. ...

It is against this background that the early Christians came to understand and believe in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. They had found a continuation of Israel's vocation to imitate God and thus in a decisive way to depict God's kingdom for the world. Jesus' life was seen as the recapitulation of the life of Israel and thus presented the very life of God in the world. By learning to

imitate Jesus, to follow in his way, the early Christians believed they were learning to imitate God, who would have them be heirs of the kingdom. ...

4. The Resurrection: The Establishment of a Kingdom of Forgiveness and Peace

Jesus' death was not a mistake but what was to be expected of a violent world which does not believe that this is God's world. In effect Jesus is nothing less than the embodiment of God's sabbath as a reality for all people. Jesus proclaims peace as a real alternative, because he has made it possible to rest – to have the confidence that our lives are in God's hands. No longer is the sabbath one day, but the form of life of a people on the move. God's kingdom, God's peace, is a movement of those who have found the confidence through the life of Jesus to make their lives a constant worship of God. We can rest in God because we are no longer driven by the assumption that we must be in control of history, that it is up to us to make things come out right.

Such a peace is not just that between people, but between people and our world. For it is a genuine eschatological peace that renews the peace of the beginning, where humans and animals do not depend on one another's destruction for their own survival (Gen. 29). ...

Therefore the Christian commitment to the protection of life is an eschatological commitment. Our concern to protect and enhance life is a sign of our confidence that in fact we live in a new age in which it is possible to see the other as God's creation. We do not value life as an end in itself – there is much worth dying for – rather all life *is* valued, even the lives of our enemies, because God has valued them.

The risk of so valuing life can only be taken on the basis of the resurrection of Jesus as God's decisive eschatological act. For through Jesus' resurrection we see God's peace as a present reality. Though we continue to live in a time when the world does not dwell in peace, when the wolf cannot dwell with the lamb and a child cannot play over the hole of the asp, we believe nonetheless that peace has been made possible by the resurrection. Through this crucified but resurrected savior we see that God offers to all the possibility of living in peace by the power of forgiveness. ...

Only if our Lord is a risen Lord, therefore, can we have the confidence and the power to be a community of forgiveness. For on the basis of the resurrection we have the presumption to believe that God has made us agents in the history of the kingdom. The resurrection

is not a symbol or myth through which we can interpret our individual and collective dyings and risings. Rather the resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate sign that our salvation comes only when we cease trying to interpret Jesus' story in the light of our history, and instead we

interpret ourselves in the light of his. For this is no dead Lord we follow but the living God, who having dwelt among us as an individual, is now eternally present to us making possible our living as forgiven agents of God's new creation.

Following Jesus

This section considers the significance of those aspects of the New Testament that are not precisely about the narrative of Jesus. One can trace New Testament ethics in broadly three strands: the Gospels (and the Acts of the Apostles), Paul's epistles, and the rest of the New Testament. The Gospels are characterized by their narrative form and the way they, unlike other parts of the New Testament, dwell extensively on Jesus' life and ministry and not just on his death and resurrection. Some of the passages most frequently cited in Christian ethics are in fact to be found in only one Gospel – for example the parable of the Good Samaritan is only to be found in Luke, while the parable of the last judgment, including the words “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me,” is found only in Matthew. It is not clear whether such passages are any less authoritative than material found in all four Gospels.

Paul's epistles weave together crises in the early churches, discussing local problems in such a way as to bring together saving revelation with practical wisdom. In particular in 1 Corinthians, Paul proceeds through a sequence of pressing questions, including incest, lawsuits among believers, divorce, eating food previously sacrificed to idols, covering the head in worship, equal distribution of food at the Lord's Supper, and speaking in tongues. Paul's theological emphases can be outlined by describing where he perceives his readers to stand in relation to world history. In the (relatively recent) past lies the overwhelming event of Christ's cross; behind it lies the still very significant relationship of God to Israel.

In the (perhaps near) future lies the completion of God's work begun in creation and fully expressed in Christ. In the present lies the church, a reality most fully emphasized and explored in Ephesians (which may have been written by a follower of Paul), but assumed throughout the Pauline letters.

The rest of the New Testament is made up of diverse material taking a range of ethical approaches. Hebrews enjoins hospitality to strangers, solidarity with those suffering, the sharing of resources and obedience to leaders: but its emphasis is primarily on the inadequacy of the sacrifices made in the Jerusalem Temple, and on the sufficiency of the sacrifice made by Christ the great high priest. James lies in continuity with the wisdom tradition of the Old Testament, and especially emphasizes charity towards the poor. First Peter grounds a wide-ranging vision of faithful Christian discipleship explicitly in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Revelation is deeply concerned with the nature of current suffering and the promise that God will intervene to vindicate the saints. There is a stark and uncompromising contrast between good and evil, light and darkness, God and Satan, church and world.

In the following readings, John Calvin attempts a summary of a New Testament ethic, striving to weave together the epistles' assumptions with those of the gospels. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is reacting against the Lutheran tendency to reduce the New Testament ethic to one element – grace – and thereby lose the need for costly human response.

John Calvin, *The Sum of the Christian Life: The Denial of Ourselves*

Calvin's *Institutes* begin with our knowledge of God the creator, before moving on to our knowledge of God the redeemer in Christ. Then comes the way in which we receive the grace of Christ, and finally the means (largely the church and its powers and sacraments) by which God invites us into Christ's society. This passage comes from the third of the four books, covering the ways in which we receive Christ's grace. After six introductory chapters about the nature of the Christian life, covering issues such as

faith and repentance, Calvin begins in earnest with this chapter on the “Sum of the Christian Life.” He goes on to explore in detail cross-bearing, the life to come, justification, freedom, eternal election, and resurrection.

Calvin begins this exposition with the principle that “we are not our own,” citing 1 Corinthians 6:19 (“your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own”). He then moves on to the affirmation that “we are God’s,” and thus that we should live and die for God. The virtue Calvin commends is humility. He summarizes his words thus: “You will never attain true gentleness except by one path: a heart imbued with lowliness and with reverence for others.”

John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 2 vols. Ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. The Library of Christian Classics 20. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960. From Vol. 1, Book III, Chapter 7, pages 689–701. Available online at www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/books/institutes/.

(The Christian philosophy of unworldliness and self-denial; we are not our own, we are God’s, 1–3)

1. We are not our own masters, but belong to God

Even though the law of the Lord provides the finest and best-disposed method of ordering a man’s life, it seemed good to the Heavenly Teacher to shape his people by an even more explicit plan to that rule which he had set forth in the law. Here, then, is the beginning of this plan: the duty of believers is “to present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him,” and in this consists the lawful worship of him [Rom. 12:1]. From this is derived the basis of the exhortation that “they be not conformed to the fashion of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of their minds, so that they may prove what is the will of God” [Rom. 12:2]. Now the great thing is this: we are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory. For a sacred thing may not be applied to profane uses without marked injury to him.

If we, then, are not our own [cf. I Cor. 6:19] but the Lord’s, it is clear what error we must flee, and whither we must direct all the acts of our life.

We are not our own: let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own: let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.

Conversely, we are God’s: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God’s: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God’s: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal [Rom. 14:8; cf. I Cor. 6:19]. Oh, how much has that man profited who, having been taught that he is not his own, has taken away dominion and rule from his own reason that he may yield it to God! For, as consulting our self-interest is the pestilence that most effectively leads to our destruction, so the sole haven of salvation is to be wise in nothing and to will nothing through ourselves but to follow the leading of the Lord alone. ...

2. Self-denial through devotion to God

From this also follows this second point: that we seek not the things that are ours but those which are of the Lord’s will and will serve to advance his glory. This is also evidence of great progress: that, almost forgetful of ourselves, surely subordinating our self-concern, we try faithfully to devote our zeal to God and his commandments. For when Scripture bids us leave off self-concern, it not only erases from our minds the yearning to possess, the desire for power, and the favor of men, but it also uproots ambition and all craving for human glory and other more secret plagues. Accordingly, the Christian must surely be so disposed and minded that he feels within himself it is with God he has to deal throughout his life. ...

(The principle of self-denial in our relations with our fellow men, 4–7)

4. Self-denial gives us the right attitude toward our fellow men

Now in these words we perceive that denial of self has regard partly to men, partly, and chiefly, to God.

For when Scripture bids us act toward men so as to esteem them above ourselves [Phil. 2:3], and in good

faith to apply ourselves wholly to doing them good [cf. Rom. 12:10], it gives us commandments of which our mind is quite incapable unless our mind be previously emptied of its natural feeling. For, such is the blindness with which we all rush into self-love that each one of us seems to himself to have just cause to be proud of himself and to despise all others in comparison. ... There is no other remedy than to tear out from our inward parts this most deadly pestilence of love of strife and love of self, even as it is plucked out by Scriptural teaching. For thus we are instructed to remember that those talents which God has bestowed upon us are not our own goods but the free gifts of God; and any persons who become proud of them show their ungratefulness. "Who causes you to excel?" Paul asks. "If you have received all things, why do you boast as if they were not given to you?" [I Cor. 4:7].

Let us, then, unremittingly examining our faults, call ourselves back to humility. Thus nothing will remain in us to puff us up; but there will be much occasion to be cast down. On the other hand, we are bidden so to esteem and regard whatever gifts of God we see in other men that we may honor those men in whom they reside. For it would be great depravity on our part to deprive them of that honor which the Lord has bestowed upon them. But we are taught to overlook their faults, certainly not flatteringly to cherish them; but not on account of such faults to revile men whom we ought to cherish with good will and honor. Thus it will come about that, whatever man we deal with, we shall treat him not only moderately and modestly but also cordially and as a friend. You will never attain true gentleness except by one path: a heart imbued with lowliness and with reverence for others.

5. Self-renunciation leads to proper helpfulness toward our neighbors

Now, in seeking to benefit one's neighbor, how difficult it is to do one's duty! Unless you give up all thought of self and, so to speak, get out of yourself, you will accomplish nothing here. For how can you perform those works which Paul teaches to be the works of love, unless you renounce yourself, and give yourself wholly to others? "Love," he says, "is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful, is not envious or puffed up, does not seek its own, is not irritable," etc. [I Cor. 13:4–5 p.]. If this is the one thing required – that we seek not what is our own – still we shall do no little violence to nature, which so inclines us to love of ourselves alone that it does not easily allow us to neglect ourselves and our possessions

in order to look after another's good, nay, to yield willingly what is ours by right and resign it to another. But Scripture, to lead us by the hand to this, warns that whatever benefits we obtain from the Lord have been entrusted to us on this condition: that they be applied to the common good of the church. And therefore the lawful use of all benefits consists in a liberal and kindly sharing of them with others. No surer rule and no more valid exhortation to keep it could be devised than when we are taught that all the gifts we possess have been bestowed by God and entrusted to us on condition that they be distributed for our neighbors' benefit [cf. I Peter 4:10].

But Scripture goes even farther by comparing them to the powers with which the members of the human body are endowed [I Cor. 12:12 ff.]. No member has this power for itself nor applies it to its own private use; but each pours it out to the fellow members. Nor does it take any profit from its power except what proceeds from the common advantage of the whole body. So, too, whatever a godly man can do he ought to be able to do for his brothers, providing for himself in no way other than to have his mind intent upon the common upbuilding of the church. Let this, therefore, be our rule for generosity and beneficence: We are the stewards of everything God has conferred on us by which we are able to help our neighbor, and are required to render account of our stewardship. Moreover, the only right stewardship is that which is tested by the rule of love. ...

(The principle of self-denial in our relation to God, 8–10)

8. Self-denial toward God: devotion to his will!

... To begin with, then, in seeking either the convenience or the tranquillity of the present life, Scripture calls us to resign ourselves and all our possessions to the Lord's will, and to yield to him the desires of our hearts to be tamed and subjugated. To covet wealth and honors, to strive for authority, to heap up riches, to gather together all those follies which seem to make for magnificence and pomp, our lust is mad, our desire boundless. On the other hand, wonderful is our fear, wonderful our hatred, of poverty, lowly birth, and humble condition! And we are spurred to rid ourselves of them by every means. Hence we can see how uneasy in mind all those persons are who order their lives according to their own plan. We can see how artfully they strive – to the point of weariness – to obtain the

goal of their ambition or avarice, while, on the other hand, avoiding poverty and a lowly condition.

In order not to be caught in such snares, godly men must hold to this path. First of all, let them neither desire nor hope for, nor contemplate, any other way of prospering than by the Lord's blessing. Upon this, then, let them safely and confidently throw themselves and rest. For however beautifully the flesh may seem to suffice unto itself, while it either strives by its own effort for honors and riches or relies upon its diligence, or is aided by the favor of men, yet it is certain that all these things are nothing; nor will we benefit at all, either by skill or by labor, except in so far as the Lord prospers them both. ...

10. Self-denial helps us bear adversity

And for godly minds the peace and forbearance we have spoken of ought not to rest solely in this point; but it must also be extended to every occurrence to which the present life is subject. Therefore, he alone

has duly denied himself who has so totally resigned himself to the Lord that he permits every part of his life to be governed by God's will. He who will be thus composed in mind, whatever happens, will not consider himself miserable nor complain of his lot with ill will toward God. How necessary this disposition is will appear if you weigh the many chance happenings to which we are subject. ... "Nevertheless we are in the Lord's protection, sheep brought up in his pastures" [Ps. 79:13]. The Lord will therefore supply food to us even in extreme barrenness. If he shall be afflicted by disease, he will not even then be so unmanned by the harshness of pain as to break forth into impatience and expostulate with God; but, by considering the righteousness and gentleness of God's chastening, he will recall himself to forbearance. In short, whatever happens, because he will know it ordained of God, he will undergo it with a peaceful and grateful mind so as not obstinately to resist the command of him into whose power he once for all surrendered himself and his every possession.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Costly Grace*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) was a German theologian and founder of the Confessing Church that opposed the Nazis. He established a Confessing Church seminary in Finkenwalde and on the von Blumenthal family estate in modern Poland. He was drawn into the plot to kill Adolf Hitler, and this led to his imprisonment in 1943 and his brutal execution in 1945, in the last weeks of the war.

He is best known today for his reflections on seminary existence, *Life Together*; for his extensive, wide-ranging, and allusive *Letters and Papers from Prison*; and for the text quoted here, the challenging and uncompromising *Cost of Discipleship* (1937), in which he coins the influential term "cheap grace." This last work is most famous for Bonhoeffer's unequivocal statement, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

Bonhoeffer's Lutheran formation is evident in the passage below. Here we see him steering a course between a bland Protestant affirmation of humanity in the notion of grace and the much-feared (but no doubt caricatured) Roman Catholic notion of merit. Bonhoeffer is in no doubt that there is nothing the Christian can do to earn grace – and he credits Luther for demonstrating this conviction; but he is equally sure that while grace is free, it must never be regarded as cheap, and again he cites Luther as an example of how the burden of grace costs everything to the stability of life. Bonhoeffer cites the directness of Jesus with the urgency of Paul.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. London: SCM Press, 2001. From Chapter 1, "Costly Grace," pages 3–9. Available online at www.cross-road.to/Persecution/Bonhoeffer.html. Reprinted by permission of the publisher SCM Press. Reprinted with the permission of Scribner, a Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., from *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Copyright © 1959 by SCM Press Ltd. All rights reserved.

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting to-day for costly grace.

Cheap grace means grace said on the market like cheapjack's wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be if it were not cheap?

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian "conception" of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins. The Church which holds the correct doctrine of grace has, it is supposed, *ipso facto* a part in that grace. In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God.

Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything, they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. "All for sin could not atone." The world goes on in the same old way, and we are still sinners "even in the best life" as Luther said. Well, then, let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world's standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin. ... Let the Christian rest content with his worldliness and with this renunciation of any higher standard than the world. He is doing it for the sake of the world rather than for the sake of grace. Let him be comforted and rest assured in his possession of this grace – for grace alone does every-

thing. Instead of following Christ, let the Christian enjoy the consolations of his grace! That is what we mean by cheap grace, the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs. Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be *sought* again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must *knock*.

Such grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is *costly* because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.

Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world, and not thrown to the dogs. It is therefore the living word, the Word of God, which he speaks as it pleases him. Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

On two separate occasions Peter received the call, "Follow me." It was the first and last word Jesus spoke to his disciple (Mark 1:17; John 21:22). A whole life lies between these two calls. The first occasion was by the lake of Gennesareth, when Peter left his nets and his craft and followed Jesus at his word. The second occa-

sion is when the Risen Lord finds him back again at his old trade. Once again it is by the lake of Gennesareth, and once again the call is "Follow me." Between the two calls lay a whole life of discipleship in the following of Christ. Half-way between them comes Peter's confession, when he acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of God. Three times Peter hears the same proclamation that Christ is his Lord and God – at the beginning, at the end, and at Caesarea Philippi. Each time it is the same grace of Christ which calls to him "Follow me" and which reveals itself to him in his confession of the Son of God. Three times on Peter's way did grace arrest him, the one grace proclaimed in three different ways.

This grace was certainly not self-bestowed. It was the grace of Christ himself, now prevailing upon the disciple to leave all and follow him, now working in him that confession which to the world must sound like the ultimate blasphemy, now inviting Peter to the supreme fellowship of martyrdom for the Lord he had denied, and thereby forgiving him all his sins. In the life of Peter grace and discipleship are inseparable. He had received the grace which costs. ...

When the Reformation came, the providence of God raised Martin Luther to restore the gospel of pure, costly grace. Luther passed through the cloister; he was a monk, and all this was part of the divine plan. Luther had left all to follow Christ on the path of absolute obedience. He had renounced the world in order to live the Christian life. He had learnt obedience to Christ and to his Church, because only he who is obedient can believe. The call to the cloister demanded of Luther the complete surrender of his life. But God shattered all his hopes. He showed him through the Scriptures that the following of Christ is not the achievement or merit of a select few, but the divine command to all Christians without distinction. ... The bottom having thus been knocked out of the religious life, Luther laid hold upon grace. Just as the whole world of monasticism was crashing about him in ruins, he saw God in Christ stretching forth his hand to save. He grasped that hand in faith, believing that "after all, nothing we can do is of any avail, however good a life we live." The grace which gave itself to him was a costly grace, and it shattered his whole existence. Once more he must leave his nets and follow. The first time was when he entered the monastery, when he had left everything behind except his pious self. This time even that was taken from him. He obeyed the call, not through any merit of his own, but simply through the grace of God. Luther did not

hear the word: "Of course you have sinned, but now everything is forgiven, so you can stay as you are and enjoy the consolations of forgiveness." No, Luther had to leave the cloister and go back to the world, not because the world in itself was good and holy, but because even the cloister was only a part of the world. ...

It is a fatal misunderstanding of Luther's action to suppose that his rediscovery of the gospel of pure grace offered a general dispensation from obedience to the command of Jesus, or that it was the great discovery of the Reformation that God's forgiving grace automatically conferred upon the world both righteousness and holiness. On the contrary, for Luther the Christian's worldly calling is sanctified only in so far as that calling registers the final, radical protest against the world. Only in so far as the Christian's secular calling is exercised in the following of Jesus does it receive from the gospel new sanction and justification. It was not the justification of sin, but the justification of the sinner that drove Luther from the cloister back into the world. The grace he had received was costly grace. It was grace, for it was like water on parched ground, comfort in tribulation, freedom from the bondage of a self-chosen way, and forgiveness of all his sins. And it was costly, for, so far from dispensing him from good works, it meant that he must take the call to discipleship more seriously than ever before. It was grace because it cost so much, and it cost so much because it was grace. That was the secret of the gospel of the Reformation – the justification of the sinner.

... When he spoke of grace, Luther always implied as a corollary that it cost him his own life, the life which was now for the first time subjected to the absolute obedience of Christ. Only so could he speak of grace. Luther had said that grace alone can save; his followers took up his doctrine and repeated it word for word. But they left out its invariable corollary, the obligation of discipleship. There was no need for Luther always to mention that corollary explicitly for he always spoke as one who had been led by grace to the strictest following of Christ. Judged by the standard of Luther's doctrine, that of his follower was unassailable, and yet their orthodoxy spelt the end and destruction of the Reformation as the revelation on earth of the costly grace of God. The justification of the sinner in the world degenerated into the justification of sin and the world. Costly grace was turned into cheap grace without discipleship.
